



Royal United Services Institute
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By Parity and Presence

Deterring Russia with Conventional Land Forces

Jack Watling



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Executive Summary

THE FOREMOST MISSION of UK Defence is the protection of the UK's interests, and few interests are as significant as the avoidance of warfighting at scale. This must be ensured through the maintenance of credible deterrence, which aims to convince potential adversaries that they cannot achieve favourable outcomes through recourse to force. The resurgence of great power rivalry, however, ensures that UK interests will be threatened by state actors around the world, below the threshold of war, meaning that deterrence must also be pursued to constrain adversaries in competition.

Russia represents the most serious threat in both conflict and competition. Not only is it willing to use direct military force to advance its interests when it perceives the conditions to be right, but it is also developing global reach, and acts internationally to build up leverage with great powers through coercive issue linkage. Because deterrence is primarily cognitive – aiming to convince an adversary not to do something – any analysis of effective deterrence must be based on an assessment of the target's policy and outlook.

This paper is an analysis of conventional deterrence by UK land forces with regard to Russia. There is a deficiency in nuanced public discussion of the mechanisms of conventional deterrence in the UK, which inhibits the effective use of the military to proactively deter hostile actions. Land forces are particularly important in this discussion because deterrence in warfighting is ultimately about preventing the seizure of land, while deterrence in competition is first and foremost about operating among people. This paper comes to several conclusions about what deters Russia, and the choices facing the UK in offering a credible deterrence posture in competition, and as a contribution to NATO.

Russia's global operations capitalise on opportunities to enable unopposed theatre entry, to counterweight other powers and thereby build leverage over them. Deterring theatre entry is enabled by denying Russia opportunities, which is best achieved through persistent engagement. The UK should therefore prioritise its defence attaché, loan and liaison officer networks to maintain strong relationships with partners and allies.

Meeting partner needs is partly dependent on technical assistance and the ability to deploy larger force packages. If Russia is able to enter the theatre and threaten UK interests, those interests must be defined and protected through deterrence by punishment. Constraints on logistics limit Russian expeditionary operations to brigade size, and so the UK's expeditionary deterrence requirements amount to a brigade-sized force prioritising reconnaissance, mobility and fires.

In regional competition, Russia works to integrate its neighbours into multilateral frameworks, to build economic dependencies with them, develop coercive influence over them and then use this

leverage to align the state to Russian interests. If this policy fails, Russia has sometimes resorted to instigating conflict as a means of coercion or creating a buffer between itself and NATO.

Where the UK has interests in Russia's regional periphery, deterrence must first function by denial through maintaining a presence in multilateral forums, and by disrupting Russia's attempts to develop economic dependence and coercive leverage. Where Russia escalates to violent coercion, the partner state should – if possible – be bolstered to both increase the level of overt effort required for Russian coercion and reduce the scope for ambiguity in Russian activities.

These efforts in competition are only relevant if the threat of direct armed force can be deterred. Ultimately, this comes down to NATO having a sufficient force to make fait accompli not worth attempting.

NATO's foremost challenge in deterring Russian fait accompli is that such an operation could take place across a very large area. Although the Alliance collectively has the forces to defeat an attempted fait accompli at any single point, it cannot pre-position forces at the potential points of contention, running from the Balkans, through the Baltics, to the High North. Thus, NATO must deter by proving it can deploy three kinds of formation:

- Rapid reaction forces to delay and attrit adversaries attempting fait accompli.
- Heavy manoeuvre forces to retake seized ground.
- Support forces able to sustain and coordinate manoeuvre forces, and emplace reconnaissance strike complexes to attrit Russian air defences and break up enemy formations.

There is sufficient mass across the Alliance to form these forces. However, member states will need to modernise and rationalise their forces to deploy credible contributions.

For the UK, this presages hard choices. The British Army is structured to make contributions in all three areas. However, its rapid reaction forces lack anti-armour and organic air defence, its heavy forces are in need of comprehensive modernisation, and while the UK has excellent recce elements, it has a critical deficiency in firepower. Without a significant increase in funding, it cannot realistically afford to support all three – a challenge which is likely to be compounded by the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. The UK must, therefore, decide whether to accelerate and expand the modernisation of its heavy forces, or move away from heavy forces and prioritise the development of resilient reconnaissance and fires, shifting its NATO contribution.

A further consideration is that heavy forces can only deter if they can reach the battlespace in time, and so would likely need to be partly forward deployed, unavailable for operations in competition. By contrast, strike and reconnaissance assets are easier to deploy and have wider relevance. Either way, however, the UK will no longer have a balanced force.

Deterrence requires acting early. Thus, the UK must strengthen the integration of its intelligence and engagement activity to improve situational awareness, and refine its national security decision-making processes to take proactive – rather than reactive – deterrence measures. The costs of failing to deter are far higher than a few uneventful deployments.

Introduction

DETERRENCE SITS AT the heart of NATO's military thinking.¹ As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg explained at the conclusion of Exercise *Trident Juncture 2018*, 'NATO's mission is to preserve the peace. Not to provoke a conflict, but to prevent a conflict. To do so, we provide credible deterrence'.² This emphasis is also central to the policies of member states. The UK, for example, in its 2015 National Security Strategy, proposed that: 'In NATO, we will lead a renewed focus on deterrence to address current and future threats'.³

In turning this ambition for 'leadership' into concrete policy, there is a rich literature on the theory of deterrence – with foundational texts including Thomas Schelling's *Arms and Influence*, Edward Luttwak's *The Political Uses of Sea Power* and Herman Kahn's *The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence* – and a broad evidence base from the Cold War.⁴ As Peter Roberts and Andrew Hardie observed in 2015, however, while there 'has been much scholarly work on deterrence over the past decade ... much less consideration has been given to the concept in policy terms'.⁵ Indeed, despite the ubiquitous perception of 'deterrence' as the object and output of defence activity, and an articulated aspiration for 'leadership' in NATO's deterrence posture, public discourse of the subject in the UK remains underdeveloped. During the UK's general election in 2019, the only concrete defence policy proposed by the Conservative Party was to keep spending at current levels,⁶ while the Labour Party – beyond a commitment to increase peacekeeping activity – deferred any clear commitments by promising that policy would emerge from an evidence-led review.⁷ There was only one defence issue that featured

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1. NATO, 'Deterrence and Defence', last updated 26 May 2020, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm>, accessed 8 April 2020.
 2. NATO, 'Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Trident Juncture 2018 Distinguished Visitor's Day', 30 October 2018, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_159852.htm>, accessed 8 April 2020.
 3. HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* (London: The Stationery Office, 2015), p. 24.
 4. Herman Kahn, 'The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence', RAND Corporation, P-1888-RC, 1960; Thomas C Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
 5. Peter Roberts and Andrew Hardie, 'The Validity of Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century', RUSI Occasional Paper, August 2015, p. 1.
 6. Conservative and Unionist Party, 'Get Brexit Done: Unleash Britain's Potential – The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019', 2019, p. 53.
 7. Labour Party, 'It's Time for Real Change: The Labour Party Manifesto 2019', 2019, p. 100.

prominently in the campaign: whether the prospective prime ministerial candidates were willing to push ‘the nuclear button’.⁸

The UK’s continuous at-sea deterrence (CASD) aims to ensure that in the event of a nuclear attack on the UK mainland, the adversary could not avoid a retaliation in kind, rendering such an attack pointless and removing the option from an opponent’s playbook. Whatever the shortcomings of the debate over CASD, there is a clearly recognised choice at its heart. Those who oppose CASD question whether there is a threat to be deterred,⁹ suggest that allies can deliver nuclear deterrence, or question the opportunity cost of funding the system. Nevertheless, they accept that losing it means giving up a capability. Regrettably, the choice is much less clear in the almost non-existent public discussion surrounding conventional deterrence. There is a lack of understanding of what separates a credible military formation from one that is not. Nor is there an understanding of what is being deterred, the mechanisms for achieving that deterrence or why deterrence is necessary. As Hew Strachan and Ruth Harris observe, the absence of concrete discussion of the UK’s defence policy is in part deliberate, but in this the government ‘may have learnt the wrong lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan, in that it believes that the public is averse to the use of armed force, when the real public concern is with its inept use in a strategy which proved inconsistent and ill-considered’.¹⁰ The absence of public discourse on military affairs has allowed for the public articulation of foreign policy aspirations to become completely detached from resourcing.

The fact that most outcomes in conventional warfare are less absolute than a strategic nuclear exchange, and because conventional deterrence can function across multiple levels simultaneously, objectives in competition are harder to distil into a form that is easily communicated. This is especially true of deterrence because its success is demonstrated by the absence of conflict. This has a number of pernicious effects. Conventional deterrence is highly susceptible to ‘salami slicing’: the public may react negatively to a cut in the number of main battle tanks (MBTs), but the logistics and support arms that make those tanks effective could be cut without public notice. The distinction between, for example, a division that is able to conduct divisional warfighting and a force that simply bears the name is opaque to the public and politicians. Yet, it is all too obvious to adversaries.

Inefficient or incoherent force structures are manageable in a large force because there is enough mass to generate coherent formations to respond to a crisis. However, as the size of conventional forces shrink – and UK land forces are the smallest they have been since the 19th century – incoherent force structure becomes a crippling inhibitor to the efficient generation of effective formations. The consequences of the collapse of a credible conventional deterrence

8. Esther Webber, ‘Would Jeremy Corbyn Hit Nuclear Button? No One Knows, Says Emily Thornberry’, *The Times*, 11 November 2019.

9. *BBC News*, ‘General Election 2019: Jeremy Corbyn on Future of Trident Nuclear Weapons’, 17 November 2019.

10. Hew Strachan and Ruth Harris, ‘The Utility of Military Force and Public Understanding in Today’s Britain’, RAND Corporation, 2020, p. 14.

posture are severe. For example, the Argentinian decision to invade the Falkland Islands in 1982 came about because the Junta did not believe that the UK was able or willing to mount a military campaign to retake the islands.¹¹ Nor can nuclear deterrence replace conventional deterrence. A significant factor in the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 was the US's deterioration in conventional capability as a consequence of believing that it could rely on the threat of nuclear strikes to deter attacks by conventional forces,¹² which led Soviet and North Korean planners to believe that the US had neither the inclination nor capability to fight over Korea.¹³ It is worth noting that unlike the Falklands War, where the superior fighting ability of British forces ultimately prevailed, the hollowing out of US conventional capabilities saw North Korean and Chinese forces defeat and outfight US, UK and Commonwealth formations for much of the war. That the US clawed a stalemate from the jaws of defeat reflected the disproportionate resources and scale of US forces compared to those of North Korea and China.¹⁴

Today, the UK lacks disproportionate mass or resources compared to potential adversaries, and therefore would struggle to make up for qualitative deficiencies in its forces. It is also crucial to recognise that while most contemporary theory suggests that conflict will be in the 'grey zone', or beneath the threshold of direct armed conflict, a disproportionate capacity to escalate allows a power to set the boundaries and terms of competition.¹⁵ Thus, without credible conventional deterrence, a state will find itself competing at a severe disadvantage. If the UK is to remain an influential global power, able to protect its partners and interests, then it is important that its forces are structured to deliver a credible deterrent effect. This requires clarity as to what must be deterred, and how that deterrence can be established within the limits of the resources available.

There is a tendency for any shortcoming or deficiency in the coherence or capability of UK forces to be met with the affirmation that it 'does not stand alone but alongside its NATO Allies'.¹⁶ While it is true that the UK's deterrence posture is intrinsically linked to NATO's, this assertion becomes problematic when the Alliance is appealed to as a means of covering for deficiencies in what states have promised as their contribution. The UK is the second or third most capable military force in NATO. If the UK struggles to deploy a credible force package, then the assumption that less capable militaries will generate a wide array of sophisticated enablers in great enough

11. Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War: The Falklands Conflict of 1982* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. xxxiii.

12. Steven T Ross, *American War Plans, 1945–1950* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996).

13. Seung-Young Kim, *American Diplomacy and Strategy Toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882–1950 and After: Perception of Polarity and US Commitment to a Periphery* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 194.

14. Throughout the war, it was the volume of US firepower that routinely saved its infantry, who had been outmanoeuvred and broken. See Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp. 86, 190.

15. Peter Roberts and Sidharth Kaushal, 'Competitive Advantage and Rules in Persistent Competitions', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (April 2020).

16. *BBC News*, 'UK Would be "Outgunned" in Russia Conflict – Think-Tank', 27 November 2019.

numbers to support their own forces and cover gaps in UK capability is optimistic. Even the US lacks sufficient enablers in its air force to sustain all of its own forces.¹⁷ If everyone in the Alliance takes the view that deficiencies in capability can be wished away because another country will be able to cover it, very soon no member of the Alliance will have critical capabilities. Thus, while the UK's deterrence posture should be measured in the context of NATO, that does not diminish the importance of the credibility of the UK's national contribution.

Capable militaries like the UK also need to be able to generate credible force packages of their own, as part of their commitment to NATO's deterrence posture, because – in many scenarios – the Alliance is likely to follow, not lead, its members. Despite NATO having prepared frameworks for the movement and management of resources at scale across the Alliance, its mechanisms were not used for months during the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁸ Except in the most obvious cases of immediate and direct armed aggression against a member state, NATO processes are unlikely to be the first port of call for states dealing with growing tensions. As NATO is a consensus organisation, member states will be reluctant to submit courses of action to its council while crises build, because while diplomacy, grey zone competition and other activities are ongoing, there is unlikely to be unanimity over the response. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that while NATO members may be reacting militarily, the Alliance as a structure may not. There would likely be a delay following a crisis while national governments assessed the situation, engaged bilaterally to shape the conversation at the NATO committee and then meet to decide a course of action. If, in the preceding period, member states had not unilaterally or bilaterally taken steps to prepare for the options discussed, then the options available for submission to the NATO committee would likely be slow to execute. By contrast, if member states are forward leaning and mobilise capabilities before a decision to employ them has been taken, but posture themselves to be able to do so, the NATO committee becomes a decision point that can approve immediately implementable actions. In short, there is a direct causal relationship between NATO members having credible independent military capabilities and the capacity of the Alliance to bring those capabilities together in response to crises.

This paper explores how deterrence functions in regard to land forces in competition with Russia, though many of the principles and capabilities are relevant to other competitors. It begins by exploring the principles of conventional deterrence. The paper then considers Russia's foreign policy objectives, where these conflict with the UK's interests and what military measures might deter Russia from adopting undesirable courses of action. From there, the paper translates deterrent activity into military tasks, and considers the suitability of UK land forces in being able to perform these tasks. The ultimate aim of the paper is to provide a number of deterrence postures for UK land forces and the minimum military capabilities required to sustain them, so

17. Justin Bronk, *The Future of NATO Airpower: How are Future Capability Plans Within the Alliance Diverging and How Can Interoperability be Maintained?*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 94 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2019), p. 72.

18. They were used eventually, but governments acted first. See NATO, 'NATO Defence Ministers Meet to Discuss COVID-19', 14 April 2020, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_175089.htm>, accessed 8 May 2020.

that policymakers may judge at what point a decline in military capability crosses thresholds that leaves conventional deterrence impracticable.

The emphasis on land forces reflects the disproportionate need for a detailed consideration of the mechanisms of deterrence in this domain. Deterrence by land forces is uniquely complex because of the confusion and ambiguity that pervades land warfare. Air and maritime warfare are technically complex but ultimately clean domains in which escalation and deterrence are highly managed processes. On land, there are many more rungs on the escalation ladder, and a great deal more scope for miscalculation, confusion and subterfuge, to an extent that makes a dedicated study valuable. This does not mean that there is not a need for a consideration of deterrence at sea and in the air, but it does explain why the land domain involves a number of unique factors that justify its consideration in isolation. Deterrence functions at the tactical, operational and strategic level. The methodology of this paper is necessarily theoretical. Deterrence is about cognitive effects. Governments are not very revealing as to how they assess threats, and their public statements can be highly misleading. However, analysing statements over time, and tracking how they correspond with actions, does provide a baseline against which to assess threat perception.

Russia is not the UK's only competitor. Deterrence is similarly important against Iran, and may become important with regards to China. However, Russia is the most difficult and immediate challenge, spanning competition to potential conflict. While a new era of great power competition is likely to see tensions rise between China and the US, deterring Russia is likely to be a priority for US allies if American attention and effort is diverted to the Pacific.

I. Mechanisms of Conventional Deterrence

DETERRENCE IS THE act of persuading an adversary not to undertake a course of action. The first principle of deterrence is the primacy of cognitive effect: deterrence is psychological. How a state assesses the credibility of its own forces matters in so far as it will shape its messaging and wider strategy. However, in terms of deterring an adversary from a course of action, the important point is how they perceive one's capabilities and willingness to employ them. The government of Neville Chamberlain, for instance, had an internally coherent strategy to avoid war with Hitler's Germany without upending the balance of power in Europe. That strategy was premised on the assumption, as Chamberlain explained in September 1938, that 'Hitler's objectives were strictly limited',¹⁹ and that the devastation deliverable by air power and the threat of blockade provided a sufficient deterrent to Germany escalating to a full-scale conflict.²⁰ As Jeffrey Hughes observed, however, 'Hitler ... neither understood the basis of British strategy nor recognised the blockade as a significant British economic weapon. He noted only the decline in the direct and immediate pressure that Britain could bring to bear, which increasingly skewed his perception of British resolve'.²¹ To select a positive example, Saddam Hussein refrained from using chemical weapons against US forces during the 1991 Gulf War because he believed that the US would respond with a nuclear strike. This was not what the US intended to do, but it was what Hussein feared they might do, and so deterred him from taking this course of action. In this, the US had facilitated deterrence by not clarifying their position.²²

The primacy of psychology requires recognition that the targets of deterrence are not wholly rational actors. Even rational courses of action are highly dependent upon the assumptions underpinning them, and so one country cannot project its own rational assessments onto another. Instead, rational assessments must be premised upon the starting point of the target of deterrence. Those starting points will often be built on prejudices, while subsequent reasoning is no less susceptible to biases. The interrelation between rational estimates based on skewed assumptions, combined with how the biases of decision-makers affect their interpretation of those estimates, makes calculating deterrent effect difficult. For instance, China was clear during the Korean War that a US advance on the Yalu River would prompt their intervention.

19. The National Archives, CAB 23/95: Cabinet Minutes, 17 September 1938.

20. Joseph A Maiolo, 'The Naval Staff, British Strategy and the German Menace, 1934–38', in *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 111–32.

21. Jeffrey L Hughes, 'The Origins of World War II in Europe: British Deterrence Failure and German Expansionism', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1988), p. 854.

22. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 288–89.

General Douglas MacArthur, however, failed to recognise China's determination to carry out its threat and woefully underestimated the capabilities of Chinese forces, suffering heavy losses as a result. MacArthur had the evidence available to make the correct decision, but dismissed China's intent and capability because of racial prejudice and structural biases in assessments regarding collective Communist decision-making.²³

Deterrence takes place, and should be optimised, for a target practising dynamic decision-making. It is often argued that we do not need to be able to deter Russia's conventional capabilities because the Russian Federation has no intention of invading NATO territory. That Russia has no immediate intention of doing so is likely true. However, it would also be true that the Russian Federation had no intention of invading Ukraine in 2013.²⁴ A decade and a half of Russian foreign policy had been premised on strengthening economic ties with its neighbours. Russia was becoming more economically dependent on Ukraine,²⁵ including for sensitive activities such as the production of equipment critical to Russia's military modernisation programme.²⁶ The decision to seize Crimea and invade eastern Ukraine fundamentally altered Russia's foreign policy, and that decision was made quickly in response to the changing political landscape. As General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith observed, 'Russia took the view that it could not cope with losing influence in the Crimea, whilst the West probably could. And Russia therefore took a rational risk, judging correctly, that the Crimea was "doable"'.²⁷ Thus, whether Russia intends to invade NATO territory is the wrong question. The correct question is whether under crisis conditions – in NATO or Russia – the invasion of NATO territory would be perceived as viable, and as supporting Russia's national interests. In this context, deterrence must target multiple elements of the decision-making system. It must target the technical assessments generated by the adversary's military bureaucracy,²⁸ which will provide policymakers with what are deemed credible options. It must also target the decision-makers, and those who might replace them,

23. William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880–1964* (New York, NY: Back Bay, 2008), pp. 580–93.

24. Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia in a Multipolar World. Core Interests and Threat Perceptions', speech given at the Air Power Conference 2019, Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy, 6 February 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puVq2n9Yfkc>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

25. Andrei P Tsygankov, 'Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power', *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Vol. 21, No. 2, 2005), pp. 132–58.

26. *Ukrainskii Vybor [Ukrainian Choice]*, 'Poteri Ukrainy ot razryva kontraktov s RF v kosmicheskoy i voyennykh otraslyakh sostavyat 2 mlrd grn' ['Ukrainian Losses from Broken Contracts with the Russian Federation in the Space and Aerospace Sector Amount to 2 Billion GRN'], 9 February 2016, <http://vybor.ua/news/poteri_ukrainy_ot_razryva_kontraktov_s_rf_v_kosmicheskoy_i_voennykh_otraslyah_sostavyat_2_mlrd_grn.html>, accessed 8 April 2020.

27. Mark Carleton-Smith, keynote speech given at RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2018, 20 June 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jurJ4hHpDAY>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

28. In NATO militaries, these assessments are usually referred to as the 'correlation of forces and means'. In Russia, they are termed 'operational-tactical calculations'. See Clint Reach, Vikram Kilambi and Mark Cozad, *Russian Assessment and Applications of the Correlation of Forces and Means* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), pp. 87–88.

noting that succession is a potential cause of crisis, and that the starting biases of a successor may be different to the present leadership.

Accepting that deterrence must function within dynamic rather than status quo conditions, there are a number of operating biases that must be taken into consideration. The first is the Rubicon model, which establishes a distinction between motivational or planning activity, and action or implementation activity.²⁹ In essence, actors are more manipulatable while they are establishing their objectives. Once they fix themselves to an objective and begin to pursue it, actors become hard to deter and are less susceptible to influence. They cross a metaphorical version of the Rubicon river. For instance, the catastrophic losses among the Red Army during the initial invasion of Finland did not cause Stalin to reconsider his objectives. Having fixed upon defeating Finland, the setback simply prompted a change in tactics before a second, successful assault.³⁰ The Rubicon model implies that deterrent activity has a window of maximal effect, and the scope for deterrence diminishes beyond the point where an adversary fixes upon a course of action. Thus, in deterrent activity, there is the continuous deterrence posture that must inform the assessments of an adversary's military bureaucracy, and there is time-critical deterrent activity that must be enacted during a crisis to shape adversary decision-making. Once the adversary puts their plans into effect, they are more likely to double down in response to the stakes increasing than to withdraw.

This tendency is exacerbated by prospect theory.³¹ In short, humans pay much greater attention to small probabilities and tend to exaggerate the significance of unlikely outcomes. Thus, when in a good position, actors tend to become risk averse; and when in a weak position, they tend to take more risks. Perceived trends in this context are significant. For instance, the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor was taken because Tokyo perceived the gap between itself and the US to be widening, and so it undertook what the Japanese government knew to be a very high-risk operation.³² Given the number of factors that needed to work out in Japan's favour for its surprise attack to succeed, the chances of success were small. And yet, Japan gambled. Trend analysis in deterrence planning is important: if an adversary perceives that their relative capabilities are getting worse, they may become more inclined to risk conflict sooner rather than later.³³

29. For the psychological theory, see Jutta Heckhausen and Heinz Heckhausen (eds), *Motivation and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For its application to defence, see Dominic D P Johnson and Dominic Tierney, 'The Rubicon Theory of War: How the Path to Conflict Reaches the Point of No Return', *International Security* (Vol. 36, No. 1, Summer 2011), pp. 7–40.

30. Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), p. 47.

31. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk', *Econometrica* (Vol. 47, No. 2, March 1979), pp. 263–91.

32. Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), reprint edition, pp. 261–86.

33. For all the attention given to conflict between established and rising powers, declining powers have a long history of seeking to change strategic trends through recourse to force. See Dong

The importance of trends in shaping how options are perceived underscores the difference between aiming to deter an adversary and aiming to be able to comprehensively defeat them. Deterrence is predominantly established by two categories of capability: denial and punishment. Denying an adversary course of action is to make the opponent believe that they will be unable to succeed in achieving their objectives. Deterrence by punishment is to convince an adversary that the cost that will be imposed in retaliation for a course of action will outweigh the value of any gains. The ability to comprehensively defeat an adversary can enable deterrence by either of these categories. However, in getting to a position where comprehensive victory is possible, it is also entirely plausible that a power may convince an adversary of the need to take risks in the short term to forestall total defeat.³⁴ Furthermore, striving to be able to demonstrably and comprehensively defeat an adversary is liable to lead to an arms race, as the ability to win forces an opponent to try and develop their own deterrence posture in case the more powerful party uses its advantages for offensive purposes. The foremost example of this challenge was Germany prior to the First World War. Having recognised their defeat in the naval arms race, and fearing that advantages on land would be eroded as Russia industrialised, the German government came to see war as a better option in the short term while the country remained competitive.³⁵ As per prospect theory, it settled on a high-risk military strategy, which ultimately failed. Outright military superiority may deliver deterrence, but striving to obtain it may compel an adversary to war.

Absolute military superiority is not the most efficient means of establishing a credible deterrence posture. One can deny the viability of an adversary's plans, or threaten sufficient punishment to deter aggression, without having military superiority or even parity. Iran is the ultimate example of this. There is no doubt that the US could comprehensively defeat Iran in a conflict. However, given Iran's size, and the experience and capabilities of its forces, the resource and opportunity costs essentially deny this as a course of action to US policymakers. At the same time, while Iran could not effectively defend its territory, it could inflict so much damage through its proxies and ballistic missiles targeting the Gulf and Israel that the punishment it could inflict is an effective deterrent against escalation.³⁶ Thus, Iran has an effective deterrence posture despite being weaker by any available metric. Instead, the ability to punish or deny an adversary is dependent on being able to inflict an unacceptable level of damage.³⁷ In Iran's case, it is able to target the US's lead over Russia and China, threaten the global oil market and cause the US an unacceptable number of casualties.

Sun Lee, *Power Shifts, Strategy, and War: Declining States and International Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2007).

34. Poorly judged attempts to establish deterrence can therefore be escalatory. See Roberts and Hardie, 'The Validity of Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century', p. vi.
35. David G Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 199–200.
36. John Chipman (ed.), *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019); Jack Watling, 'Iran's Objectives and Capabilities: Deterrence and Subversion', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (February 2019).
37. John J Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 24–25.

While Iran is able to deter the US, the catastrophic consequences of a conflict between the countries means that Iran is itself deterred from direct military confrontation. There is, therefore, a balance of deterrence. This leads to a further element, however, which is that deterrence has a shaping effect. There is often a significant distinction drawn between deterrence and coercion, in so far as deterring an adversary is to prevent them from acting in an undesirable manner, whereas coercing an adversary is to make them act in a desired manner.³⁸ Coercion and deterrence may be different, but there is considerable overlap between them, and deterrent activity can often have a coercive effect. As per the Rubicon model, once an adversary has set themselves on a line of policy, it is hard to dissuade them from that objective. To stay with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action could have been the beginning of a progressive development of trust between Iran and the US. However, despite limited agreement for a short time on the nuclear file, neither side stopped seeing the other as an adversary.³⁹ In the same vein, despite extensive efforts to overcome decades of mistrust and hostility with Russia at the end of the Cold War, Russian policymakers ultimately projected the worst possible motives onto NATO expansion.⁴⁰ Thus, deterring an adversary from a course of action is unlikely to cause them to reconsider their hostility, but rather divert their hostile activity to another avenue. That avenue can be predicted, and in this way, deterrence can also be a form of coercion, driving an adversary to pursue the path that is not denied, or which will not provoke punishment. In the case of the US and Iran, with both parties deterred from escalating to direct armed conflict, this has manifested in proxy warfare,⁴¹ just as much of the competition with Russia, given the mutual recognition of the dangers of a major war, has been carried out in the grey zone.

If it is accepted that deterrence is likely to divert rather than cause an adversary to desist from hostile activity, then it must also be recognised that within the boundaries of the physically possible, and the shortcomings of the imagination, there are a limited number of courses of action open to adversaries, and an even more limited number that are compatible with the world view of an opposing power. This aids in prediction aimed at avoiding accidentally deterring an adversary from one course of action into a worse one. It also sets the boundaries for a coherent policy in that if it is accepted that one often cannot deter without also having a coercive effect, then a sensible deterrence posture should consider where it is trying to shift an adversary. In doing this, however, it must be recognised that there are a limited number of positions to which they will move. Coercion by deterrence must, therefore, be premised on what the adversary is likely to do in response and not simply on what the deterring power would like them to do.

38. James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919–1991: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*, 3rd edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).

39. Jay Solomon, *The Iran Wars: Spy Games, Bank Battles, and the Secret Deals That Reshaped the Middle East* (New York, NY: Random House, 2016), pp. 259–60.

40. Sergey Rogov, 'NATO and Russia: A View from Moscow', *Politique Étrangère* (No. 5, 2009), pp. 107–21.

41. Michael Eisenstadt, 'Operating in the Gray Zone: Countering Iran's Asymmetric Way of War', Policy Focus 162, Washington Institute, January 2020.

A deterrence posture is not a static position.⁴² Taking a position at a critical point in time may deter an adversary from a course of action, but as the adversary's conduct evolves and is shaped by the options available, the relevance of that original deterrence position will change. An effective deterrence posture therefore evolves in parallel to the threat.⁴³ There are two elements of a deterrence posture that must be assessed: capability and credibility. Both of these elements must be communicated and demonstrated. It is highly desirable to have capabilities that an adversary is unaware of, and to undersell the performance of equipment so as to undermine enemy planning assumptions. It is also worth noting that uncertainty as to adversary capabilities can – against a risk-averse opponent – significantly strengthen a deterrence posture. Generating known unknowns for an opponent can effectively paralyse their decision-making, which constitutes a form of deterrence by denial. Unknown unknowns, by contrast, cannot be factored in to adversary decision-making and cannot, therefore, have a deterrent effect.

The primary avenues for demonstrating capability are military exercises, providing a clear demonstration of equipment capabilities, scale, capacity for deployment, efficiency of logistics and competence of troops. Military exercises can reinforce credibility to a degree, in that the cost of running large exercises shows commitment, and credibility must be founded on capability, but the forces are not credible simply by existing. A credible deterrence posture must be underpinned by a demonstrable will to use force under defined circumstances. As with capability, there is an advantage in maintaining some degree of ambiguity as to thresholds. Inserting known unknowns as to whether or not a state will react can create uncertainty and thereby expand the space denied to an adversary. For instance, the US strike killing Major General Qassem Soleimani, precisely because it broke with so many precedents surrounding calculations of proportionality, introduced uncertainty into Iranian decision-making and increased the risk in acting directly against the US.⁴⁴ However, at its core, an opponent must believe that certain actions will lead to a clear response.

There is a tendency for kinetic exchanges to be understood as escalatory. This is not axiomatically true. When Turkey shot down a Russian jet for a brief airspace violation, Russia did not see this as an act of war.⁴⁵ The Russian Federation did respond economically, and Turkey offered some face-saving statements, but there was never any suggestion that Russia would escalate to a military confrontation. Instead, it made clear that Turkey was prepared to respond to infringements upon its sovereignty. Russia accepted the credible messaging, and subsequent relations between Turkey and Russia improved. Similarly, the Soviets shooting down British and

42. Vesna Danilovic, *When the Stakes Are High: Deterrence and Conflict Among Major Powers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 48.

43. It is for this reason that Israel prosecutes a 'campaign between wars' to reinforce the adversary's clarity about Israel's deterrence posture, and maintain the balance of deterrence. See Gadi Eisenkot and Gabi Siboni, 'The Campaign Between Wars: How Israel Rethought Its Strategy to Counter Iran's Malign Regional Influence', Policy Analysis, Washington Institute, 4 September 2019.

44. Jack Watling, 'The Death of Soleimani Brings Uncertainty, Violence and Opportunity', *RUSI Commentary*, 3 January 2020.

45. *BBC News*, 'Turkey Shoots Down Russian Warplane on Syria Border', 24 November 2015.

American aircraft that strayed into USSR airspace during the Cold War did not set NATO and the Soviet Union on the path of war,⁴⁶ but clarified the boundaries within which electronic warfare activity could be conducted. A limited kinetic action that is clearly framed as a response to a provocation, and is not tied to a wide pattern of activity suggesting imminent attack, is therefore not inherently escalatory. Instead, it can be de-escalatory in so far as it strengthens the credibility of a deterrence posture and frames the boundaries within which competition can be pursued.

The implications of credibility being underpinned by a certain amount of kinetic activity has far-reaching repercussions for the permissions required for forces to be able to maintain a credible deterrence posture. Isolated clashes can take place without either party embarking upon warfighting. Deterrence, therefore, should not be understood as simply preventing war, but rather as a means of defining boundaries and thresholds both vertically and horizontally that define the competitive space. It should also be recognised that adversaries – in establishing their distinct red lines – collaborate in building the space within which they are prepared to compete. Between adversaries, this space often involves low-level and sporadic violence. Failing to have the capability and credibility to maintain an effective deterrence posture therefore not only risks increased uncertainty as adversaries move without constraints across poorly defined thresholds, but also means that the rules of competition are likely to be imposed externally. A credible deterrence posture sets the rules of competition, and these can be structured to favour desirable policy objectives, enabling states to compete for advantage over the points that are their greatest interest.

Finally, in developing a deterrence posture against an adversary, it is necessary to ask how that adversary understands deterrence. In essence, it is worth asking what the adversary would expect a deterrence posture to look like. By adopting that posture, a state can not only fulfil the adversary's criteria for deterrence, but also reduces the risk of miscalculation. This may seem like a highly restrictive objective, but in many instances it expands the range of available deterrent activity. It has already been noted, for instance, that the Russian Federation recognises the use of violence against its forces, under some circumstances, as deterrent rather than aggressive activity. This is consistent with Russia's own deterrence theory, which envisages applying 'doses of pain' to an opponent to warn them off specific courses of action.⁴⁷ Because this is what Russia expects, acting within this framework poses a reduced risk of misinterpretation. This should not constrict deterrent activity against Russia to the limits of Russian theory. For example, Russian deterrence theory proceeds from demonstrative acts, to the infliction of targeted damage, to retaliation for damage received. There is no explicit concept of deterrence by denial in Russian

46. Richard Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), pp. 201–25.

47. V M Burenok, Yu A Pechatnov and R G Tagirov, 'K Voprosu ob Opredelenii Urovnei Nepriemlemosti pri Reshenii Zadachi Silovogo Strategicheskogo Sderzhivaniya' ['Determination of Levels of Intractability in Solving the Problem of Force Strategic Deterrence'], *Vestnik Akademii Nauk* [*Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences*] (No. 1, 2009), <<http://naukaxxi.ru/materials/74>>, accessed 20 June 2020.

theory; there is only deterrence by the threat or application of punishment.⁴⁸ However, this does not mean that Russian 'operational-tactical' calculations cannot be influenced so as to deny the viability of courses of action.

48. Michael Kofman, Anya Fink and Jeffrey Edmonds, 'Russian Strategy for Escalation Management: Evolution of Key Concepts', CNA, April 2020, p. 18.

II. Russian Policy and the Application of Deterrence

HAVING OUTLINED THE principles of deterrence, it is now necessary to examine how these translate into practice with regard to the Russian Federation. This must be based on an assessment of what Russia's objectives are, the means by which Russia pursues those ends and their critical dependencies. Any such assessment must be presented with the caveat that such matters are highly classified, and so while parameters can be deduced from the history of Russian policy, statements and the limited material that has entered the public domain, this assessment is unavoidably incomplete, and in places inexact.

Russia's Strategic Interests

There are four primary strategic interests that shape Russian policy. These interests are highly interrelated, but also consecutively dependent in Russia's view,⁴⁹ so it is necessary to consider them in the following order:

- Great power status.
- Regional hegemony.
- National sovereignty.
- Regime survival.

Great Power Status

A 'great power' is broadly defined as a sovereign state, able to project power globally, and willing to exercise that power beyond its immediate interests, so that its interests must be considered in the resolution of most international disputes.⁵⁰ Russia's great power status reflects its historic place in the international order and is secured by its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. However, it is also a status that Russia continues to try and bolster.⁵¹ India, for example, has a larger economy than Russia, a nuclear arsenal, a comparably sized military, and while less militarily powerful, maintains some niche capabilities that are superior to Russia's. And yet,

49. Janusz Bugajski, *Cold Peace: Russia's New Imperialism* (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 215–30.

50. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, NY: Random House, 1987), p. xxi.

51. Cristian Nitoiu, 'Aspirations to Great Power Status: Russia's Path to Assertiveness in the International Arena Under Putin', *Political Studies Review* (Vol. 15, No. 1, February 2017), pp. 39–48; Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), p. 12.

India does not actively try and involve itself in disputes beyond its regional interests.⁵² It is a regional power, but not a great power. The distinction here is a matter of policy, rather than capability. Russia, by contrast, actively involves itself abroad.

There are many examples of Russia attempting to insert itself diplomatically and – though this has only seriously developed since 2014 – militarily into international matters where it lacks clear direct interests. For instance, as tensions in the Gulf rose over the summer of 2019, Russia began a diplomatic effort to develop a new security framework for the region.⁵³ When Iran conducted a cruise missile strike on two Saudi Arabian oil installations in September 2019, Russia immediately convened a conference in Moscow drawing together a wide – though not entirely relevant – range of actors from across the Middle East. The ‘new’ element of Russia’s proposed framework, as far as Western diplomats could discern, was that Russia would be included. The requests were rebuffed, since the regional states had a developed understanding of the escalation dynamics, and non-regional powers such as the US and the UK were involved because they had direct security commitments and forces based in the region.⁵⁴ While offering itself as the critical mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia in private, Russia publicly boasted of the effectiveness of its air defence systems, suggesting that Saudi Arabia should procure the S400.⁵⁵ In this case, Russia failed to translate the event into an opportunity, but it tried, and continues to put out feelers on the idea.⁵⁶

In considering Russian engagement in Libya, it is possible to see another effort to gain influence and leverage. This proved more successful and encapsulates why Russia pursues these policies. Early Russian outreach to Khalifa Haftar was not particularly productive.⁵⁷ However, in January 2019, Russian diplomats began to ask European colleagues whether a Russian contribution to the stabilisation of Libya might be received favourably. They were told it would not. Nevertheless, as the security situation in Libya deteriorated, Europe proved apathetic in its response⁵⁸ and created an opportunity for external powers to fill the vacuum. Russia capitalised on the opening, simultaneously hosting diplomatic dialogues⁵⁹ – though these proved no more

52. Shashank Joshi, *Indian Power Projection: Ambition, Arms and Influence*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 85 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

53. TASS, ‘Russia Urges to Convene Regional Security Conference of Gulf Countries’, 25 June 2018.

54. Former Prime Minister Theresa May went so far as to say that ‘Gulf security is our security’. See Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ‘Prime Minister’s Speech to the Gulf Co-Operation Council 2016’, 7 December 2016, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-to-the-gulf-co-operation-council-2016>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

55. Henry Meyer, ‘Putin Offers to Sell Saudis S-400 Missiles to Bolster Defenses’, *Bloomberg*, 16 September 2019.

56. Alasdair Pal and Devjyot Ghoshal, ‘Russia Says Urging Gulf Nations to Consider a Joint Security Mechanism’, *Reuters*, 15 January 2020.

57. Vladimir Soldatkin et al., ‘East Libya Strongman Visits Russian Aircraft Carrier in Mediterranean: RIA’, *Reuters*, 11 January 2017.

58. David Ehl, ‘EU, France Split on Libya as Khalifa Haftar Strikes Tripoli’, *DW*, 23 April 2019.

59. Patrick Wintour, ‘Libya Talks in Moscow in Diplomatic Coup for Putin’, *The Guardian*, 13 January 2020.

successful than European efforts⁶⁰ – and deploying forces to Libya.⁶¹ The latter, though small in number, ensures that no further efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict in Libya can take place without consulting with Russia, lest Russian forces act as a spoiler to diplomatic efforts. The entrance of an additional external power into Libya also diminishes European leverage over other intervening powers such as Egypt, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, if Russia decides to make competing offers.

Leverage in the Libyan conflict is not an end in itself; Russia has few interests in the country. There is a wider play for influence in the Middle East, central to which is Russia's contention that it is a more stalwart ally than the US.⁶² Russian diplomats highlight by way of example the US's dropping of support for President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in 2011,⁶³ compared with their continued backing of President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria, or quiet assistance to President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela.⁶⁴ Russian support for Egyptian and Emirati interests in Libya fits its diplomatic narrative.⁶⁵ However, the question that Russian diplomats raised in discussions with European colleagues in January 2019 regarding Libya gives an indication of how great power status supports a broader Russian strategy. The question concerned whether Russian assistance in Libya might lead Europe to consider sanctions relief over Crimea.⁶⁶ They were told it would not, but some European states, including Italy, were not entirely hostile to the idea. More recently, there is a growing alignment between Russian and French interests in Libya that demonstrates how being willing to retain a presence can create opportunities.⁶⁷ This does not imply that Russia is desperately looking for sanctions relief. Rather, it highlights a strategy of issue linkage.⁶⁸ By virtue of being a great power, able to insert itself into a wide range of geopolitical concerns, Russia is able to wield greater leverage in matters concerning its immediate regional

60. *Al Jazeera*, 'Libya's Haftar Leaves Moscow Without Signing Ceasefire Agreement', 14 January 2020.

61. *Interfax*, 'NYT soobshchila o pribytii v Liviyyu snayperov CHVK Vagnera' ['NYT Reports Arrival of Wagner PMC to Libya'], 6 November 2019, <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/683115>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

62. A case Russia has been making persistently to the Gulf States and Egypt. See Samuel Ramani, 'Sochi Summit Highlights Growing Russia–Egypt Ties', Middle East Institute, 5 November 2019.

63. David E Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2013), pp. 277–303.

64. Maria Svetkova and Anton Sverev, 'Exclusive: Kremlin-Linked Contractors Help Guard Venezuela's Maduro – Sources', *Reuters*, 25 January 2019.

65. Egyptian diplomats have been asserting a range of interests in Libya in private for some time, but have now moved their claims public following direct Turkish intervention in the conflict. See Mahmoud Mourad, 'Egypt Has a Legitimate Right to Intervene in Libya, Sisi Says', *Reuters*, 20 June 2020.

66. Author interview with Russian foreign policy adviser, London, January 2019; substance confirmed by British diplomat, London, January 2019.

67. Anas el Gomati, 'Russia's Role in the Libyan Civil War Gives it Leverage Over Europe', *Foreign Policy*, 18 January 2020.

68. While diplomats often try and avoid issue linkage, there is a strong empirical evidence base to highlight its effectiveness. It is a strategy that is similarly employed by China. See Paul Poast, 'Does Issue Linkage Work? Evidence from European Alliance Negotiations, 1860 to 1945', *International Organization* (Vol. 66, No. 2, Spring 2012), pp. 277–310; Krista E Weigand, 'China's Strategy in the

interests.⁶⁹ Thus, great power status secures Russia's regional hegemony, because in dealing with its neighbours, Russia can deter interference from competing great powers by threatening to disrupt their interests globally.

Regional Hegemony

The criticality of regional hegemony to Russia is that it is believed to ensure its territorial sovereignty. Russia has, for centuries, had unsettled borders, permeated by nomadic peoples. The sheer scale of the country, the variation in climate and the limitations of infrastructure all render defining clear borders difficult. It may be argued that the harshness of Russian Tsarist officials as administrators partly stemmed from how few they were in number compared to both the populations they oversaw and the area for which they were responsible.⁷⁰ It must also be recognised that Russia has always been a more imperial than national state.⁷¹ Made up of a wide range of peoples and cultures, the centre has a limited intrinsic hold on its peripheral territories. In the 20th century, the standardisation of language under the Soviet Union and the pushing out of the Russian periphery helped to cohere the state. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the lived experience of Russian officials indicated that Russia would, once again, see power bleed from Moscow, and ultimately lead to the crumbling of the Russian border. In 1992, Moscow signed treaties with a wide range of nationalities to avert this.⁷² No such agreement was achieved in Chechnya, and as Russian officials feared, the situation quickly deteriorated into a costly and politically disruptive war.⁷³

The dynamic for Russia's frontiers is that in order for them to be stable and secure, Russia must be strong beyond them. Russian history during the Tsarist Empire and early Soviet Union consistently showed that ethnic, linguistic, sectarian and political divisions were all used by adversaries to impinge upon Russia's borders and sovereignty.⁷⁴ This long history, with which Russian officials are largely familiar, underpins the logic of Russia seeking hegemony over its

Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute: Issue Linkage and Coercive Diplomacy', *Asian Security* (Vol. 45, No. 2, 2009), pp. 170–93.

69. Russian military theorists have emphasised the capacity of distant competition to ensure Russia's regional hegemony for decades. See S G Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1979), pp. 122–30.

70. Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 201–30; Mark Galeotti, *The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 9–20.

71. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 1–22.

72. Robert Sharlet, 'The Prospects for Federalism in Russian Constitutional Politics', *Publius* (Vol. 24, No. 2, Spring 1994), pp. 115–27.

73. Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

74. John Ledonne, 'The Frontier in Modern Russian History', *Russian History* (Vol. 19, No. 1/4, 1992), pp. 143–54.

immediate neighbours. It is also the reason for the vehement hostility to perceived adversaries gaining leverage over bordering states. In this context, NATO represents a particular threat in the minds of Russian officials for several reasons. First, NATO is ultimately an entity specifically designed to counter Russia. While the Alliance's purpose has evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian officials perceive it to be institutionally hostile to Russia.⁷⁵ Second, while NATO may provide a framework for a unified conventional defence against Russia, its existence does not prevent NATO member states from operating independently of the Alliance against Russian interests. However, the Alliance does provide conventional deterrence that enables its members to pursue independent but hostile policies. Irrespective of NATO policy, therefore, the Alliance enables weak states to undertake a strong anti-Russian policy, which many of them are inclined to do. It is worth highlighting that this forms the basis for the narratives in Russian exercises such as *Zapad 2017*, whereby Poland and Lithuania sought to set up a vassal state on Belarusian territory to reinstate historic borders.⁷⁶ NATO membership bordering Russia is consequently seen as a strategy of containment that enables those states to disrupt Russia on favourable terms across its borders. Since crisis on the periphery has often led to crisis at the centre – the political fallout of the First Chechen War being within the lived experience of many senior Russian officials – this is seen as a serious threat. There is a tendency for NATO officials to dismiss Russian alarm over its expansion.⁷⁷ This partly stems from believing that propaganda to the effect that Russia fears a conventional invasion comparable to the Second World War is an accurate reflection of Russian concerns. There is less awareness, however, of Russia's perception of its own vulnerability to the fragmentation of its periphery.

National Sovereignty

While the 'Great Patriotic War' features heavily in Russian propaganda, the more significant reference point for many Russian officials is the 1990s, as a demonstration of what Russia will suffer if it fails to uphold its national sovereignty. In this decade, Russia lost its ability to project power internationally and saw its periphery embrace the West. The period amounts to a collective trauma for Russians who lived through it, and it is important to recognise that those who were just beginning their careers during it, and saw first-hand the damage wrought, will occupy senior administrative posts over the next decade. In Russia, the 1990s are talked about as a second 'time of troubles'⁷⁸ equivalent to the collapse of state authority in the 16th

75. Bryan Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), p. 74.

76. Kalev Stoicescu, 'Decoding *Zapad-2017*', Analysis, International Centre for Defence and Security, September 2017, p. 3.

77. Robert Pszczel, 'How NATO Is Perceived in Russia (Or Lessons in Optimism)', NATO Review, 29 June 2011, <<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2011/06/29/how-nato-is-perceived-in-russia-or-lessons-in-optimism/index.html>>, accessed 22 June 2020.

78. Kåre Johan Mjør, 'Smuta: Cyclical Visions of History in Contemporary Russian Thought and the Question of Hegemony', *Studies in East European Thought* (Vol. 70, 2018), pp. 19–40.

and 17th centuries,⁷⁹ which saw economic turmoil, rebellion, invasion and pestilence. In the 1990s, Russians saw savings evaporate, jobs vanish and services disappear. They witnessed the rise of a new elite of moneymen, who captured state enterprises and funnelled vast quantities of money from Russia to the West.⁸⁰

Lessons were stark. While many Russian officials believed capitalism to be a superior system to communism, they also saw it as a predatory system of winners and losers, and believed they had witnessed the consequences of defeat play out to the detriment of their country.⁸¹ In this context, the failure to defend national sovereignty from what is perceived to be informational, political, economic, diplomatic and military pressure aimed at diminishing Russian influence is a critical interest.

Regime Survival

Given this lived experience, the importance of regime survival takes on a different hue to that which is generally portrayed. Regime survival is often framed as the defence of elite interests over those of the country. In Russia, the Putin project is more complex. Upon taking office, President Vladimir Putin waged a slow campaign to co-opt and coerce Russia's new business elite to serve the interests of the state. After the perceived success of the Second Chechen War,⁸² Putin attempted to implement what came to be known as the vertical of power, by which the central government manages a coherent chain of command across the country.⁸³ The concept was not fully successful, and has faded from Russian political discourse. However, the significance of control in Russian reporting on the presidency is indicative of the importance placed on a strong centre. Putin progressively took control of media organisations in the early 2000s.⁸⁴ Those who resisted were forced into exile,⁸⁵ charged with corruption⁸⁶ or died.⁸⁷ From the West, the process looked like the slow strangulation of Russian society. In Russia, the state's malignity was targeted and precise.

79. Ruslan G Skrynnikov, *The Time of Troubles: Russia in Crisis, 1604-1618*, translated and edited by Hugh F Graham (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1988).

80. David E Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011).

81. Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (London: William Collins, 2020), p. 106.

82. Anna Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya* (London: Harvill Press, 2001).

83. Andrew Monaghan, 'The Russian *Vertikal*: The Tandem, Power and the Elections', Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper REP 2011/01, Chatham House, June 2011.

84. Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2014).

85. Neil Buckley, 'Boris Berezovsky: A Death in Exile', *Financial Times*, 29 March 2013.

86. *BBC News*, 'Russian Oil Tycoon Khodorkovsky Found Guilty in Trial', 27 December 2010.

87. David Filipov, 'Here Are 10 Critics of Vladimir Putin Who Died Violently or in Suspicious Ways', *Washington Post*, 23 March 2017.

For much of the population, the early Putin era was characterised by steady economic growth and a growing sense of security.⁸⁸ It must be understood that the Russian population is widely dispersed, and there are many communities in terminal economic and demographic decline.⁸⁹ For these communities, their experience of the wider world is largely mediated through family working in urban centres and through Russian television. Their concerns are local, and the contrast between the grandeur of the centre as presented in Russian media and the petty corruption of local officialdom often leads to a dynamic where the centre is appealed to for reprieve. Periodic activism in regional politics allows the Kremlin to appear as benevolent, addressing grievances when it learns of them.⁹⁰ Corruption is resented in the centre also, but the dynamics of how that anger is expressed are complex. Putin's popularity fluctuates, and it is widely known that he has amassed a vast fortune in office.⁹¹ However, Russians observing the oligarchs of the 1990s – and many today – are particularly infuriated with the ownership of Russian property through foreign companies.⁹² Putin's effort to bind the oligarchy to the state therefore appears to combat corruption, though in reality it harnessed corruption to the interests of the state.⁹³ Thus, many of those who are dissatisfied with the present government are nevertheless supportive of the concept of a strong state, fearing that without it corruption will return to how it was in the 1990s. The government's particular failings are, to some extent, forgiven as a perceived structural necessity.

Regime survival is not simply a self-serving venture; for many Russians, it is bound up with Russia's capacity to rebuild itself and avoid the ravages of a hostile world. Western observers may dismiss this perspective as incomplete, inaccurate or contradictory, but it drives Russian policy all the same, being at the heart of the world view of Putin and senior Russian officials, and reflecting anxieties that are more widely felt in Russian society.

88. The World Bank, 'GDP Growth (Annual %) – Russian Federation', <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=RU>>, accessed 22 June 2020.

89. Oliver Bullough, *The Last Man in Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

90. For a detailed exploration of the relationship between regional politics and central politics in Russia, see Cameron Ross (ed.), *Regional Politics in Russia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). For a topical demonstration note on how regional governors have enforced lockdowns, but the centre has announced economic relief in response to the coronavirus pandemic, see Henry Force and Max Seddon, 'Putin Leaves Tough Coronavirus Decisions to Regional Aides', *Financial Times*, 4 April 2020.

91. Reuters Enterprise Team, 'Comrade Capitalism: How Russia Does Business in the Putin Era', *Reuters*.

92. Oliver Bullough, *Moneyland: Why Thieves and Crooks Now Rule the World and How to Take it Back* (London: Profile Books, 2017).

93. For an exhaustive study of how Putin achieved this, see Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

Operationalising Russian Strategy

It is important to consider how the four strategic objectives driving Russian policy lead Russia to behave, and the specific courses of action that the UK may wish to deter. To begin with Russia's pursuit of great power status, there is a consistent pattern of behaviour. First, Russia seeks to identify an opportunity to enter a theatre. The hunt for opportunities is broad and global. However, a particular focus is placed on areas of dispute or conflict within the international system. In these contexts, Russia often simultaneously presents itself as a disinterested outsider, able to reach across the divide and speak to all parties,⁹⁴ while perusing defence sales with most parties and using sales to one state to encourage sales to another. Opportunities that are unlikely to come to fruition are often explored, such as a trans-Korean railway project, enabling South Korea to move goods through Russia to Europe.⁹⁵ As a symbolic step towards the reunification of the peninsula, such a proposal has enough plausibility to start a conversation, but is in practical terms highly unlikely. Conversely, Russia seeks to develop more credible opportunities, such as proposed mediation between India and Pakistan.⁹⁶ Through the deployment of trainers and technicians, defence sales also extend Russia's political leverage, as demonstrated in Turkey. Here, Russia successfully convinced President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to procure its S400 strategic surface-to-air missile system (SAM),⁹⁷ placing Russian air defenders inside NATO airspace.⁹⁸ Where some of the less probable opportunities sought will likely pay off, increasing uncertainty among competitors, others will result in minor cooperation, which Russia can build on if further opportunities arise. The delivery of weapons, the promise of economic engagement and other projects are largely aimed at building up leverage in the country.

Once an opening is established, Russia can act quickly and decisively to reshape political calculations for other actors on the ground. The most immediately significant line of action is the transfer of modern air defence systems into a theatre. These significantly increase the threat for other actors – expanding the range of capabilities they need to safely operate – and creates political uncertainty, as Russian advisers will often be attached to partnered air defence crews.⁹⁹ Concerns over inadvertently killing Russians in attacking air defence systems has had a proven deterrent effect on other actors, though perhaps more importantly, as Israel has demonstrated, it also facilitated new lines of diplomatic engagement, and therefore leverage.¹⁰⁰ Having created barriers to competitors, Russia has been willing to put forces in country –

94. Boris Volkhonsky et al., 'The US Strategy of "Rebalancing" in Asia Pacific and Russia's National Security Interests', CAME Discussion Paper No. 2, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, November 2015, p. 25.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

96. TASS, 'Pakistan Hails Russia's Mediation Offer to Resolve Crisis with India', 1 March 2019.

97. TASS, 'Over 120 Missiles for Russian S-400 Systems Delivered to Turkey, Says Source', 20 January 2020.

98. TASS, 'Russian Experts to Visit Turkey to Help Put S-400 Systems into Operation', 27 May 2019.

99. Julian Borger, 'Russian Military Presence in Syria Poses Challenge to US-Led Intervention', *The Guardian*, 23 December 2012.

100. Guy Plopsy, 'Russia's Air Defenses in Syria: More Politics than Punch', BESA Perspectives Paper No. 618, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 18 October 2017.

whether badged soldiers or private military contractors – to change the reality on the ground.¹⁰¹ Reduced force protection requirements, and loose permissions, have enabled Russian forces to act quickly and aggressively. It is not axiomatic that Russia will progress from building access to exploiting it. The process is highly opportunistic. But when favourable opportunities arise, Russia has acted decisively.

Russia may have less capacity than the US, or even the UK and France, to sustain operations at reach. However, it is able and willing to employ tactics and techniques that NATO forces cannot. In September 2019, for example, it was assessed that Russia would commence an operation against Idlib in December,¹⁰² because bombing in the summer failed to displace the civilian population, as the warm weather enabled bombed-out civilians to sleep outside or in damaged buildings. By contrast, bombing in the winter displaced that population and so cleared the battlespace for military operations against remaining fighters. The refugee flows would also put a huge amount of pressure on Turkey.¹⁰³ These assessments proved accurate,¹⁰⁴ and Russia achieved a significant political effect. In supporting the Assad government, it was prepared to directly target civilians, which could not be conducted by NATO states.¹⁰⁵ This difference in policy options must be taken into consideration when examining Russia's interventions.

Russia's long-term policy objectives vary. In Syria, Russia has an established interest in preserving both an ally and a base.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the example of Russia's steadfast support for an ally has been used to bolster its outreach to other governments, including Egypt.¹⁰⁷ In most cases, however, Russia's interests are more limited, either comprising a hunt for economic opportunities or an attempt to imbed Russian leverage into local dynamics, so that Russia can – at minimal cost – force other powers with disproportionate interests at stake to consult Moscow.

Russia's relationships around its borders differ from its international engagement, though they also vary considerably by region. Russia is both a close economic partner with, and yet a competitor of, China. Its relationships in Central Asia are far less volatile than those in Eastern Europe, reflecting Russia's disproportionate leverage over the former. Other than with China

101. The line between private and public force in Russia is blurred, and its deployments extend far beyond Syria. See Nils Dahlqvist, 'Russia's (Not So) Private Military Companies', FOI Memo 6653, RUFS Briefing No. 44, Swedish Defence Research Agency, January 2019; Neil Hauer, 'Russia's Favorite Mercenaries', *The Atlantic*, 27 August 2018.

102. Author interviews with US analysts, Lebanon, September 2019.

103. *BBC News*, 'Syria War: Turkey Can't Handle New "Refugee Wave", Says Erdogan', 23 December 2019.

104. Gabriela Baczyńska, 'NATO Calls on Russia, Syria to Halt Idlib Offensive', *Reuters*, 28 February 2020.

105. The Assad government has pursued the targeting of civilian infrastructure since the beginning of the war. Russia has since targeted hospitals and other civilian facilities. See Roy Gutman and Paul Raymond, 'Syrian Government Has Pattern of Attacking Bakeries, Bread Lines', *McClatchy Newspapers*, 21 January 2013; Malachy Browne et al., 'Hospitals and Schools Are Being Bombed in Syria. A U.N. Inquiry is Limited. We Took a Deeper Look', *New York Times*, 1 January 2020.

106. Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia's Interests in Syria', Carnegie Moscow Center, 9 June 2014.

107. Ramani, 'Sochi Summit Highlights Growing Russia–Egypt Ties'.

and the Baltic states – shielded by NATO – Russia pursues hegemony over its neighbours by four lines of effort: engagement; dependence; coercion; and disruption. It must be noted that these phases do not axiomatically progress, and that the starting point varies by state.

Russia structures engagement through attempts to develop bilateral and multilateral frameworks for cooperation, such as the Eurasian Union¹⁰⁸ or Arctic Forum. Through these frameworks, Russia seeks to establish recognition of its regional interests and secure guarantees for its sovereignty over crucial territories. It is vital to recognise that Russian interests are not uniform across the various regions that it straddles. In Eastern Europe, Russia faces potentially hostile neighbours and therefore cares deeply about its relative leverage in these capitals versus NATO. In the Arctic, Russia acts constructively for now, though it continues to expand its military footprint in the region. In the South East, by contrast, Russia is facing a growing competition with China, and must balance the economic independence from the West that closer ties with China offers with the threat that China poses to Russia's status.¹⁰⁹ Russia's relationship with China sits beyond the scope of this paper.

The second line of effort in Russia's attempt to secure regional hegemony comprises the development of its neighbours' dependence. This is done economically, politically and in the security domain. For instance, in Ukraine, Russia used economic largesse and lent political support to President Viktor Yanukovich both diplomatically and covertly.¹¹⁰ Further afield, Russia offers cheap energy exports¹¹¹ and attempts to maintain lines of transportation for goods moving into Europe, binding its neighbours into economic and political structures that ensure the continued importance of strong relations with Moscow.¹¹² This sets the groundwork for the coercive phase of Russian policy, to be employed should a neighbour seek to break away from Russia's orbit.¹¹³ The collection of intelligence on corrupt business practice enables Russia to coerce and manipulate actors. The fallout from concerns regarding then presidential candidate Donald Trump's relationships in Russia has unfortunately skewed the public discourse around

108. Marcel H Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 2nd edition (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), pp. 61–88.

109. Paul Stronski and Nicole Ng, 'Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2018.

110. Belton, *Putin's People*, p. 268.

111. This is most dramatically demonstrated in Belarus, where Russia sells oil for as little as \$4 per barrel. See RBC, 'V Belorussii reshili kupit' v Rossii 2 mln t nefti po \$4 za barrel' ['Belarus Bought 2 Million Tons of Oil from Russia at \$4 per Barrel'], 2 April 2020, <<https://www.rbc.ru/economics/02/04/2020/5e859cf09a7947d1d99a4186>>, accessed 20 June 2020.

112. Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, 'Between Dependence and Integration: Ukraine's Relations With Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies* (Vol. 68, No. 4, 2016), pp. 678–98.

113. This duality is captured well in a publication that predates, and therefore does not retrospectively explain, Russia's annexation of Crimea. See James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

‘kompromat’ to overplay the importance of sexual perversion as a lever for blackmail.¹¹⁴ This, of course, is used by intelligence services, but corrupt business practices are more important. Russian organised crime – extensively intertwined with its intelligence services¹¹⁵ – enables potential allies to make money, but the enablement also provides Russian intelligence with receipts. These ‘receipts’ can be leaked to destroy reputations, used for blackmail or form the basis for prosecution in Russia. They can also be used to pursue enemies through foreign courts.¹¹⁶ UK courts, for instance, will freeze assets while someone is being pursued through litigation, and successive litigation can separate someone from assets for a long time. Russia’s methods, therefore, both reward loyalty and punish disloyalty in a way that leaves few avenues for escape. This kind of personalised targeting allows for coercive leverage over businesses and judicial, regulatory and political institutions.

It is important to note that there is a ‘tipping point’ here.¹¹⁷ Ideally, Russia would like its neighbours to be in its sphere of influence, benefiting economically from the arrangements and willingly seeking integration, but aware of the costs of opposing Moscow. If Russia has to actually employ such coercive measures to draw a state back into its orbit, however, this indicates failure.¹¹⁸ In Ukraine, for example, the leverage exerted on the president did have the effect of tightening support for Russia among a portion of the political class,¹¹⁹ but it also led to popular outrage that fractured the traditional east–west political divide in the country.¹²⁰

The final course of action in Russia seeking regional control is the denial of ground to adversaries. In essence, if Russia perceives that it has lost control of a peripheral state, it may endeavour to create a buffer of instability or ‘frozen conflict’ beyond its borders. Russian policy in Moldova – where it backed Transnistrian separatists in a war of secession in 1992 – was not deliberately designed to create a frozen conflict, but the Russian government learned from its consequences, and has pursued such a state in Georgia and Ukraine.¹²¹ This has created a pattern of territorial

114. See, for example, the references to sexual acts found in the so-called ‘Steele dossier’, <<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3259984/Trump-Intelligence-Allegations.pdf>>, accessed 27 May 2020.

115. Galeotti, *The Vory*, pp. 186, 210.

116. These methods are detailed in Belton, *Putin’s People*.

117. Russian military theorists define the ‘tipping point’ as being between the application of passive and active soft power. See, for example, Alexandr Naumov, “*Miagkaia sila*” i “*tsvetnye revoliutsii*” i *tekhnologii smeny politicheskikh rezhimov v nachale XXI veka* [“Soft Power” and “Colour Revolutions”, *Technologies of Regime Change at the Beginning of the 21st Century*] (Moscow: Agramak-Media, 2017).

118. Vasile Rotaru, ‘Forced Attraction? How Russia Is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the “Near Abroad”’, *Problems of Post-Communism* (Vol. 65, No. 1, 2018), pp. 37–48.

119. Luke Harding, ‘Viktor Yanukovich Promises Ukraine will Embrace Russia’, *The Guardian*, 5 March 2010.

120. Favourable attitudes towards Russia declined across most oblasts. See Oleg Grytsaienko, ‘The Crisis in Ukraine: An Insider’s View’, IFRI, June 2014, p. 11, <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_rnv_78_ukraine_oleg_grytsaienko_june_2014_eng_0.pdf>, accessed 28 June 2020.

121. It is a state that, over time, becomes progressively acceptable to international parties. See Robert Ortung and Christopher Walker, ‘Putin’s Frozen Conflicts’, *Foreign Policy*, 13 February 2015; James

seizure, either by proxy forces or a limited offensive by the Russian military. One advantage of such a state is that it prevents the state from joining NATO. Perhaps more importantly, it ensures that Russia has leverage in the state's capital, as Moscow can always dial up the level of tension in the disputed territories. After Western theorists began to describe these activities as 'hybrid warfare', the term entered the lexicon of Russian military theory, but primarily to describe Western approaches to such operations. More widely, Russian military theorists employ the term 'controlled chaos' to describe both the Western fermentation of political revolution and the countering of such techniques.¹²² Building a buffer of disorder within a defined geopolitical space allows Moscow to adjust the pressure to suit its interests.

Although Ukraine is the primary contemporary example, a distinction must be drawn between the annexation of Crimea and Russian policy in Donbas. While the international community considers both to be violations of Ukrainian sovereignty, these actions are distinct in Russian thinking. Maintaining instability in Donbas was originally an attempt to coerce, and has since become a means to maintain leverage, over Kiev, with the subsequent advantage that it denies Ukraine accession to NATO. By contrast, the annexation of Crimea is part of a separate line of Russian policy, aimed at ensuring its national sovereignty. Although Crimea was not Russian territory, it was critical to Russia's confidence in being able to defend its southern border. Sevastopol is integral to Russia's defence plans for the Black Sea, just as Kaliningrad serves as a defensive bastion against any threat emanating from Eastern Europe. Underpinning this strategic logic is a strong and widespread nationalistic belief that Crimea is Russian territory.

The maintenance of these outposts is critical to Russian defence planning because it enables defence in depth, which has been central to Russian operations since the defeat of Napoleon in 1812. By holding bastions with sophisticated anti-air and ballistic missile capabilities beyond Russia's immediate borders, Russia is able to hold hostile air, logistics and enabling assets at reach, thereby drastically increasing the necessary preparatory effort to conduct credible operations against Russia directly.¹²³ The first element in Russia's defence of its national sovereignty, therefore, is access denial through capabilities that US planners term 'layered standoff'.¹²⁴ It is important to recognise that this is less about preparing for an all-out war than creating a high threshold for adversaries to be able to use limited military tools. Against a conventional threat to Russian national interests, the Kremlin has adopted a willingness to embark upon fait accompli operations – in Crimea, Syria and Georgia – mobilising, seizing and denying ground quicker than adversaries can react. In this context, standoff capabilities play two critical roles. In the first instance, they encourage adversaries to choose, when confronted with limited Russian military operations, between passivity and mobilising at a scale that crosses the threshold into

Brooke, 'A Frozen Conflict May Be Ukraine's Best Option', Atlantic Council, 20 January 2020.

122. Alexandr Bartosh, *Konflikty XXI veka: gibrднаia voina i tsvetnaia revoliutsiia* [21st Century Conflict: Hybrid War and Colour Revolutions] (Moscow: Goriachaia liniia – Telekom, 2018).

123. For an outline of the functioning of these systems, see Justin Bronk, 'Modern Russian and Chinese Integrated Air Defence Systems: The Nature of the Threat, Growth Trajectory and Western Options', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (January 2020).

124. US Army, 'The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028'.

non-limited international armed conflict. In the event of the latter, they hold an adversary at reach long enough for Russian forces to maintain localised dominance of the battlespace for an extended period.¹²⁵

The risks of attempting *fait accompli* operations are high. Russia will only employ these tactics if a limited set of interests are threatened and, as in Crimea, those interests are often messaged beforehand.¹²⁶ On the other hand, being unable to respond, and thereby lowering the risk threshold, may present opportunities for *fait accompli* operations beyond core interests.

Over the past five years, the Western discussion of Russian military methods has been greatly hampered by the conception of a ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ (named after Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff). It is hard to overstate how much damage this idea has done.¹²⁷ First, this concept confused an article in which a newly appointed Gerasimov outlined his understanding of his operating environment by reference to recent American operations, with a blueprint for Russian operational art. Second, the doctrine’s conception implies a fixed approach, which is odd given that Gerasimov wrote that ‘each war is a unique case, demanding the establishment of a particular logic and not the application of a template’.¹²⁸ It is nevertheless helpful to distinguish between the ‘non-linear’ warfare that Russia perceived to be Western – and subsequently emulated in Donbas and, to some effect, in Syria – and the annexation of Crimea, which was a conventional military operation. The latter was a *fait accompli*, and comprised the kind of military operation for which Gerasimov has extensively trained the Russian military: offensive conventional operations at army group level.¹²⁹

Small operations involving up to four battalions of Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) – sufficient to seize an initial outpost in the Arctic, for instance – could be mounted within a week. For full-scale conventional operations – accepting the timing as yardsticks rather than set in stone – a 40-day buildup of forces and materiel would be expected, combined with special forces and reconnaissance activity to prepare the operating environment. The battlespace is then denied to adversaries to increase the requisite commitment in plausible response, preventing

125. This line of thinking is consistent with Soviet theories regarding power projection to prevent US strategic mobility, ensuring local superiority. See Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev, *If War Comes Tomorrow?: The Contours of Future Armed Conflict*, translated by Yakov Vladimirovich Fomenko and edited by Jacob W Kipp (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), p. 149.

126. Doris Wydra, ‘The Crimea Conundrum: The Tug of War Between Russia and Ukraine on the Questions of Autonomy and Self-Determination’, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* (Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003), pp. 111–30.

127. Mark Galeotti, ‘I’m Sorry for Creating the “Gerasimov Doctrine”’, *Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2018.

128. Valery Gerasimov, ‘Tsennost’ nauki v predvidenii’ [‘The Value of Science in Prediction’], *VPK* (Vol. 476, No. 8, 2013), <https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf>, accessed 8 April 2020.

129. Capabilities which – from strategic mobility and ballistic missile defence to wide wet gap crossing by armoured formations – are thoroughly trialled in military exercises. See Michael Kofman, ‘Assessing Vostok-2018’, *Russia Military Analysis*, 28 September 2018, <<https://russianmilitaryanalysis.wordpress.com/2018/09/28/assessing-vostok-2018/>>, accessed 9 April 2020.

adversaries from building up in proportion to Russian force commitments. Russian commanders then envisage up to 30 days of high-intensity conventional offensive operations to gain control over the relevant terrain. From there, Russian forces harden the theatre, threaten strategic escalation, and use the threshold between a limited and total war to force negotiation and compromise. If the layered standoff is able to slow adversary mobilisation, this choice should be stark and political, rather than one of military practicality.

Regarding operational methods, Russia has developed a highly offensive set of capabilities as part of its 2008 Defence Reforms. Although some elements of those reforms, such as the Armata vehicle family, have not yet been rolled out across the force, many of the enablers from electronic warfare, engineering and artillery systems have been manufactured and distributed.¹³⁰ Essentially, Russian doctrine comprises a deep operational layer of special reconnaissance forces, proxies and intelligence actors that both disrupt and identify adversaries. Electronic warfare assets then jam enemy communications to fix their units in place while raiding by reconnaissance forces ensures that adversary logistics become constrained. Once fixed, adversary formations are subjected to coordinated massed fires, followed by a high-tempo assault by heavily armoured formations, which seek to break through and seize key terrain rather than defeat adversaries in detail. Victory is not necessarily achieved by clearing ground, but by seizing the ground that matters and progressively reinforcing it so that it cannot be retaken. These operations, best characterised as positional warfare,¹³¹ are likely to occur over a limited geographical space. This has a constraining effect on adversary theatre entry because, assuming that both parties intend to remain below the threshold of total war, access to the specific operational theatre can be made exceptionally difficult without expanding the scope of the conflict.

In seeking to limit the duration of the conflict, the ultimate point of the policy is to convince opposing governments that the costs of reversing Russia's *fait accompli* operations are not worth the risks of further escalation. To this end, an enabler of these methods, shaping the ground, is continuous Russian operations in the information environment. However, for all the obsession with information operations in Western thinking, it must be stressed that for Russia, in a military context, these activities support the application of hard power. Russian military theorists consider information warfare to be the fourth domain of operations, and Russian doctrine divides activities in this domain into info-technical and info-psychological operations.¹³² The former targets systems for penetration, whether to gather intelligence, deny adversary communications or corrupt adversary networks. The latter are intended to shape adversary decision-making or the attitudes of populations. These categories are platform and vector agnostic. Cyber attacks against critical national infrastructure, physically shaping the battlefield, would constitute info-technical operations. Cyber attacks against an opposing political

130. For a succinct outline of where Russia envisaged its capability today – most of which it has now achieved – see Igor Sutyagin, RUSI Land Warfare Conference, Session Seven, July 2019, 21:54–48:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EcrrD1dBhg>, accessed 8 April 2020.

131. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, p. 18.

132. Keir Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*, Fellowship Monograph 9 (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), p. 4.

campaign to access compromising information and thereby shape an opponent's election would constitute an info-psychological operation. It is true that the unexpected disruptive effect of information operations against the US in 2016 has led to the wider conception of such activities as an alternative lever to hard power outside the military sphere.¹³³ This builds on longstanding Russian concepts of information warfare – akin to Western 'political warfare' – which is not strictly a military activity. But within the military sphere, these capabilities are subordinated to conventional operations.

Appreciation of the scale of Russian hard power capabilities is seriously hampered by a deluge of faulty analysis concerning the extent of Russian military expenditure. SIPRI, for example, puts Russian military expenditure in 2018 at \$61.4 billion dollars.¹³⁴ It is not uncommon to hear even high-ranking NATO officers suggest that Russia is an economically weak and politically fragile state in steady decline.¹³⁵ How a state supposedly spending a comparable sum on its military as the UK or France can sustain formations that are far larger than any other power in Europe – with more effective artillery and electronic warfare capabilities, competitive heavy armour, anti-tank and aviation platforms, which it continues to modernise, supported by an integrated air and missile defence system that is world leading – is rarely explained. Recent work by Richard Connolly, however, provides a convincing explanation. Most calculations of Russian expenditure are based on converting the public Russian budget into dollars based on market exchange rates. But unlike many NATO states that import equipment or raw materials, and therefore spend dollars, the Russian defence industry is partly state owned, has lower production costs, buys raw materials from other state-owned extractive industries and conducts all its business in rubles, with the money going back into the Russian economy. Thus, when Russian defence expenditure is compared in a manner that reflects purchasing power parity, Connolly calculates that in 2018 Russian military expenditure was in fact closer to \$159 billion.¹³⁶ Given this discrepancy in spending, the gap in capability between European powers and Russia becomes wholly comprehensible. This also throws into relief the extent to which Russia still invests in, and therefore depends upon, hard power.

When it comes to regime survival, the Russian government does not believe that any foreign state has the intention of seizing Moscow in any plausible scenario. It does, however, fear what it terms 'colour revolutions' – popular risings that Russian officials believe the West ferments to topple its adversaries, and which could be exacerbated on Russia's periphery by the use of Western military forces. These are listed as threats to the Russian state in the country's 2015

133. Julia Ioffe, 'What Putin Really Wants', *The Atlantic* (January/February 2018).

134. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 'Military Expenditure by Country', <<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20in%20constant%20%282018%29%20USD.pdf>>, accessed 28 May 2020.

135. James Dobbins, Howard J Shatz and Ali Wyne, 'Russia Is a Rogue, Not a Peer; China Is a Peer, Not a Rogue', Perspective, RAND Corporation, October 2018.

136. Richard Connolly, 'Russian Military Expenditure in Comparative Perspective: A Purchasing Power Parity Estimate', CNA, October 2019, p. 22.

National Security Strategy.¹³⁷ Because of the belief that a strong state is critical to ensuring Russian national sovereignty, and information operations put the core of the state at risk from its own public, information operations as conducted by the West are thought to constitute the most serious form of decapitation strategy,¹³⁸ and not a sub-threshold or non-escalatory form of competition.

Russian information warfare – as separate from military activity in the information domain – requires some consideration because it is practised continuously across all levels of Russian policy, and is both offensive and defensive. It shapes the ground for potential Russian deployments and distracts competitors by attacking their political cohesion. It is also waged against the Russian population to frame how Russian foreign policy is perceived, to discredit and suppress foreign narratives, and to manage Russia's domestic opposition. Thus, in operations abroad, as in Syria, there was a simultaneous effort to portray Russian actions as in the national interest by suppressing terrorism,¹³⁹ sow dissension in Western powers by amplifying voices alleging that Western policy drove towards a repeat of the 2003 invasion of Iraq,¹⁴⁰ and discredit local voices that could challenge the Russian narrative by portraying the White Helmets and others as terrorists.¹⁴¹ The same techniques – though at greater risk – were applied in Ukraine, where the Russian government portrayed the opposition forces in eastern Ukraine as local resistance against a fascist coup in Kiev.¹⁴² Those attempting to report on Russian casualties in the conflict have been threatened, assaulted and received death threats.¹⁴³

The threats are credible. While the Russian media is generally untroubled in being allowed to speculate about corruption or killings, there is a high rate of attrition among those who conduct detailed and specific investigations. As David Satter has written, 'the average person did not fear death at the hands of the authorities for political reasons. But selective killings made it clear that opposition in Russia was tolerated only within certain limits'.¹⁴⁴ Because anyone gathering the requisite evidence to tie the state to specific killings tends to end up dead, imprisoned or in permanent exile, unequivocal examples of state-sponsored murder are rare,

137. 'Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015, Full-Text Translation', 2015, <<http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

138. MCIS-2019, 'Speech by Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed Forces, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov', 25 April 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs1B3qtExz0>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

139. RT, 'Russia Will Support Syria's Fight Against Terrorism in Idlib Despite Trump's Calls to Stop It – Kremlin', 17 February 2020.

140. Sui-Lee Wee, 'Russia, China Oppose "Forced Regime Change" in Syria', *Reuters*, 1 February 2012.

141. Olivia Solon, 'How Syria's White Helmets Became Victims of an Online Propaganda Machine', *The Guardian*, 18 December 2017.

142. Sam Sokol, 'Russian Disinformation Distorted Reality in Ukraine. Americans Should Take Note', *Foreign Policy*, 2 August 2019.

143. *BBC News*, 'Russian Reporters "Attacked at Secret Soldier Burials"', 27 August 2014.

144. David Satter, *The Less You Know, The Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 75.

but the aggregate body count and pattern of threats makes the policy clear.¹⁴⁵ This policy has a deterrent effect against the Russian opposition. The Russian government exercises control over its domestic opposition, just as it attempts to control its neighbours, by straddling the precarious balance point between co-option and coercion. This leaves the Kremlin's political adversaries keen to retain the right to express their opinion, without straying over a poorly defined line that, if crossed, will selectively and unpredictably bring down a violent response. In this regard, Russian information warfare is not distinct from the application of kinetic force. Info-psychological and info-technical operations may include physically damaging or targeting information infrastructure, or the intimidation or assassination of messengers. However, there is a distinction between this personalised warfare and warfighting on land – the latter concerns the destruction of the opposing force or the capture of terrain and uses different tools.

Detering Hostile Activities

It cannot, and should not, be the policy of the UK or its allies to counter Russian activity in all places and at all times. Russia has interests that converge with the UK's, and has commitments to some allies that are of purely bilateral concern. Moreover, in some instances it may be advantageous to step aside for Russia to become embroiled in the world's many available quagmires. Russia may have an expeditionary capability, but is very constrained in its capacity to operate at reach. Nevertheless, the survey of how Russia operates, globally and regionally, provides an outline of the dependencies enabling its policy and the means by which such operations can be disrupted. More importantly, in setting out the phases of Russian policy, it now becomes possible to consider the windows of opportunity within which deterrence activity can be effectively undertaken. This section, therefore, aims to break down when and how Russian operations can be deterred globally, regionally and specifically in operations of *fait accompli*.

In its global interventions, three critical turning points may be identified: the creation of an opportunity; the creation of a bridgehead; and taking a side. The most effective way to deter Russia from entering a theatre therefore begins by denying it an opportunity. This is first and foremost a political and diplomatic effort. British diplomats need to be able to convince partners why a Russian presence would be undesirable. Because a primary reason for countries turning to Russia is a need for equipment that they have the capacity to maintain, or to diversify their supporters against a perceived threat, this generates commitments for UK Defence. The UK's capacity to offer capabilities or concrete support is an important factor in reducing Russian opportunities. Russia's failure to penetrate the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, is largely because the region is heavily dependent on US, UK and French high-end capabilities, and because these countries have made clear defence commitments. When the supply of such capabilities has been withheld – as in the case of UAVs to the United Arab Emirates – countries have quickly sought capabilities from competitors. In that instance, China was the preferred

145. Filipov, 'Here Are 10 Critics of Vladimir Putin Who Died Violently or in Suspicious Ways'; Buckley, 'Boris Berezovsky'.

partner.¹⁴⁶ Having a credible, deployable ability to meet commitments to partners, and the trust this engenders, can deny Russian opportunities. Conversely, offering a force that lacks credibility can do serious damage. There is a risk that partners will court Russia to extort the UK and other NATO members to provide additional capabilities or commitments.¹⁴⁷ In such instances, however, the country is less likely to follow through on threats to make orders from Moscow, as Saudi Arabia's dalliances over the S400 have so far shown.¹⁴⁸ Whether it is appropriate to extend military assistance is a matter for diplomats on the ground to advise, but the capacity to deliver military assistance matters.

There are many areas where UK partners lack complete control of the operating environment, or where the UK does not have the strength of relationships to prevent Russia from developing opportunities to enter the environment. Should the UK fail to deny Russia a political opportunity to enter the theatre, it may have the ability to deny routes of theatre entry. This should not be an automatic escalation of policy. But where the UK has clear interests, the ability to pre-empt an attempt to enter the theatre provides a key window of opportunity for establishing deterrence. Russian expeditionary concepts are premised upon unopposed theatre entry. The model – if we consider the doctrine for Russian Naval Infantry as an example – is for a self-contained expeditionary contingent to establish a beachhead at an airfield or port, to emplace sea and air denial capabilities to protect the logistics hub, and then to airlift or sealift relevant capabilities to achieve the given mission.¹⁴⁹ Unlike operations along its borders, Russia is severely constrained in the size of force it can project and sustain in this manner, amounting to little more than a brigade.¹⁵⁰ In an environment where the UK is already operating, one way to forestall such an eventuality is to occupy the relevant port or airfield. One consistent element of Russia's expeditionary operations is that because they are aimed at achieving limited objectives, and given Russia's limited expeditionary capacity, combined with a doctrine that demands an unopposed entry to theatre, Russian forces have not sought to dislodge the positions of other great powers. In Syria, for instance, great powers have largely avoided one another's controlled airspace surrounding bases, and have receded, but rarely tested, the perimeters of other great powers. Denial by deployment therefore appears to deter attempts to enter theatre via the occupied area. Of course, to do this credibly, the force must have capabilities such as anti-air

146. Sharon Weinberger, 'China Has Already Won the Drone Wars', *Foreign Policy*, 10 May 2018; Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Justin Bronk, 'Armed Drones in the Middle East: Proliferation and Norms in the Region', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (December 2018).

147. This is not a new challenge. See John C Campbell, 'The Soviet Union and the United States in the Middle East', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 401, No. 1, May 1972), pp. 126–35.

148. *Al Arabiya*, 'Saudi Ambassador to Moscow: S-400 Missile Deal with Saudi Arabia in Final Stages', 20 February 2018.

149. Alexandr Khranchikhin, 'Rossiyskaya morskaya pekhota segodnya' ['Russian Marines Today'], *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* [*Independent Military Review*], 6 December 2019.

150. Ben Connable et al., *Russia's Limit of Advance: Analysis of Russian Ground Force Deployment Capabilities and Limitations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020).

and anti-ship systems to threaten Russia's theatre entry, generating a readiness, deployability and capability requirement to adopt this measure.

Deploying to deny must be appreciated in the appropriate context. Seen in isolation, this would imply the hostile seizure of territory in a move purely intended to deter Russia; a policy prescription that would be both disproportionate and potentially illegal. In real-world examples, however, it is easier to see how such instances come about. For example, during the war in Kosovo, NATO and Russia ended up in a race to Pristina airport, with the Russians at a severe disadvantage – despite arriving first – because of NATO control of the airspace, precluding reinforcement.¹⁵¹ It is plausible that similar circumstances could have arisen had the UK and the US intervened more extensively in Syria.¹⁵² Although denial of Russian basing in Syria would not have been possible since Russia already had bases prior to the conflict, the Russian deployment to a base in Libya shows that the Kremlin does not confine such operations to areas of historic control.¹⁵³ In Libya, the UK lacked the interest to intervene. However, as the world enters an era of great power competition, it is entirely plausible that Russia would deploy to an area where the UK was conducting operations to prop up opposing forces. If this occurred in an area of significant UK interests, then the UK may need to move fast and hard to deny access. The relevance of the policy option in the future operating environment is therefore clear.

In many theatres, it will not be possible to occupy potential routes of Russian entry, owing to the political or military environment. Furthermore, there are plenty of conflicts where denial by occupation would be militarily undesirable for the UK, and in plenty of cases the occupation of a single port would displace Russian theatre entry, but not prevent it. Libya, for example, has a large number of potential ports along its coast. Once Russian forces establish a beachhead, however, their capacity to further exploit theatre entry can be curtailed by adopting a posture of deterrence by punishment. This can take the form of a range of measures. At the lower end, there is interference in the electromagnetic spectrum, disruption of communications and other shows of force. Such activities do not have a directly punishing effect, but they message intent. To become a deterrent, they must be paired with the communication of a willingness to escalate, if adversary actions go beyond certain lines. Should the adversary press ahead, then punishment ranges from the sponsoring of harassment activities – such as rocket or UAV strikes, ambushes and anti-air interdiction – to the deliberate application of military capabilities against a portion of the opposing force. These actions may seem inherently escalatory. Indeed, the prospect of actually harming Russians and the perceived escalatory consequences have had a genuine deterrent effect on Western planners in the past.¹⁵⁴ However, a distinction must be drawn between the use of military force against Russians and strikes against forces contravening communicated red lines. Whereas the former is clearly escalatory, the latter has consistently

151. *BBC News*, 'Confrontation over Pristina Airport', 9 March 2000.

152. *BBC News*, 'Syria Crisis: Cameron Loses Commons Vote on Syria Action', 30 August 2013.

153. US Department of Defense, 'Russia Deploys Military Fighter Aircraft to Libya, Africom Officials Say', 26 May 2020.

154. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 128.

proven not to be. The Soviet Union and the US avoided revealing direct confrontation, even as their pilots flew against one another in Korea¹⁵⁵ and Russian air defenders knocked out US aircraft in Vietnam.¹⁵⁶ Today, we observe Russia and Turkey, and Russia and Israel, playing down suggestions that Russian advisers may have been killed in drone strikes against SA-22s.¹⁵⁷ Russia has persistently probed adversary red lines, but has withdrawn – rather than escalated – when it has suffered casualties, even in significant numbers.¹⁵⁸ In short, the infliction of ‘doses of pain’ to enforce red lines has proven to provide an effective deterrent by punishment. The limited application of force has had a constraining effect on Russian operations.

A further form of punishment is the use of information operations to highlight the vulnerability of Russian equipment, the incompetence of its troops and the casualties it takes in its interventions. There is a widespread – yet incorrect – perception that Russia is not sensitive to casualties.¹⁵⁹ While Russian civil society may accept that casualties are an inevitable consequence of war, there is sensitivity to the idea that casualties are the consequence of incompetence, or are being taken pointlessly. Highlighting substandard equipment, the scale of casualties, and the dishonesty or total denial by the Russian state in its messaging about the war has an effect.¹⁶⁰ Again, by indicating that the crossing of certain thresholds or lines on the ground will lead to an uptick in information operations showcasing these shortcomings, it becomes possible to have a less kinetic form of deterrence by punishment. By forcing the Russian government to acknowledge its presence and related casualties, such methods force the state to define its objectives domestically and justify the purpose of its actions. This, in itself, constrains policy. Thus, though not a replacement for kinetic activity, such measures can contribute to deterring Russia from certain courses of action.

When it comes to deterring Russian regional operations, it must once again be emphasised that the UK’s lack of significant interests in some countries impedes its ability to establish a sufficient presence to compete. Because of this, confrontation in these areas should be avoided. However, in those territories where there are UK interests at stake, the first deterrent steps are diplomatic. Russia attempts to bind regional partners into multilateral structures that facilitate economic, defence and diplomatic ties. The UK should not attempt to prevent the formation of these entities. However, where they overlap with other states’ interests, it makes sense to ensure that those parties are members of, or at least have observer status at, any multilateral forums that develop. Military deterrence activity does not come into play until the

155. Steven J Zaloga, ‘The Russians in MiG Alley’, *Air Force Magazine*, 1 February 1991.

156. Francis X Clines, ‘Russians Acknowledge a Combat Role in Vietnam’, *New York Times*, 14 April 1989.

157. Sebastien Roblin, ‘Why Syria Hates Israel’s Hard-To-Stop “Suicide” Drones’, *National Interest*, 9 March 2020.

158. Thomas Gibbons-Neff, ‘How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria’, *New York Times*, 24 May 2018.

159. The shadow of Russia’s invasion of Afghanistan is long. See Serguei Alex Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 202–58.

160. As evidenced by the extent to which Russia tries to suppress information about military casualties. See *BBC News*, ‘Russian Reporters “Attacked at Secret Soldier Burials”’.

second stage, as Russia shifts to develop dependency in its region. The first task is to develop training and advisory missions, joint exercises and other bilateral military partnerships. These help to reduce a state's military dependency on a single party, but also have a wide range of additional advantages. Capacity building in areas of UK expertise, such as cyber security, enables the observation and logging of Russian malicious cyber activity, which tends to be practised at scale against states around its periphery.¹⁶¹ This information can be exploited in two ways. First, exposing the scale of Russia's malicious activity to the state reduces the trust of that state's authorities in Russian promises of friendship and cooperation, thereby reducing leverage. Second, understanding where the state's officials become vulnerable to blackmail, and being able to either plan mitigations with them, or reduce Russian leverage by highlighting that the information is available more widely, constrains Russia's coercive control over the state in question. Having a forward military presence also enables the use of military ISR assets to map the activity of Russian foreign intelligence (SVR), military intelligence (GRU) and other special reconnaissance (Spetsnaz) activity. This can be exploited either to reduce the state's trust in Russian outreach by reporting it, disrupting the activity, either with the partner or unilaterally, or developing target packages to be able to rapidly close down Russian units in the event of escalation. Furthermore, because Russian escalation in these states is preceded by activities aimed at preparing the operating environment, observing these activities creates an early warning system, enabling UK policymakers to react faster to a transition by Russia to coercive measures. If partnered activity has denied Russia sufficient access to coerce, then it will have succeeded in deterring Russian power projection. If it has not, then the UK will need to consider further military capabilities.

Suppressing the violent uprising in Donbas was not beyond the capabilities of the Ukrainian military. However, Ukraine's military was not able to defeat militia in defensive positions, supplied with sophisticated weaponry, when every time the Ukrainians concentrated to conduct offensive operations, they were engaged from across the Russian border by heavy artillery.¹⁶² Nor could Ukrainian units operate freely when Russian forces infiltrated their lines and conducted widespread sabotage against their civilian and military infrastructure. The final critical impediment to Ukraine asserting its sovereignty was widespread denial of its military communications and command and control (C2) systems. Enabling a regional state to expel an undeclared incursion therefore requires three primary areas of support: signals and C2; rear area security; and counter-battery fires. The unwillingness of Ukrainian forces to fire at artillery engaging them from Russian soil was primarily because Russia could have used this as *casus belli* to become directly and openly involved in the conflict, and thereby rapidly overmatch Ukrainian forces.

This dilemma could be applied by Russia elsewhere. If, by contrast, a third state conducts the counter-battery fire, on the basis that Russia appears unable or unwilling to prevent the use

161. John Carlin, *Dawn of the Code War: America's Battle Against Russia, China and the Rising Global Cyber Threat* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2018).

162. Bellingcat, 'Bellingcat Report – Origin of Artillery Attacks on Ukrainian Military Positions in Eastern Ukraine Between 14 July 2014 and 8 August 2014', 17 February 2015.

of its territory by heavily armed undeclared violent actors, then the balance of considerations is somewhat different. Rather than achieving rapid overmatch, were Russia willing to escalate, it would spark a much wider conflict. The critical component of making such a policy non-escalatory would be to establish clear parameters within which artillery would conduct strikes. The most obvious criteria would be that strikes would be conducted against targets that were striking the regional state's soil, or against emitters that were actively locking on to targets in the regional state's airspace. This could be maintained as long as Russia refused to acknowledge that the firing pieces were Russian military assets. If Russia did acknowledge this, they would also have publicly declared an act of armed aggression against the regional state. It is a legitimate concern that such measures could be escalatory. It is worth noting, however, that there are a number of conflicts that have seen artillery parity established as a means of stabilising a conflict. The uneasy standoff between Israel and Hizbullah is one example.¹⁶³ The demilitarised zone between North and South Korea is another, though in this instance the US presence enables South Korea to respond to artillery strikes without American artillery being directly involved.¹⁶⁴ These situations are far from ideal. However, the rate of persistent fighting in these conflicts is far lower than in Ukraine, where violations of the Minsk agreements are occurring weekly, and at times daily, with a steady rate of attrition for Ukraine's forces.¹⁶⁵ By dampening exchanges across the border through deterrence by punishment, this would allow the regional state to stabilise its own territory by conventional military means.

The risk of escalation can be exaggerated, but it is nevertheless real. Russia may proactively engage in a fait accompli operation as occurred in Crimea. In considering the timing and actions for deterring such activity, it is first important to note that, for the Russian military, these operations constitute the concentrated application of hard power to decisively seize a limited objective. Despite the emphasis placed on constant competition,¹⁶⁶ Russia still conceives of the application of the military in terms of a campaign, with a clear objective and a strategy for conflict termination. Furthermore, Russian operational doctrine has evolved significantly from its war with Georgia. There is still a heavy emphasis on large numbers of tube and rocket artillery. However, when the Russians developed the reconnaissance strike concept in the 1980s, – a system of fighting that systematically identifies and destroys adversary formations with artillery – they lacked the sensors and communications to fully implement it.¹⁶⁷ Today, by contrast,

163. Jean-Loup Samaan, *From War to Deterrence? Israel–Hezbollah Conflict Since 2006* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2014).

164. Adam Mount, 'Conventional Deterrence of North Korea', Federation of American Scientists, 2019.

165. Incident reports prepared by the Ukrainian General Staff received by author from October 2018 to present.

166. US Department of Defense, 'Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America', <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>, accessed 22 June 2020.

167. Mary C FitzGerald, 'Marshal Ogarkov on the Modern Theater Operation', *Conflict Quarterly* (Vol. 6, No. 3, Summer 1986), pp. 1–54.

Russia's military has extensive electronic warfare equipment, UAVs, aviation assets,¹⁶⁸ a vastly expanded force of recce troops and a much more sophisticated C2 infrastructure, including the ability to disperse its batteries.¹⁶⁹ We can therefore be confident that Russia can find its targets and bring heavy firepower to bear, either destroying enemy formations or suppressing their movement, enabling Russian manoeuvre elements to strike hard against selected enemy positions that will struggle to mutually support one another without being exposed to heavy fire. Moreover, these are operations conducted at army group scale.

Facing such a force is a daunting prospect. However, precisely because warfighting is not a constant activity, there are critical points for the application of deterrence. In the first instance, the capacity to deploy and respond quickly should see off the attempt. For this to be a credible deterrence posture, however, forces must be prepared to conduct two kinds of operation: preventing Russia from achieving its objectives within an acceptable timeframe and punishing Russia by counterattack once a sufficient buildup has been achieved. Most importantly, a demonstrable capacity and willingness to do both removes the policy option from the Russian playbook. One without the other is ineffective, because the ability to slow Russian operations without the capacity to respond simply allows Russia to achieve its objectives slower than anticipated. At the same time, the ability to counterattack after a long delay from the completion of Russian combat operations enables the hardening of the theatre – increasing the difficulty of a counterattack – and the use of political mechanisms for conflict termination to create a post-conflict framework favourable to Russia. The clear choice between de-escalation and the cost of the counterattack would, under these circumstances, likely create political divisions among a coalition responding to the incursion, whereas a counterattack against an ongoing offensive is fundamentally different.

Delaying the Russian *fait accompli* can be achieved in a number of ways. One of the most critical is the targeting of Russian logistics and enablers, which – given the dependence on fires in Russian doctrine – must slow the rate of advance and reduce the available firepower to dislodge defensive strongpoints. Russian forces have historically pressed ahead despite significant losses, partly reflecting the tendency to deny their own communications and a reliance on time-synchronised fire plans, which leads to a need to achieve objectives within fixed timeframes. However, this approach means that Russian manoeuvre elements are liable to remain in contact through their depth; a challenge that Russian theorists describe as the 'fragmented battlefield'.¹⁷⁰ Thus, as long as bypassed forces have supplies of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), or communications to call for effects, and fires platforms remain available, a Russian advance must increasingly expose air defence, engineering and fires systems that can be targeted, further depleting combat power. Extending the duration of fighting must necessarily

168. Lester W Grau and Charles K Bartles, 'Russian Aviation in Support of the Maneuver Defense', Foreign Military Studies Office, 2018.

169. Lester Grau and Charles Bartles, 'Russian Artillery Fire Control for Large-Scale Combat Operations', *Fires Bulletin*, No. 3 (2019), pp. 7–14.

170. Lester Grau, 'Restructuring the Tactical Russian Army for Unconventional Warfare', *Red Diamond* (Vol. 5, No. 2, February 2014), p. 7.

force the resupply of Russian fires, and while Russian manoeuvre elements are heavily protected, logistics lines are not.¹⁷¹ The threat posed by long-range strikes is something that Russia consistently invests heavily in trying to counter, and so demonstrating capabilities that can prosecute long-range strike operations must affect the viability of fait accompli attempts as determined by Russian operational-tactical calculations.¹⁷²

Given that Russia would choose the time and place of an attempted fait accompli – the Arctic, Balkans and Baltics are all plausible areas for such operations – it may be presumed that it will have brought a sufficiently sized force to overpower pre-positioned defensive units. The defensive units should, therefore, fall back to defend points at which they can maximise the force ratio and resource expenditure required to dislodge them. This is for two reasons: first, to inflict casualties; second, to force the enemy to concentrate and bring forward operationally significant equipment such as bridging equipment. The concentration of units must reduce the number of axes on which adversary logistics can move, and thereby present a more favourable target for long-range fires. River crossings would be one vital area to defend. The second would be urban terrain. There is a justified fear of urban operations among NATO forces.¹⁷³ However, the Russians find urban warfare no easier,¹⁷⁴ and as a result of their experiences in Chechnya, Russian doctrine expects a 6:1 force ratio in successfully assaulting an urban area.¹⁷⁵ As long as the force is covered by fires, urban terrain presents disproportionately defensible ground, which buys time. In Donbas, Russian forces, operating alongside locally raised militia, took months to dislodge Ukrainian units from urban features, not least Donetsk airport.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the difficulty encountered in taking the airport led to the resurrection of assault pioneer units in Russian formations.¹⁷⁷ An early priority – before the start of direct combat operations – should therefore be the deployment of light infantry with a high density of ATGMs and man-portable air defence systems to invest urban terrain. Their resupply would be critical to extending how long they could hold out. Although reversionary methods would be required, the initial provision of supplies by air would encourage Russia to activate its SAMs. Once fired from Russian soil, this

171. It is also worth noting that Russian logistics can be exceedingly vulnerable to long-range precision fires. See *Telekanal*, 'Iz-za rukhnuvshego mosta chast' gruzov iz Murmansk uydut v porty Pribaltiki' ['Because of a Collapsed Bridge Cargo Bound for Murmansk Will be Shipped via Baltic Ports'], 9 June 2020.

172. Clint Reach, Vikram Kilambi and Mark Cozad, *Russian Assessments and Applications of the Correlation of Forces and Means* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), p. 136.

173. This is justified, but in opposing fait accompli, it may give NATO forces crucial advantages. See John Spencer, 'The City Is Not Neutral: Why Urban Warfare Is So Hard', Modern War Institute, 4 March 2020.

174. Olger Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars, 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001).

175. Lester Grau, 'Russian Urban Tactics: Lessons from the Battle for Grozny', *INSS Strategic Forum* (Vol. 38, 2001), p. 3.

176. Amos C Fox, "'Cyborgs at Little Stalingrad': A Brief History of the Battles of Donetsk Airport', Land Warfare Paper No. 125, Institute of Land Warfare, May 2019.

177. Igor Sutyagin, RUSI Land Warfare Conference, Session Seven, July 2019, 21:54–48:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EcrrD1dBhg>, accessed 8 April 2020.

would require the commencement of a suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) campaign, by both artillery and air assets, so that the airspace could be accessed by the time offensive operations commenced.

The demonstrable ability to conduct a SEAD campaign is fundamental to deterring *fait accompli*. Russia recognises that NATO has an appreciable advantage in the air, and has pursued an asymmetric strategy in denying access, rather than prioritising competing with aircraft of its own. Russian anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities are aimed specifically at holding NATO ground forces at a disadvantage, with support from the air, and lines of supply, under threat. This is why US Multi-Domain Operations, premised on penetrating A2/AD bubbles and then disintegrating enemy formations, is central to deterrence.¹⁷⁸ The speed at which the A2/AD bubble can be penetrated, and thus the speed at which NATO can bring its full range of effects to bear, constrains the available time and calculated viability of attempted *fait accompli*. The contribution to the SEAD effort by land forces is therefore critical, whether through the location and tracking of Russian radar, C2 and SAM systems, or through their destruction.

By demonstrably complicating and extending the timeframe for operations, while increasing the degree of uncertainty, the framework outlined above would offer a credible deterrent to Russian military operations. It is worth highlighting a few capabilities that do not offer a deterrent effect in isolation, namely offensive cyber and information operations, though they are critical in supporting deterrent activity. Offensive cyber capabilities could play a role in disrupting adversary logistics and C2, thereby slowing down the operational tempo of a force. However, the effects of offensive cyber operations are unpredictable for both the user and the target.¹⁷⁹ Success depends on access to networks, but embedded malware can be disrupted by patching, and the availability of a connection to activate malware in air-gapped systems is hard to assure. While potentially reliable against civil infrastructure such as railways, the ability to access military systems after mobilisation in order to activate an attack cannot be guaranteed, and cannot be synchronised with a fires plan.¹⁸⁰

Perhaps most importantly, while some capabilities may be employable at any given time, they cannot be messaged beforehand without undermining the capability. Consequently, any effective cyber penetration stands as an unknown unknown, which by definition cannot deter. At a strategic level, cyber vulnerability can deter against escalation because of the damage achievable against a state's infrastructure, but such a widespread attack would not be decisive, and would expand the scope of a localised conflict. The deterrent value against a specific contingency is therefore dubious. Information operations suffer from a different problem. In competition, information operations can play a crucial role in amplifying the deterrent effect of activity or dampening escalation. In conflict, involving urban warfare information operations

178. Jack Watling and Daniel Roper, 'European Allies in US Multi-Domain Operations', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (October 2019).

179. Nina Kollars, speech at the 2020 DC Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge, 20 March 2020.

180. Jack Watling, 'Spare Me Your Cyber-Age Technobabble', *RUSI Defence Systems* (5 June 2020).

can be vital in retaining the support of urban populations, and can supplement targeting.¹⁸¹ As a standalone deterrent, however, the threat of use – and therefore the threat of generating unrest and undermining the legitimacy of a regime – can only really be aimed at an adversary government. However, if it is viewed as being credible, then the threat is not about reversing an attempt at territorial annexation, or a specific infringement, but instead about regime survival, triggering a heightened risk of unpredictable and strategic escalation. Indeed, the true value of information operations may be in bolstering the resolve and coherence of friendly forces and populations in the area of operations. Economic deterrence is also dubious in Russia's case, given that the country is largely self-sufficient in raw materials, has an important economic outlet via China and has structured its industries to bring them firmly under state control.

181. Nick Reynolds, 'Performing Information Manoeuvre Through Persistent Engagement', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (June 2020).

III. Implications for UK Land Forces

HAVING EXPLORED RUSSIAN policy, its dependencies and the points at which military capabilities can be applied to deter, the structure of military forces required to perform the respective deterrence tasks must be considered. The aspects of Russian policy that the UK may wish to deter can be divided into two categories of operations: deterrence in competition and deterring conflict. This chapter is split into three sections. The first examines the land forces' contribution to deterrence against Russia in competition. The second considers the UK's contribution to NATO's efforts in deterring conflict at scale. The third examines whether the UK has the requisite structure of policies and permissions to effectively practice deterrence. Some of the activity outlined is unilateral UK activity, and some – especially deterring conflict – is in cooperation with partners. In considering the UK's contribution to NATO, the chapter will begin by elaborating on the task as a whole, before highlighting which components the UK might realistically and helpfully undertake.¹⁸²

Deterrence Against Russia in Competition

The foremost military asset in deterring Russian attempts to threaten UK interests around the world is the UK's network of defence attachés, liaison and loan service officers, working in collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, intelligence services and UK defence industry.¹⁸³ Defence attachés, able to maintain a close watch on diplomatic, political and military activity in country, provide situational awareness, both in flagging that Russia may be seeking an opportunity and in tracking why a partner government may court Russian support. The defence attaché would also be able to assess what a partner wants and needs, and how to navigate differences between the two. The liaison and loan service officer network, in those countries where they exist, not only extend the UK's situational awareness, but offer in themselves a deterrent by denial in attempts by Russia to expand their influence and access.¹⁸⁴ Of course, in many states, it would not be appropriate for liaison or loan service officers to support a government. In others, liaison may be with actors in a state already facing internal divisions. In

182. Some of the tasks would depend heavily on interdepartmental or joint activity. However, as this paper concerns land forces, details of the contributions by other departments or services are not developed.

183. Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy', 2017.

184. Russian outreach to Iraq, for instance, had to go through a separate intelligence cell, which could be cut out because of the liaison network from OIR, and the more valuable support from the US, UK and coalition. See Babak Dehghanpisheh, 'Iraq Using Info from New Intelligence Center to Bomb Islamic State: Official', *Reuters*, 13 October 2015.

areas of regional competition, such as the Balkans, there is a sizeable part of the local population that has a strong and positive view of the Russian government, limiting access.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the development of liaison functions is valuable both in improving UK situational awareness and justifying UK observer status in multilateral regional forums, providing, along with other partners such as the EU, a counterweight to Russian influence.

There is a danger that defence attachés will be incentivised to call for activity in their country not because of a clear need, but because they feel that they must ‘do something’ or exaggerate the significance of what they are seeing locally. Addressing this issue requires the ability to put local information into a regional context.¹⁸⁶ As described in the context of the Rubicon model, deterrence works best before an opponent commits to a line of policy, and since Russian expeditionary operations are largely premised on building opportunities and exploiting them to enter theatre unopposed, the aim for deterrence in competition is to avoid surprise, and thereby move to close down Russian opportunities that may threaten UK interests before they can be exploited. In competition, this activity would need to be closely integrated with wider government policy. Under Fusion Doctrine, this would best be enacted by a senior responsible officer, appointed to implement the UK’s regional strategy.¹⁸⁷ However, there is also a need for regional coordination on a defence-specific basis. While the FCO has country and regional strategies, the operational level is underdeveloped because it does not handle the deployment of scalable assets. There is, therefore, value in an analytical structure within Defence; one which is able to conduct regional analysis, debrief those entering and exiting theatre, monitor the trends in Russian activity and develop indicators to establish when deterrence activity should be undertaken. We may, therefore, envisage the commitment of something akin to regional military intelligence battalions, with a company focused on primary threat actors, and other platoons divided across regional states. By bringing reach-back analysis, debriefing of operators from across the region and deployments within a single unit, this would enable the development of a cadre of intelligence practitioners with deep regional expertise, corporate memory, requisite language skills, and a community able to effectively share and debate information as it arose.

Deterrence activity against Russia in competition would need to develop along two strands: denial and punishment. Where partners sought Russian support owing to their own security concerns, the UK should examine the provision of training. The need for counterterrorism units during the ‘Global War on Terror’ has arguably skewed partner force capacity building towards light infantry training. However, training an insignificant number of partnered infantry units is

185. Vsevolod Samokhvalov, ‘Russia in the Balkans: Great Power Politics and Local Response’, *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 21, No. 2, Spring 2019), pp. 189–210.

186. Wider context can enable analysts to better contextualise collection and its limitations. See James Bruce, ‘The Missing Link: The Analyst-Collector Relationship’, in Roger Z George and James B Bruce (eds), *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), pp. 191–210.

187. Abigail Watson and Meghan Karlshøj-Pedersen, ‘Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons Learned from Remote Warfare in Africa’, Remote Warfare Programme, Oxford Research Group, November 2019.

unlikely to alleviate the kinds of concerns that have drawn states to seek Russian assistance.¹⁸⁸ Instead, training should focus on specialisms such as signals, cyber threat intelligence, logistics, maintenance, payroll, air defence, fires and engineering. Where possible, training should be turned into liaison functions. In a global context, these functions close down partner anxieties that present Russia with opportunities. In Russia's regional periphery, such deployments have several additional advantages. Improving a state's signals capability reduces Russia's capacity to coerce that state's military through electronic warfare. Strengthening its logistics, maintenance and air defence increases the resource commitment Russia would need to undertake to sabotage and disrupt the state's military if attempting to escalate to covert or proxy action on the state's soil.

The second means by which training and engagement activities establish denial in competition is in forestalling Russian coercive measures. UK cyber trainers, for example, could observe and track Russia's breaches in the country. This would comprise monitoring and – where possible – the disruption of GRU and SVR activity by revealing its agents, exposing nefarious activities to local law enforcement, and understanding what compromising material or other points of leverage may have been developed through cyber attacks and other intelligence techniques. By sharing such information with local officials where appropriate, the UK can simultaneously highlight Russia's malicious conduct to the partner government and bolster trust in the UK.¹⁸⁹ Monitoring would not be an entirely military effort, but the deployment of special forces would play an important part in finding GRU and SVR agents. It would also require a cross-government effort, with business and development agencies working to both decrease dependence on Russia and improve transparency and corporate governance to reduce levels of corruption and thereby deny leverage to Russia. The EU could be a valuable partner in pursuing this activity.

While small liaison teams would comprise the majority of defence activity, the UK must retain the capacity to deploy a larger force package if it is to be seen as a credible partner or have a meaningful deterrent effect on Russia. The credibility of small teams is immeasurably bolstered if it is understood that they can facilitate access to larger units, rather than being the sum of the UK's offer. In this sense, small teams function as tripwires, comparable to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups,¹⁹⁰ alongside their liaison functions. The UK has previously undermined its position in states by responding to requests for support with very small offerings. In states experiencing internal division, the UK has a strong interest in establishing a presence at logistical hubs with the permission and support of partnered forces. While Russia has decisively intervened to shift the balance in conflicts beyond its region, this has depended on unopposed

188. Jack Watling and Namir Shabibi, 'Defining Remote Warfare: British Training and Assistance Programmes in Yemen, 2004–2015', Briefing No. 4, Remote Warfare Programme, Oxford Research Group, June 2018.

189. Although constrained by the protection of sources, intelligence liaison can have long-term advantages. See William R Johnson, *Thwarting Enemies at Home and Abroad* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), pp. 165–74.

190. NATO, 'NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence', factsheet, October 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/october_factsheet_efp.pdf>, accessed 5 June 2020.

access, and even where Russia has disproportionate interests at stake – such as in Syria – it has generally not sought to dislodge other powers.

Presence for the purpose of denial may be small, but it must be backed by the potential for punishment if it is to constrain Russian activity. As has played out repeatedly across Syria, Russia uses non-badged forces to test what it can get away with, violating deconfliction lines.¹⁹¹ If the UK cannot deny theatre entry, then it should deploy assets able to defend its forces from unconventional attacks, such as UAV strikes, and conduct strike operations utilising fires and mobile reconnaissance. The geographic and political boundaries of UK interests can then be articulated and enforced, with the assets available to punish incursions against those interests. At maximum effort, the size of a competitive and globally deployable force would likely amount to a brigade with an emphasis on mobility, ISTAR and strike assets. This would be comparable to what Russia can project internationally, and so act as a counterweight. A brigade-sized task force would thus be able to compete while being strong enough to deter escalation to direct fighting.

Deployments in Russia's regional periphery bring different considerations to bear. If Russia were to actively escalate from seeking leverage to coercion over a regional neighbour where the UK had critical interests, it is unlikely that the level of disruption Russia could generate would, in itself, threaten the state. In the Baltics, any Russian-sponsored uprising could be put down by local forces, supported by NATO through Article 4.¹⁹² In Donbas, the Ukrainian military could have defeated the separatists if those forces had not been operating under the protection of Russian artillery. Nevertheless, the UK could offer to support the partner government through 6th (UK) Division, strengthening C2 resilience, countering Russian disinformation and providing ISR support. Special forces – working with the host government – could also begin to roll up and conduct direct action against Russian special reconnaissance elements. These actions would serve two roles in deterrence. First, the consequences of firing on a multinational force including NATO members are much greater than doing so against a lone state. This would, therefore, deter the application of fires over fears of escalation; inverting the dilemma that Russia poses with its advisers attached to exported air defence systems. Second, by improving situational awareness and resilience, such operations increase the difficulty for Russia in overcoming the partner and make the policy less attractive. The addition of long-range precision-strike capabilities coupled with ISR could add a further constraint on Russia, because in enabling counter-battery fire against undeclared guns, such a capability would reduce the ambiguity that Russia has historically used to employ its artillery, aircraft and high-end systems without overtly committing to a declared war. Again, such a posture would likely require the deployment of a brigade-sized formation from the UK. There is, however, a risk that Russia would switch to a policy of *fait accompli*. This level of competition would only be sustainable assuming that NATO had a credible deterrence posture.

191. There have been multiple skirmishes beyond the Wagner incident. See Chad Garland, 'US and Russian Forces Have Clashed Repeatedly in Syria, US Envoy Says', *Stars and Stripes*, 23 November 2018.

192. NATO, 'The Consultation Process and Article 4', last updated 28 February 2020, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49187.htm>, accessed 5 June 2020.

Deterring Fait Accompli

Deterring fait accompli is achieved by demonstrating that it will not have the desired political effect, or that it will not succeed. This requires the ability to respond with hard power. NATO faces a serious challenge in making a fait accompli unworkable because of the number of geographic areas in which one could take place. In the first instance, Russia could engage in a fait accompli seizing a small and remote piece of NATO territory such as on Svalbard, or a kilometre of the Baltic states, comparable to what has been done by China to India in the Ladakh region.¹⁹³ In Russia's case, the point of such a policy could be to generate a political crisis in NATO by seizing land which is disproportionately difficult to recapture, or simply requiring massive escalation by NATO to retake, and thereby call Article 5 into question. At the same time, a fait accompli could equally be aimed at the full annexation of territory, and consequently involve a full-scale military effort. This presents NATO with a challenge because the simplest way to deter a fait accompli would be to maintain sufficient forward-deployed forces to render such an attack militarily difficult. Because an attacker needs a substantial numerical advantage over a defender, this could be done without deploying a force that appeared to threaten offensive action. The problem is that a fait accompli could be attempted anywhere along a border which spans over 2,000 km. Holding forces forward deployed along the length of that border would require too many troops and constitute a large enough force to appear to threaten offensive action and escalate tensions.

Accepting that forces cannot be pre-positioned in place means that even if a large NATO force were stationed in Poland, they could find themselves 700 km from the point of incursion, and that would require traversing terrain flanked on both sides by Russian territory. This means that NATO cannot realistically demonstrate parity in place. NATO therefore needs three kinds of formation:

- Rapid reaction forces, able to deploy while Russia mobilised its heavier formations, with the objective of slowing down an attempted incursion for long enough to prevent Russia seizing its objectives before heavier forces arrived.
- Heavy manoeuvre forces, able to counterattack to retake lost territory.
- Support forces, able to provide the requisite C2, ISTAR, logistical and mobility enablers to coordinate the multinational force, and long-range fires and air defences to support the SEAD campaign, disrupt the enemy and protect the force.

Although Russia maintains large divisional formations in the Western Military District, several are under strength, and it would take time for them to fully mobilise.¹⁹⁴ Assuming a four-week mobilisation, it would be reasonable to anticipate an offensive operation being conducted at

193. Shashank Joshi, 'A Border Dispute Between India and China is Getting More Serious', *The Economist*, 28 May 2020.

194. Michael Kofman, 'Russian Military Buildup in the West: Fact Versus Fiction', *Russia Matters*, 7 September 2017, <<https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/russian-military-buildup-west-fact-versus-fiction>>, accessed 5 June 2020.

army group strength, given the limited width of any front, Russia's need to retain follow-on forces and the ability to respond to horizontal escalation.¹⁹⁵ The Russian army group does not have a standardised structure, but corresponds to a large NATO corps.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, as a yardstick for offensive operations, this provides rough boundaries for the credible scale of force required across NATO to deter a fait accompli by denial. In short, rapid reaction forces would need to comprise a square division in strength, deployable within two weeks, equipped with significant anti-tank capabilities, prepared for the defence of complex terrain and able to self-protect from air threats.¹⁹⁷ In defending urban terrain, it would also need to be prepared to protect itself from chemical agents and the use of flame projectors and thermobaric artillery. Heavy manoeuvre forces would need to reach the level of two corps within six weeks, assuming a two-week lag in decision-making from the start of Russian mobilisation, two further weeks of mobilisation, and 30 days of subsequent combat operations within which the counteroffensive would need to take place. The support forces would need to have their C2 and recce strike element mobilised along with the rapid reaction forces, with enablers building up alongside heavy manoeuvre formations to protect the force in its assembly areas, and to manoeuvre to fire.¹⁹⁸

While far beyond the means of any European NATO member, such a large force is realistic across the Alliance. In terms of rapid reaction forces, the US, the UK and France maintain brigades of rapidly deployable forces, which could form a division alongside the forces of the targeted state. With regard to heavy forces, the US intends to pre-position an armoured division's equipment in Europe,¹⁹⁹ and is standing up V Corps as a warfighting headquarters with its requisite enablers.²⁰⁰ The UK, France and Germany each claim to have an armoured division. A number of other European states could form a further multinational armoured division given the widespread use of consistent armoured platforms (primarily the Leopard 2A4-7). With the US, this would provide two corps' worth of manoeuvre elements. Italy, France (through Project Griffon), the US (through its Stryker Brigades) and the UK (through its Strike Brigades) are developing credible medium-weight screening and recce elements to contribute. Poland, meanwhile, can mobilise a further corps, though this would be used defensively or for fixing Russian forces in Kaliningrad. Support forces, and particularly long-range precision fires, are far less plentiful. The US Marine

195. While Russian forces are severely constrained in the size of force they can generate outside the western and southern military districts, there are excellent transport links between these, and large existing formations. See Connable et al., *Russia's Limit of Advance*, p. xx.

196. Lester W Grau and Charles K Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office), pp. 28–31.

197. This is comparable, in terms of supporting enablers, to the elements of the USMC Littoral Combat Regiment. See United States Marine Corps, 'Force Design 2030', March 2020.

198. Burke-Macgregor Group LLC, 'The Light Reconnaissance Strike Group (LSRSG)', <<https://nealrauhauser.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/lrsbriefing.pdf>>, accessed 24 May 2020.

199. Briefing by Chris Cavoli on Exercise *Defender Europe 20*, delivered at AUSA's annual meeting, Washington, DC, 15 October 2019.

200. Kyle Rempfer, 'Army Resurrects V Corps After Seven Years to Bolster Europe', *Army Times*, 12 February 2020.

Corps II Marine Expeditionary Force reconfigured with large quantities of rocket artillery could help fill this gap. However, given that long-range fires require a robust and extensive ISR infrastructure, few NATO states can realistically provide such a capability unless they are closely integrated into US systems. The UK is uniquely positioned in this regard, and through the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, it could field a credible C2 architecture with higher echelon enablers to complement UK capabilities. This would, however, require substantial investment. At present, only the US maintains ammunition stockpiles for such formations.

Fielding this force in practice, however, presents major challenges. There is currently sufficient rolling stock in the German rail system to move one armoured brigade across it at a time.²⁰¹ Meanwhile, transportation fleets across NATO are limited.²⁰² The UK has 92 heavy equipment transporters and fewer medium equipment transporters to move a division of over 1,000 armoured vehicles.²⁰³ Readiness and the availability of German armour, for example, is notoriously bad.²⁰⁴ Even assuming that there were no delays, the minimum shuttle time cannot bring the UK's division to bear within a relevant timeframe. Furthermore, since the division's fighting strength should not be wasted piecemeal, this would leave it in its assembly area for an extended period, vulnerable to long-range strike. Unfortunately, the assumption of frictionless shuttles between the UK and Eastern Europe is unrealistic, not only because of the threat of disruptive enemy activity, but because NATO and the EU have not yet lifted the restrictions and non-standardised regulations for the transport of military equipment across the area.²⁰⁵ Thus, every border becomes a bureaucratic hurdle. The consequence is that while a requisite force theoretically exists across the Alliance, it would not be present in time to offer a credible deterrent effect. This deficiency must be addressed. Either the force must have more transportation assets, or it must be partially forward deployed. There is no point in having a force that cannot be used.

The picture is even less favourable when the details of these formations are considered. A Russian motor rifle division includes 214 MBTs while a tank division fields 322.²⁰⁶ A US armoured division has at least 174 MBTs and would more likely have closer to 261.²⁰⁷ Compare

201. Briefing by a senior US army officer, London, November 2019.

202. Michael Shurkin, *The Abilities of the British, French, and German Armies to Generate and Sustain Armored Brigades in the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017).

203. Jack Watling, 'Britain's Declining Tank Numbers Highlights a Wider Problem', *RUSI Commentary*, 24 April 2019.

204. George Allison, 'Less Than a Third of German Military Assets are Operational Says Report', *UK Defence Journal*, 21 June 2018.

205. Daniel Fiott, 'Towards a "Military Schengen"?', European Union Institute for Security Studies, November 2017.

206. Igor Sutyagin with Justin Bronk, *Russia's New Ground Forces: Capabilities, Limitations and Implications for International Security*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 89 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), p. 30.

207. Congressional Budget Office, 'The US Military's Force Structure: A Primer', July 2016, <<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/51535-fsprimer.pdf>>, accessed 22 May 2020.

this with 3rd (UK) Division, which fields 112 MBTs,²⁰⁸ not because there is evidence that this is sufficient to conduct divisional warfighting, but because the 227 MBTs in the order of battle during the Cold War have been paired back due to budget cuts.²⁰⁹ Moreover, while there was a qualitative gap in armour at the end of the Cold War,²¹⁰ this has evaporated today. The Challenger II MBT is sliding into obsolescence. Without an active protection system, it is increasingly vulnerable on a battlefield scoured by UAVs, and faced with a growing density of Kornet-EM ATGMs among Russian forces.²¹¹ Perhaps a greater concern is that the high-explosive squash head anti-armour ammunition used by its main gun cannot defeat modern reactive armour, while the rifling of its gun cannot accept more effective NATO ammunition natures, so that its capacity to defeat upgraded T-72B3 and T-90MS Russian tanks is increasingly doubtful. It is hoped that this will be addressed by the Challenger II Life Extension Programme (LEP), but with proposals to only upgrade 148 tanks,²¹² this would not enable enough vehicles to be held at readiness to field the two regiments that constitute the minimum current armoured complement of 3rd (UK) Division, let alone a competitive armoured division.²¹³ Furthermore, there is a shortage of enablers to support heavy armour – most notably assault bridges, which are suffering from metal fatigue and are in need of replacement. As consecutive defence reviews delayed procurement decisions, it is now doubtful whether an approved CR2 LEP would be able to deliver enough vehicles to maintain a deployable force until the late 2020s.

It is worse still for 3rd (UK) Division's infantry fighting vehicles, which are wearing out and are inferior to Russia's Kurganetz-25, or even the modernised BMP-3. The disparity in artillery is even starker. A Russian tank division has 222 organic artillery pieces compared to 48 self-propelled howitzers and 27 multiple launch rocket systems available across the entire British Army.²¹⁴ Meanwhile, air defence is scarce, leaving the division – as a formation – exceedingly vulnerable to enemy air, aviation and strike assets. Thus, the UK's promise of a division on paper does not meet the reality. If states do not have the same tanks, artillery and infantry fighting

208. British Army, 'Continual Operational Readiness: 3rd (United Kingdom) Division', <<https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/formations-divisions-brigades/3rd-united-kingdom-division/>>, accessed 5 June 2020.

209. 'BAOR Order of Battle: July 1989', <<https://www.orbat85.nl/documents/BAOR-July-1989.pdf>>, accessed 5 June 2020.

210. Malcolm Chalmers and Lutz Unterseher, 'Is There a Tank Gap?: Comparing NATO and Warsaw Pact Tank Fleets', *International Security* (Vol. 13, No. 1, Summer 1988), pp. 5–49.

211. Nick Reynolds and Jack Watling, 'Your Tanks Cannot Hide', *RUSI Defence Systems*, 5 March 2020.

212. Lucy Fisher, 'British Army Outgunned by Cambodia After Tank Cuts', *The Times*, 19 April 2019.

213. Readiness for armoured formations fluctuates in cycles from between 5% and 30% requiring repair, depending on whether the force has been on exercise, while some additional slack is required for vehicles unavailable for deployment because they are dispersed to training grounds or experimental activities. See Eric Peltz et al., *Diagnosing the Army's Equipment Readiness: The Equipment Downtime Analyzer* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), p. xvi.

214. Jack Watling, 'The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (November 2019).

vehicles, then a composite division suffers from highly inefficient logistics and maintenance. Thus, in armoured manoeuvre warfare, divisions are the smallest currency of useful exchange.

These deficiencies are all too evident to Russian planners, to the extent that Russian operational-tactical assessments must look highly favourable. Rebuilding a credible deterrence posture requires the modernisation of NATO land forces, but for this to be affordable and effective, it also demands the rationalisation of state contributions. To keep with the UK, while a deployable division, a high-readiness brigade and wider enablers to be a framework nation are articulated in the 2015 *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*, as the components of a balanced force, this has proven unachievable.²¹⁵ Indeed, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has conceded that previous plans were ‘overambitious and underfunded’.²¹⁶ Defence has persistently delayed modernising heavy armour to the point that the force lacks credibility, but nevertheless bears the expense of maintaining it. At the same time, concepts such as Strike²¹⁷ – which arguably provide the conceptual groundwork for the recce element of a recce strike complex – have not been matched by a sufficient investment in firepower to make the concept effective. A fully developed recce strike force – being the enabler for NATO’s divisional manoeuvre by suppressing Russian fires and contributing to the SEAD campaign – would greatly increase NATO’s deterrence posture by protecting the manoeuvre elements that could be brought to bear and dealing out disproportionate damage to Russian manoeuvre forces. However, it cannot be afforded alongside a fully equipped armoured division without a substantial increase in spending. It would require the expansion of the UK’s resilient ISR capabilities and a focus on the procurement of long- and medium-range precision fires.²¹⁸ For the UK, there is a further tradeoff in that an armoured division cannot be broken up and deployed internationally if it is to retain its deterrent value. By contrast, if we return to the requirements of deterrence in competition, enablers, reconnaissance and fires have substantial utility in these activities. Thus, the UK may be forced to choose between providing armoured manoeuvre forces to NATO’s deterrence against Russian *fait accompli* and more flexible reconnaissance, strike and enabling forces able to support NATO warfighting and conduct wider deterrence activity across the spectrum of competition and conflict.

The UK is not unique in facing these challenges. However, one of the problems is that many states – for reasons of tradition and national pride – will not feel comfortable pursuing unbalanced forces. And yet, NATO is at risk of becoming an amalgamation of disjointed forces for which the whole is less than the sum of its parts. Ammunition is a good example: the Alliance has a critical shortage of stockpiled munitions to the extent that its guns would fall silent within

215. HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*.

216. Georgina Bailey, ‘Ben Wallace Interview: UK Defence Isn’t Fit for Purpose – Our Armed Forces Must Adapt to 21st Century Threats’, *Politics Home*, 19 June 2020.

217. Jack Watling and Justin Bronk, ‘Strike: From Concept to Force’, *RUSI Occasional Papers* (June 2019).

218. Jack Senogles, ‘The British Army Must Extend the Range of its Precision Strike Capability’, *RUSI Defence Systems*, 27 March 2020.

days of operations commencing at scale.²¹⁹ There are member states that cannot field forces at a sufficient scale to offer any meaningful battlefield effect. They would drastically improve NATO's position and their contribution to the Alliance if they invested in common ammunition stockpiles rather than focus on redundant capabilities. For the UK to admit that it can no longer achieve a balanced force, and lead by example by rationalising its force structure, could pave the way for other members to do the same.

In summary, NATO's deterrent posture must depend on having parity and presence where Russia may attempt a *fait accompli*. NATO cannot pre-position to all of the potential targets, and so must hold rapid reaction forces to delay the enemy, and then move manoeuvre and fires elements to counterattack. The object of parity is sufficient to demonstrably render limited offensive operations unlikely to succeed, without such an overwhelming force ratio as to be able to conduct deep offensive operations, since this would trigger a parallel buildup. However, having the forces is only relevant if the will and understanding to use them appropriately exists.

The Will to Deter

To be credible, deterrence must be premised upon the capability and will to respond. This chapter has outlined the measures – and the timeframes – within which the UK government would need to act to credibly deter Russia. The capability requirements for deterring Russia's most dangerous course of policy have been outlined. Whether the UK government has the appropriate policy and permissions architecture to actually compete and deter must be considered.

The UK's structures broadly reflect the needs identified in this paper. The UK National Security Council, in appointing a senior responsible officer through Fusion Doctrine, intends to improve the coherence of policy. In Defence, there has been an effort to expand the value of the defence attaché network, and through the formation of 6th (UK) Division, there is a structure to generate coherent missions in competition to support partners. The Royal Marines – especially under the Future Commando Force concept²²⁰ – and 16 Air Assault Brigade both aspire to provide rapid reaction forces that could deploy globally to a range of difficult environments. Meanwhile, the UK has a command structure to offer NATO either a recce strike formation or an armoured manoeuvre formation, in the form of its Strike Brigades supplemented with fires or 3rd (UK) Division respectively. Most of these forces are underequipped, and currently lack a sufficient digital backbone, but the command structures are sound.

As with capabilities, the permissions framework supporting these forces does not stand up in practice to close scrutiny. While the structures broadly match the tasks, clarity over when they are to be employed, and when responsibility is to transition between them, is less well established and poorly understood across government. In order for these formations to effectively compete,

219. Deficiencies have already been demonstrated in the air domain. See Karen DeYoung and Greg Jaffe, 'NATO Runs Short on Some Munitions in Libya', *Washington Post*, 17 April 2011.

220. Sidharth Kaushal and Jack Watling, 'Requirements for the UK's Future Amphibious Capabilities in the Future Operating Environment', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (November 2019).

they must have the requisite permissions to operate. At present, authorisation sits with PJHQ Northwood and the Operations Directorate in the Ministry of Defence, which must approve even minor acts of local initiative. Because requests from deployed tactical commanders to act seldom relate to operationally or strategically significant issues, they are rarely at the top of senior decision-makers' priority lists. In fact, most are never presented to the decision-makers. And yet, because senior officials are the only ones empowered to issue permissions, and they are rarely even asked the question unless crisis forces it upon them, it is usually deemed safer to 'de-risk' activity and to decline approval. The result is a permissions structure that leaves dispersed teams unable to compete in complex environments.

The failure to hold permissions at the appropriate level has more pernicious consequences from a deterrence perspective. The unwillingness to escalate tactical issues to strategic-level decision-makers would be sensible if it were not for the fact that they are the only ones empowered to approve the activity. This leaves UK policy highly reactive. For instance, when the authorities of Gibraltar seized the Iranian supertanker *Grace 1*, the likelihood of a retaliatory seizure by Iran was eminently predictable.²²¹ In response, tactical formations began to plan for options both to deter this taking place and to react should Iran seize a British tanker. These options were never presented to policymakers, and were instead 'de-risked'. When the predicted seizure occurred, it triggered a crisis in Whitehall. After it was determined that the Department for Transport (DfT) bore the risk for the incident, DfT officials found themselves put in charge of a response having never previously worked with the military and having never been briefed on issues of deterrence or Iran. The UK subsequently let the *Grace 1* go²²² on assurances it would not go to Syria – which it promptly did²²³ – while the Iranians held onto the British-flagged tanker for a much longer period.²²⁴ Far from being deterred from further escalation, the Iranian government followed these episodes with a cruise missile strike against the critical national infrastructure of a UK ally,²²⁵ to whom the UK government had issued security guarantees.²²⁶ That Iran would escalate had similarly been predicted,²²⁷ but responses were not forthcoming. Perhaps the most concerning element of this debacle is that some UK officials maintain delusions of adequacy as to their handling of the crisis.²²⁸ Unfortunately, such a perception is symptomatic rather than

221. Dan Sabbagh and Patrick Wintour, 'Iran Fury as Royal Marines Seize Tanker Suspected of Carrying Oil to Syria', *The Guardian*, 5 July 2019.

222. Guardian News, 'Iran Troops Rappel onto Seized British-Flagged Oil Tanker', 20 July 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uks4DvpMhpA>>, accessed 8 April 2020.

223. *Sky News*, 'Grace 1 Tanker: UK Condemns Iran over Adrian Darya 1 Delivery of Oil to Syria', 10 September 2019.

224. *BBC News*, 'Stena Impero: Seized British Tanker Leaves Iran's Waters', 27 September 2019.

225. Ben Hubbard, Palko Karasz and Stanley Reed, 'Two Major Saudi Oil Installations Hit by Drone Strike, and U.S. Blames Iran', *New York Times*, 14 September 2019.

226. As Theresa May put it, 'Gulf security is our security'. See *BBC News*, 'Theresa May "Clear-Eyed" over Iran Threat', 7 December 2016.

227. Jack Watling, 'Expect Iran to Go Further', *RUSI Commentary*, 23 July 2019.

228. The process was briefed as the successful implementation of Fusion Doctrine to the author on several occasions by officials involved.

atypical, and can also be witnessed in the UK's response to the coronavirus pandemic. The risk of a pandemic was registered as high impact and high probability in threat assessments.²²⁹ Nevertheless, the UK's personal protective equipment stockpile – rather like its ammunitions stockpiles – had been neglected,²³⁰ with a subsequent scramble to procure more from an overburdened international supply chain.²³¹ The challenge of supply shortages would be far worse in the context of war.²³² Similarly, the government's approach to implementing measures was premised on receiving data to trigger reactions, failing to take into account that available data was limited in both quantity and reliability.²³³ Thus, measures were taken late. In warfare, there is almost always an information deficit, and if higher echelons wait for a clear picture, they are likely to act late. One of the consistent conclusions of this paper is that effective deterrence is about being proactive – moving to deny grounds or lay the groundwork for deterrence by punishment before the point of crisis develops. However, the UK's national security architecture – which has developed as a crisis-management process, shaped by single incidents like terrorist attacks or flooding – is fundamentally inadequate when it comes to proactive measures, while the centralisation of decision-making risks paralysis in the face of multiple crises. As a senior national security official admitted in discussion, 'a third consecutive crisis would overwhelm the system'.²³⁴ War would produce multiple crises.²³⁵ Without permissions being held at an appropriate level, and a change in mindset from reactivity to proactivity, the UK will continue to be unable to practice a sophisticated deterrence policy.

This problem is not isolated to the Cabinet Office and National Security Council. It is also present in the military. While 6th (UK) Division is well placed to compete, it lacks many requisite permissions to do so effectively.²³⁶ This is particularly true for deployed liaison and training teams who in many environments are not able to accompany their trainees on operations, and owing to force protection measures are kept on a very close hold by PJHQ so that the trainers do not have the freedom of manoeuvre to develop useful situational awareness, and are not perceived to be empowered by their trainees, ensuring that they are often not seen as interlocutors. There is a tendency to centralise command and decision-making to the highest levels, so that several general officers may be observing each mission, reducing efficiency in competition and laying the groundwork for paralysis in warfighting. Higher echelons would simply be overwhelmed if they tried to monitor all concurrent lines of activity. The military

229. David Pegg, 'What Does the Leaked Report Tell Us About the UK's Pandemic Preparations?', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2020.

230. *BBC News*, 'Coronavirus: UK Failed to Stockpile Crucial PPE', 28 April 2020.

231. Helen Warrell and Sarah Neville, 'Naval Chief Brought in to Help Turn Tide on UK PPE Supplies', *Financial Times*, 22 May 2020.

232. John Kay and Mervin King, *Radical Uncertainty: Decision-Making for an Unknown Future* (London: Bridge Street Press, 2020).

233. Letter from David Norgrove to Matt Hancock, 2 June 2020.

234. Briefing by senior national security official, London, December 2019.

235. Jack Watling, 'The Coronavirus Pandemic: This Is Not War', *RUSI Commentary*, 21 April 2020.

236. Reynolds, 'Performing Information Manoeuvre Through Persistent Engagement'.

recognises the need for ‘mission command’ in warfighting, but the administrative culture over operations in competition does little to prepare for it.

Ultimately, the emphasis on ‘de-risking’ reflects a cognitive bias towards assuming that inaction is inherently less risky than acting. This may be true in many circumstances, but over time, as adversaries perceive passivity, highly reactive and crisis-driven escalation undermines deterrence. Without the articulation of red lines and interests, and the demonstration that they will be enforced, adversaries lose sight of the limits of what they can do without triggering a response. The failure to deter Iran after the attack on Abqaiq, for example, led to Iran ignoring clear US statements that the death of US citizens would lead to retaliation.²³⁷ The subsequent assassination of Soleimani has precipitated a crisis in relations with the Iraqi government that has imposed significant constraints on US and UK engagement in the country, risking the collapse of decades of investment and presumably national interests. Thus, the question of proactivity in deterrence is less about choosing between risk and security, but instead between whether a state shapes the operating environment or stands back to have the rules of the game written by its adversaries.

The final point regarding credibility is the importance of exercises. To demonstrate that NATO forces can mobilise quickly, it is necessary to practice operational deployments for joint exercises. This was to be carried out through Exercise *Defender Europe 20*, which was unfortunately curtailed owing to the coronavirus outbreak.²³⁸ Without such a demonstrated willingness to invest in moving forces, showing that it can be done quickly and at scale, the credibility of the defence of NATO’s eastern border will wither. Defence’s tendency to seek savings from exercises and infrastructure exacerbates this trend.²³⁹ Regular joint exercises and the movement of materiel also ensures that regulatory hurdles to the movement of equipment within NATO can be identified, addressed or mitigated through practical testing. It is notable that Russia has invested heavily in snap exercises, and regularly moves large quantities of materiel between military districts.²⁴⁰ A further reason for why such activities reinforce deterrence is that, in making the movement of equipment routine, it does not become a trigger for escalation as units begin to mobilise to deter a brewing crisis, and therefore expands the scope for negotiation enabling de-escalation. It is only through practice that NATO can ensure it is able to bring its forces to parity in the right place and at the right time, and it is through the ability to generate these forces that the Alliance deters aggression.

237. White House, ‘Statement by the Press Secretary’, 11 September 2018, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-33/>>, accessed 1 October 2018.

238. John Vandiver, ‘Massive Army Exercise in Europe is Curtailed Amid Coronavirus Angst’, *Stars and Stripes*, 11 March 2020.

239. BBC iPlayer, ‘Select Committees: Defence Spending Committee’, 28 May 2020, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000jn3t/select-committees-defence-spending-committee>>, accessed 5 June 2020.

240. Center for Strategic and International Studies, ‘Russian Defense Expenditure and Military Modernization: How Much Does the Military Spend?’, 4 December 2019, <<https://www.csis.org/events/russian-defense-expenditure-and-military-modernization>>, accessed 5 June 2020.

Conclusion

ON 4 MARCH 2018, Anatoliy Chepiga²⁴¹ and Alexandr Mishkin²⁴² of Russia's GRU allegedly attempted to assassinate Sergei Skripal in Salisbury using a military nerve agent. Skripal, his daughter, a police officer and a member of the public were hospitalised, and a fifth person died from coming into contact with the nerve agent. The decontamination effort lasted a year. In the aftermath, the UK orchestrated a successful diplomatic effort to expel Russian intelligence officers from embassies around the world, seriously disrupting GRU operations. On the one hand, the effectiveness of the response may have created an effective deterrence posture by showcasing the punishment that the UK will inflict for such an attack on its territory. On the other, that Russian planners thought they could get away with the operation and accepted the risks of getting caught as worthwhile must be seen as a deterrence failure. The attempted assassination, allegedly by Russian military personnel, also reinforces a further point: an armed attack on NATO soil carried out by the Russian military is not a fantastical doomsday event. Clearly, there is a wide margin between an assassination and invasion, but there are a range of military actions short of invasion that cannot be discounted. Military action against NATO is a plausible consequence of the Alliance lacking a credible response. Nor does strategic nuclear deterrence suffice to prevent conventional armed attacks.

In light of the upcoming Integrated Review, it is time to have a frank conversation about what we expect the UK military to do, and whether it is resourced to deliver those effects. The Russian military will not overlook shortcomings in NATO's or the UK's capabilities. Furthermore, as the gap between the UK's ambition and capabilities widen, so the policy options available to its adversaries expand. Capability gaps may be papered over for a time, to reassure allies and deter adversaries, but the UK is increasingly at risk of deceiving not its opponents, but itself. Furthermore, unlike in response to the Skripal poisoning, if capabilities slide too far, there will be no re-establishing deterrence by punishment. If the Army is not competitively equipped, a second one cannot be remobilised. The old British tradition of losing the early battles but winning the war does not work when it takes years to build sophisticated modern military equipment. In short, if deterrence fails, and the Army is not appropriately provisioned, there will be no comeback. There will simply be defeat. It is therefore vital that this Integrated Review makes a cold, hard appraisal of what the UK's proposition is to its allies, what it wishes to deter and what can credibly deliver that effect.

The current structure of UK land forces is well suited to maintaining a 'war and a half force', able to maintain a division for warfighting, a high-readiness highly enabled brigade-sized task force for expeditionary operations, and additional units to rotate through training, recovery and

241. Bellingcat, 'Skripal Suspect Boshirov Identified as GRU Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga', 26 September 2018.

242. Bellingcat, 'Full Report: Skripal Poisoning Suspect Dr. Alexander Mishkin, Hero of Russia', 9 October 2018.

resilience activity. There are also multiple elements of the UK military that are appropriately equipped to meet the requirements to offer credible deterrence in competition. UK airlift transportation, for example, is potentially larger than necessary to meet these deterrence commitments (though this also enables other kinds of activity). The UK is in the process of modernising its armoured reconnaissance capabilities, and has highly trained and effective light infantry and light reconnaissance forces.

One area that needs to be carefully considered is the permissions supporting operations. While deterrence in competition requires the expansion of liaison functions, partner force capacity building and special forces activity, these tasks are currently disproportionately carried out by the latter. Special forces cannot realistically be expanded because the available pool of talent is not going to substantially increase. Therefore, some of these tasks will need to be transferred to regular units. Given the current force protection requirements, and very senior command oversight of tactical engagements, the UK is highly constrained in the use of regular forces in competition. This will need to be reassessed.

The greatest deficiencies in UK land forces, however, are in capabilities. The UK lacks ground-based air defences and deployable long-range precision fires. Electronic warfare units lack equipment, and the whole force lacks a resilient communications system able to manage the levels of data required by many systems on the modern battlefield. These are as relevant to expeditionary operations as they are to warfighting, and are priorities for procurement.

More expensive, fundamental problems face the UK's divisional warfighting capabilities. Its heavy armour is under-gunned, its protected mobility is worn out, its artillery is outranged, its logistics are under-resourced, its deployment is too slow, and its ammunitions stockpiles too small to deliver the effect for which it is designed. The Challenger II LEP, Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme and Mobile Fires Platform provide partial solutions to some of these shortcomings. However, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and its likely impact on departmental budgets, it must be asked whether the UK can afford to fully refurbish its warfighting vehicle fleet. If it cannot, and key programmes are to be delayed, the Integrated Review must recalibrate the UK's offering to conventional deterrence in Eastern Europe.

There are alternative models of a credible offering to NATO's deterrence posture. If the UK prioritised equipping forces designed to deploy rapidly to delay a fait accompli attempt, provided critical bearer networks to stitch together partners and allies, and focused on bringing significant ISR and fires capabilities into Eastern Europe, contributing significantly to SEAD, and offering capabilities that would disproportionately assist allies in Eastern Europe before the buildup of major US, German, French and other NATO formations, then it could provide a critical set of capabilities. Moreover, many of those capabilities would also bolster the UK's competitive posture internationally. Any such restructuring of the UK's deterrence posture and warfighting capabilities cannot be a half measure. The UK does not have the resources to develop a partial divisional capability. Thus, any change to the current structure must be premised on a detailed evidence base and produce an alternative system of capabilities to fulfil the relevant tasks for a warfighting force. Alternatively, if the UK feels it can no longer resource a warfighting capability,

then this must be the starting point from which UK strategy develops, and extensive and difficult conversations with allies must be initiated.

However the UK seeks to resolve its deterrence contribution to NATO, there are some fundamental conclusions as to what a credible conventional deterrence posture must comprise. In short, the measure for credibility is whether a force can be present and have parity. The UK's global presence through its liaison officers and trainers allows it to maintain situational awareness and head off Russian advances before Russia achieves theatre entry. But the UK must also be able to surge a task force to bolster allies, and to maintain parity in competition, if Russia does press its way into theatre. Similarly, in competition in Russia's periphery, the capacity to balance Russia's presence in international forums and to counter its development of dependency among its neighbours deters Russia from employing coercion.

Military parity must be maintained through a coherent contribution to NATO. The purpose of having a warfighting capability that can reach the theatre of operations within a relevant timeframe is not to be able to comprehensively defeat Russia, but to achieve parity so that Russia cannot achieve its aims through the application of force, and to deter it from adopting this line of policy. Information operations, offensive cyber capabilities, economic sanctions and soft power all contribute to effective deterrence. But they are force multipliers for hard power, and not its enablers. Having recourse to hard power, by contrast, is an enabler of these capabilities, and cannot be replaced by them. We may use information operations to message our deterrence, but credible deterrence must be founded upon military capabilities.

The emphasis on being able to be present, establishing parity and thereby maintaining deterrence demands a shift in how the UK measures its forces. There is a tendency to demand that the UK's 'equipment is the best', that it is 'world beating', 'first rate' or 'tier one'. The tendency to gold-plate capabilities, however, makes them expensive and slow to procure. A greater focus on which capabilities are vital to match – rather than overmatch – may lead to the development of a force that is more useable, and a national discussion about the use of hard power that is more realistic, thereby establishing objectives that are ultimately more achievable.

About the Author

Jack Watling is a Research Fellow at RUSI, responsible for the study of land warfare. Jack has recently published detailed studies of the British Army's Strike Concept, achieving lethal effects with small UAVs, Iran's strategic objectives and its capabilities, British training and assistance programmes in Yemen between 2004–15, allied integration into multi-domain operations, and amphibious operations, among other projects.

Jack's PhD examined the evolution of Britain's policy responses to civil war in the early 20th century. Prior to joining RUSI, Jack worked in Iraq, Mali, Rwanda, Brunei and further afield, embedded with Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces and the Burkina Faso Army. Originally a journalist, he has contributed to *Reuters*, *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Guardian*, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, *Haaretz* and others. Jack was shortlisted for the European Press Prize Distinguished Writing Award in 2016, and won the Breakaway Award at the International Media Awards in 2017.