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Lessons Learned from *2017: War with Russia* for the Command and Control Community in a Baltic Sea Invasion Scenario.

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2017: War with Russia is a "future history" set after the shocking real-world invasion of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Since the end of WWII, direct State-on-State war has been virtually unthinkable in modern Europe and much of the policy in the early 2010s was rooted in this assumption. The invasion of Crimea and then eastern Ukraine in defiance of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and Russia's continued aggression in the region has shown a fundamental shift in Russian intentions towards the West, tearing away the façade of assumed peace and stability that Europe had enjoyed for nearly 70 years. General Sir Richard Shirreff, author and former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, brings his considerable experience as a top British military officer at the head of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leadership to deliver a chilling scenario where Russia isn't content with annexing Crimea alone, but makes good on its 2014 promise to unite all ethnic Russian speakers under the banner of Mother Russia (Kendall, Shirreff preface).

Largely aimed as a wake-up call for NATO governmental policy makers and strategic thinkers, *War with Russia* delivers valuable insight for military professionals of all ranks and the general public alike who are seeking to gain more knowledge about the politics and challenges surrounding the Baltic States. Shirreff breaks down the policies and government actions of NATO leading up to the Crimean invasion and discusses how these actions-or inactions-may bring NATO closer to an armed confrontation where nuclear escalation becomes a very real possibility. This review seeks to present the four most relevant concepts and issues presented that command and control planners can take into consideration and learn from if they are faced with a Russian invasion of the Baltic States like the one detailed in this book.

The first key problem Shirreff presents is knowing when to confront covert Russian action when the Russians have become so good at challenging other Great Powers in such a way so as not to trigger an armed conflict. Russia is adept at using social media and propaganda as informational warfare campaigns to infiltrate the psyche of targeted populations in order to create instability and subversion of the national government (Giles). This can be effectively combined with advanced cyberattacks, attacks by proxy agents, and direct infiltration of extremist political groups within a country's populace to create a seemingly valid reason for Russian intervention that paints them in the role of savior instead of would-be conqueror.

Indeed, it is this very scenario that creates justifiable cause for the Russians to invade the Baltic States in *War with Russia*. Claiming to be protecting Russian compatriots who are being attacked and oppressed, Russia executes a carefully and expertly planned operation that creates significant political and social divide between ethnic Russian speakers and the Balts.

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This leads ethnic Russians within the Baltics to make public requests begging for Russian intervention, a call which Russia is prompt to respond to. Similar tactics have been used to justify the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and eastern Ukraine in 2014. Shirreff points out that Russia will continue to use these tactics against the Eastern Bloc States as long as Russia feels NATO or the West will do nothing significant against them.

The challenge, then, is for command and control planners to recognize when this is happening. NATO must be prepared to create a strong deterrence to aggressive actions by the Russians while providing active support, reassurance, moderation, and defense to the Baltic States to prevent them from needing to seek the support of the Russian government. This requires nuanced and redefined criteria for when an "attack" has been conducted against a NATO ally and what actions trigger a conflict beyond traditional warfare. Planners should consider a scalable reaction with clear criteria that includes non-traditional and cyber warfare while allowing sufficient buffer time to employ counter actions in defense of vulnerable States. NATO will be behind the eight ball if it waits for Russia to commit conventional military forces to counter Russian aggression.

Shirreff argues passionately that NATO has failed in this duty to adequately challenge overt and covert Russian aggression up to this point. Shirreff presents his second key problem concerning this issue: NATO members' complacency towards European defense policy, particularly those policies starting in 2010. He is especially critical of the United Kingdom whom he once served and who has historically been considered one of the most powerful military forces in Europe. The UK 2010 Defense Review placed a premium on creating a "lean" force that utilized only 2% of the national GDP which effectively cut 20,000 regular army troops, reduced the UK's naval support fleet, and scrapped its maritime aircraft capabilities leading up to 2014. The Prime Minister further made statements in 2016 that "Britain should avoid sending armies to fight" and implied that the Army would be primarily tasked for humanitarian missions (Shirreff, Wyatt).

The United States has similarly taken advantage of European peace and began looking increasingly towards other parts of the world, conducting an "Asia-Pacific" pivot in 2011 under the Obama administration to challenge North Korean actions and grow economic partnerships in the region (Reininger et al.). The US also removed all of its tanks from Germany in 2013 for the first time since WWII and renewed its focus in the Middle East to combat the uprise of the Islamic State in 2014. The US has continued to drawdown the number of troops stationed in Europe, especially in Germany, under the Trump administration (Gould).

This reduction in military presence by the US combined with previous comments from presidential candidate Donald Trump on the conditionality of American support to NATO allies in 2016 (Sanger) has, in Shirreff's words, "undermined the notion of NATO's founding principle of collective defense [because] NATO is totally dependent on strong US leadership and peace in Europe will only be maintained if there is absolute certainty that the US will always be there to

"Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Air University, the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other US government agency." defend its allies." He further warns that, "Trump's comments will embolden the [Russian] President and make the nightmare scenario in this book more likely."

Politically insensitive comments and public military drawdown can set a dangerous precedent in a high-speed technological world where the Russians can analyze and act on perceived weakness in real-time and should be handled carefully. Planners and policy makers must actively monitor and shape NATO's world image in the face of such threats to prevent Russia from taking attacks of opportunity on a weakened NATO alliance. Russia is unlikely to wait and see if NATO members are able to renew and strengthen their military forces prior to attack for the simple reason that it would not suit their interests to do so. It is the perception of NATO's weakness combined with a steady decrease in military capability that spurs Russia into taking the initiative in Shirreff's scenario. They swiftly invade the Baltic States to capitalize on the opportunity before NATO has the chance to react and generate sufficient conventional forces to counter them.

This leads to the third key problem Shirreff presents: the continued growth and development of conventional military forces. It is seductive to policy makers and voters who are tired of decades of fighting to reduce military forces and development to conserve spending, but avoiding nuclear escalation requires both a strong conventional military and nuclear deterrence when facing a nuclear State. One does not work without the other and strength must be met with strength on both fronts. If NATO becomes less reliant on conventional military forces, then it will have to become more reliant on nuclear deterrence which makes the option of nuclear retaliation in the face of unacceptable end states more likely. This has the potential to push NATO closer to a nuclear conflict rather than away from one. Lack of conventional troops and war material ready to deploy is a major driver in Shirreff's invasion scenario. Post invasion, NATO is left scrambling to organize a reactionary force while facing the daunting prospect of a counter invasion to liberate the Baltics against an advanced Russian threat that is willing to protect its newly acquired States with tactical nukes (the Russian version of "nuclear de-escalation") (Shirreff).

Shirreff would be heartened to know that, since the *War with Russia* was published, NATO has succeeded in deploying four rotating multinational battalions to support the Baltic States and Poland under the guidance of the US, UK, Germany, and Canada as agreed in the 2016 Warsaw Summit ("NATO's presence"). This bolsters the defense of the Baltics and serves to show conviction and resolve on behalf of the alliance towards their defense. However, the underlying issue remains the same. NATO must continue to support and advance its conventional military forces to keep pace with the rapid military development of Russia, for "once you cut capability, it requires a superhuman effort to regenerate it" (Shirreff preface). Russia has the geographical and temporal advantage to launch its military forces directly across its border and has put very capable military systems in place along that border and in Russian-held Kaliningrad. To that effect, NATO forces will have to contend with a sophisticated

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integrated air defense system (IADS), advanced fighters, tactical nuclear defense, and Russia's inherent ability to field reinforcements directly from its backyard (Conversino).

NATO must continue to develop and improve its conventional forces to keep up with Russian advances. It also must remain relatively flexible and willing to move war material and personnel quickly due to NATO's geographic disadvantage and dependence on other States to host NATO forces. Russia's proximity will allow it to field forces faster than NATO can with the exception of any forces already prepositioned within the Baltic States. This is especially worrisome due to the increase in Russian snap exercises hosting upwards of 30-40 thousand troops along Baltic borders since 2015 (Shirreff, Stiburg 37-39). For some NATO members who are significantly geographically separated from the Baltics, this will require particular consideration in manning and material that has been promised towards NATO defense. Simply stationing equipment around Europe and storing it will not be enough. Any war material that is "mothballed" must also be supported with training, manning, logistics, and a clear structure of command and control authority (which is not an insignificant challenge in a multi-national alliance) if it is to be counted towards military capability. Otherwise, planners can count on it taking a significant amount of time to bring up to combat readiness (Shirreff).

However, no amount of military equipment will win a war if it cannot get to the battlefield and this leads to Shirreff's fourth key problem: cultivating both political relationships and the political will to commit military forces in a united effort. In the book, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in NATO took 13 days from the first indications of conflict to declare Article 5 (an agreement to collectively go to war) in defense of the Baltic States. NATO was unable to launch a counter attack until 47 days later due to political and conventional force generation issues. This was largely due to a number of political hurdles that greatly reduced their ability to react in time to prevent the Russian invasion.

The largest delay came from the requirement of a unanimous vote of the NAC to declare Article 5, which becomes a risk when quick reaction decisions are needed. This unanimous vote becomes more difficult to secure with an increasing number of members in NATO which has grown from 12 nations to 30 in the years between 1949 and 2020 ("Enlargement"). New members generally bring in a rich diversity of heritage and ideologies that strengthen the alliance. However, some countries in the fictional scenario had significant financial and religious ties to Russia that made them rigidly disinclined to agree to conflict with Russia despite the warning signs. Command and control planners should work closely with their diplomatic partners to put special effort towards building relations with these nations, but planners must also take this probable delay into consideration when planning operational contingencies and should be prepared for unilateral or bilateral action to protect national interests.

Once a decision to provide military defense of the Baltics was made, NATO experienced additional delays moving their forces and war material across the plethora of borders in Europe. Continued conflict in the Middle East has generated a mass immigration into Europe by

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refugees seeking to escape the violence. This has resulted in stricter border protocols that has tied up many nations' fighting forces to control the influx of people and prevent the rise in terrorist acts in Europe (Shirreff). Command and control planners and policy makers should work to ensure that special license is given to these forces to move rapidly across national borders (especially States within the alliance) to ensure that reinforcements can be fielded in time to make a useful contribution in deterrence operations or armed conflict.

Shirreff's nightmarish scenario ends in a major multinational operation that is saved largely due to an unusually effective cyber solution that provides Shirreff with his *deus ex machina* to end the scenario with a quick, decisive, and largely bloodless victory for the NATO alliance. A fictional computer virus is introduced into the Russian computer system by the British to bypass all Russian command and control system redundancies to completely shut down Russia's ability to control their surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems or launch an effective counterair attack. NATO fighters and bombers are able to overfly the Baltic States with near impunity. Special forces from the UK and the US simultaneously overtake Kaliningrad's tactical nuke sites and are able to hold Russia hostage with them to force a resolution in NATO's favor. And, naturally, the strapping young British office that plays one of the main protagonists gets the girl.

It is unlikely for a real Baltic invasion scenario to end so cleanly for NATO forces and this fantastical conclusion should not take away from the key problems Shirreff presents to his readers. Policies based on assumptions of peace will not hold water and NATO must continue to deploy troops and war material strategically and in appropriate strength in anticipation of possible Russian attacks, recognizing that Russian attacks are no longer as easy to spot as they were prior to the invention of the internet and social media. Russia will continue to develop non-traditional warfare techniques to supplement its rapid development of advanced conventional forces and NATO States must be prepared to meet them strength for strength in both conventional and nuclear war capabilities. Lastly, political relationships, the essential ingredient to the development of a resolute NATO body, will be crucial for the proper defense of the Baltic States. Only cooperation and a willingness to act in unity will allow NATO to effectively combat an enemy that isn't hampered by the need for multinational consensus.

The command and control community is uniquely positioned to provide such insight and actionable solutions to policy makers and should make every effort to do so, thoughtfully taking into consideration the lessons learned from *War with Russia*. This "future history" is a warning that NATO faces considerable challenges to deterring Russian aggression, but it also provides hope that all is not lost and that a few good men and women can make a difference if they put in the effort to do so.

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