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HAND OVER FIST: RUSSIA'S USE OF MILITARY AGGRESSION TO AFFECT
REGIONAL POLICY

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<u>Abstract</u>

The purpose of this thesis is to assess Russia's effectiveness at using military exercises to affect the policies of neighboring Eastern European states. This is first done through an analysis of three Russian military exercises: Zapad-2017, Kavkaz-2020, and Ocean Shield-2020. The overview and results of the exercises are discussed. Then, three Eastern European countries are assessed as targets of Russian military aggression: Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The relationships between these countries and Russia are then reviewed before discussing how each country was impacted by one or more of the three aforementioned Russian military exercises. Following this analysis, a brief assessment is made of Russian military aggression producing conditions favorable to Russian national interests.

Table Of Contents

Introduction

"I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest." (International Churchill Society, 2011). One of the more famous quotes by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, here he is addressing a British crowd in 1939, less than a month after the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland and entry into the developing world war. Seldom has Russia not performed as a rational actor; national interest has always been the primary driver of Moscow's foreign policy. By examining Russian military aggression in Eastern Europe from the perspective of national interest, Russia's regional goals become more clear. It is for this reason that Russia makes an excellent topic for this research, since it almost always acts purely upon self-interest, relative to other nations. Thus, it naturally produces excellent case studies for the execution of grand strategy.

Grand strategy, the long-term pursuit of overarching goals, is the driving force behind the rise and fall of great nations. From von Bismarck's use of conquest and confederation to unify the German states, to China's romance of the Three Kingdoms, grand strategy has historically brought about the greatest changes in the standing of nations. Fortunately for all fighting-age and able-bodied men, as well as unlucky civilians, the execution of grand strategy, at least between first-world nations, has been largely peaceful. With massed-infantry charges going out of style in the early 20th century and the use of nuclear weapons and total war since becoming taboo, the most advanced nations of the world, which would also have the greatest capacity for violence,

have become less likely to meet one another in open combat. Nevertheless, there remain some advanced nations that continue to push the envelope when it comes to advancing a grand strategy.

Here, Russia comes to mind. As far as most astute observers can tell, Russia's grand strategy has always boiled down to maintaining access to a warm-water port, and hegemony over its neighbors to insulate it from other great powers. (Chauhan, 2020). That even to this day, Russia overtly pursues this national goal, though sometimes by covert means instead, has piqued the interest of this research. Political agreements and integration into the global economy seem to be the limits of grand strategy for most developed countries, though this has certainly not held Russia back from its aggressive tendencies. To push, even violently, towards securing great power status in the 21st century, after the great wars of conquest have long since vanished from the earth, provides an opportune context in which to study grand strategy. However, Russia is not unique in this regard. This research could have just as easily been about other nation's pursuit of hegemony, from China's growing control over the South China Sea and their Silk Road initiative, to Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry for control over the Gulf. What makes Russia's case stand out is that it is able to force its will upon its neighbors through shows or threats of strength, whereas China still relies to some degree on the consent of its neighbors, and the regional powers of the Middle East remain roughly equivalent.

This research begins with an examination of Russian military exercises. For the purposes of this thesis, military exercises will be defined as the use of military personnel, equipment, and other resources for practice and/or training purposes in a simulated combat and/or preparatory operation. Russian military jurisdiction is divided into four major military districts, West (Zapad), East (Vostok), Central (Tsentr), and Southern or Caucasus (Iug/Kavkaz), though a fifth

district, North (Sever), exists as a subdivision in the western military district used only by the Russian navy. Once a year, the Russian military holds a large-scale military exercise for a major military district, rotating between the four. This thesis will make use of the Zapad-2017 and Kavkaz-2020 exercises. In addition to these two, the smaller exercise Ocean Shield-2020, a series of naval maneuvers across the Arctic, Baltic, and Black Seas, will be assessed as well.

At first glance, Moscow's military maneuvers appear to be simple shows of strength. However, closer analysis reveals that Russia is using these drills in a calculated manner to elicit controlled reactions from targeted countries. The military exercises Russia has carried out over recent years, both alone and with allies, have been too controlled to indicate simpleminded aggression. While these maneuvers have yet to precipitate an actual invasion, the fact that they train for that sort of symmetrical warfare is enough to keep Eastern European leaders up at night. Or perhaps it helps the policymaker sleep better, if they are of a more pro-Moscow persuasion. Nevertheless, while on the surface Russia's military exercises only appear to be the maintenance of its martial prowess, I hypothesize that the actual goal of these drills and maneuvers is to shape the foreign policy of its European neighbors. By using shows of force to imply or prepare for hypothetical conflict, Russia is able to elicit controlled reactions from nearby European states in order to facilitate diplomatic goals. This thesis will answer the following question: Is Russia's military aggression an effective tool for controlling its neighboring countries' foreign policy?

The title "Hand Over Fist," has a double meaning for the thesis. In one regard, it still holds the phrase's colloquial meaning "to acquire very rapidly," in that the Russian Federation quickly jumps at any opportunity to advance its regional goals in Eastern Europe. However, the title can also be taken for its literal meaning, in that the "hand" may be used over the "fist," indicating action by any means necessary. Here we see the Russian military, an instrument of

hard-power or "fist," instead being used as ends to influence and soft-power policy objectives, like a "hand." While military forces are traditionally used threateningly or for deterrence, Russia has recently been using its military to demonstrate doctrine and ability in ways which cause more comprehensive changes in its neighbors' policies. The title "Hand Over Fist" is used to indicate both how the Kremlin seeks to rapidly advance its foreign policy goals in Eastern Europe, as well as the Russian military's conventional forces being used in unconventional ways.

I intend to analyze how Russia's neighbors react to military aggression, whether or not the reaction is beneficial to Moscow, and if so, how. I will do this by analyzing recent Russian military exercises, and how Russia's immediate neighbors react. The states observed are Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Belarus was chosen due to its warm relationship with Moscow, which allows the thesis to delve into how military aggression can shape the foreign policy of an ally. Ukraine, engaged in a conflict that is simultaneously a civil and a proxy conflict with the Kremlin, will allow the research to observe the effects of a more imminent threat, and on a relatively neutral nation (not a member of NATO or the EU, through still soliciting membership). And finally, Lithuania was selected for both its membership in NATO and the EU, as well as its very unique geographic position. While not bordering Russia's main territory, it is positioned between Kaliningrad and Belarus, which will show how effective Moscow is at projecting across non-contiguous borders and leveraging allies in its aggression, feeding back into the Belarus analysis. The end result will provide a nuanced study of the aforementioned actions and reactions, and potentially aid in predicting similar contingencies in the future.

Literature Review

The variety of diplomatic stances in the country's that have been targeted for study have resulted in a variety of sources and approaches to analyze them. In one example, Eray Alim's article "Decentralize Or Else: Russia's Use of Offensive Coercive Diplomacy against Ukraine," the author describes how Ukraine has been hit with Russia's most direct forms of coercion. The article begins with the distinction between offensive and defensive diplomatic coercion. Defensive diplomatic coercion is a state's forceful response (or threat of response) to an aggressive action against it by another state, whereas offensive coercion is the attempt to make another state give up or accept something. The author argues that Russia's annexation of Crimea was considered defensive rather than offensive, citing cases of popular sovereignty, Ukraine's solicitation of association status with the European Union, and loss of Black Sea ports and military installations. Conversely, Russia's actions in Eastern Ukraine have constituted offensive coercion, according to the author, in that it is an explicit violation of international law (Alim 2020, 157). Another development in the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, as discussed by "Decentralize or Else," is Russia's elimination of a status quo between the two states. Previously, the relationship between these two countries was based on a joint recognition of territorial sovereignty and integrity, backed by agreements from the *Budapest Memorandum* (*Budapest Memorandum*, 1994). and the *Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine* (Sorokowsky, 1997).

In "The Baltic's response to Russia's threat" by Finabel, the European Army Interoperability Center, the reactions of the Baltic states are recorded. The study begins with the different threats that Russia poses to the three countries, including both military and non-military coercion. In greater detail, the study breaks down the ways in which the Baltic states have

reacted thus far by country, and in what areas. This includes their national level reactions, their reactions in regards to the greater European community, and how they have reacted in the context of their alliances with NATO (La Torre 2019, 15-23). This policy piece will be important, not only in delineating the variety of threats coming from Russia, but also in acting as a repository of the recent reactions that the different Baltic states have had in regards to Russian aggression. In particular, Lithuania has been the most threatened of the Baltic states by Russia's military modernization in the past several years. Moscow's strategic buildup of forces in Kaliningrad has used this territory of Russia as a geographic wedge between the Baltic states and the rest of NATO and the EU. This, combined with Lithuania's dependence on Russian natural gas for energy needs, forces the country to remain open for Russian passage between their main body and Kaliningrad. Lithuania's relationship remains tense and limited, but under present circumstances must remain open diplomatically, lest Moscow leverage Kaliningrad to force Lithuania into a more "favorable" position (La Torre 2019, 9-15).

A prolific writer on Russian military strategy and exercises, researcher Dr. Michael Kofman discusses his estimate of Russian foreign policy in his article, "Drivers of Russian Grand Strategy." One of the main themes of his work is Russia's great power status. Though Russia's status as a great power remains inconsistent, waxing and waning cyclically over the centuries, said status does endure. Historically, asserts Kofman, perceived insecurity has always been a primary driver of Russian foreign policy. The first step in achieving security is deterrence, both conventional and otherwise. Moscow has this now, with its large nuclear arsenal and recently updated military, though for true regional security, Russia perceives that it must have hegemony over its neighbors. According to Kofman, Russian grand strategy contends that autonomy and independence are privileges that only great powers can truly possess. Combining that with what

he calls a zero-sum game mentality of diplomacy, Russia is driven by a compulsion to dominate its neighbors. If its neighbors are not under its influence, then they must be influenced by an opponent, posits the Kremlin according to Kofman. Thus, in order to achieve true security, Russia must maintain a series of buffer and satellite states in order to insulate itself from rival great powers and maintain a position of strength. Additionally, for a great power, Russia has never been able to use economic leverage to a significant degree, and must primarily rely on military power to achieve soft-power goals (Kofman, 2019), which ties in with the theories espoused by Dr. Joseph Nye.

Another scholar of Russian strategy, Dr. Robert Person's speech agrees with Kofman's assessment that current Russian grand strategy is less dependent on current heads of state as it is influenced by Russian strategies historically. Person's position, like Kofman's, is that Russia is pursuing the strategic goal of state security at all levels. This is described in three goals that Person lays out, essentially a "Yalta 2.0": uncontested influence across post-Soviet space, sufficient great power status to influence conflict in contested regions around the world, and to compete with and serve as a check to American unilateralism. The rebuilding of great power status following the collapse of the Soviet Union into three phases, first being negotiations with rival powers from an equal position since it lacked strength, called "pragmatic accommodation." The second phase, "soft balancing," involved the use of non-military means to arrest rival powers' progress towards their grand strategy objectives. The third and final phase, "asymmetric balancing," is the use of coercive measures in unconventional ways (Person, 2019), which plays nicely into this research's study of the Russian military being used unconventionally to achieve better conditions for Moscow with its Eastern European neighbors.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, "Is Russia's military aggression an effective tool for controlling its neighboring countries' policy?," this thesis first seeks to observe instances of Russian aggression through military exercises, and then to compare them to the reactions of countries targeted by said aggression. To this end, three states, referred to as "target countries," will be used by the thesis as case studies for the variety of ways in which Russian military aggression may manifest. Following analysis, the thesis will discuss whether or not the three military exercises reasonably affected the policies of the three target countries in their relationship towards Russia, and whether or not the outcomes were beneficial to the Kremlin.

The research presented in this thesis is the accumulation of many relevant perspectives and instances of Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. As Moscow seeks to secure dominion over its neighbors, the public relations of several Russian ministries have produced press releases which downplay, justify, or recharacterize their actions. These serve as the qualitative analysis's primary sources for the Russian actions observed. Additionally, opposing viewpoints are observed, namely the official responses from governments targeted by Russian aggression. These are used as the primary sources, utilized by analyzing the targeted countries' reactions to Russian aggression. By combining both groups of primary sources, the research is able to yield a more comprehensive account of Russian grand strategy in Eastern Europe. The qualitative analysis of Russian military aggression is further enhanced through its secondary sources, a motley collection of open-source analysis from professional observers, academic papers on specific instances as case studies, and news articles depicting the events from when they were current. These sources are able to add greater depth to the research.

In the case of the Russian-produced primary sources, official explanations are given for their military exercises. Granted, this is Russia being discussed, so official narratives should be taken with a grain of salt. The secondary sources discuss ulterior motives, and seek to explain or offer theories as to what Russia seeks to accomplish with a given case of military aggression. The primary sources of the second chapter, official statements from the governments of Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine, produce official statements concerning their perception of Russian actions and the stated purpose of their reaction. Diplomacy is a delicate balance, for the press releases of the targeted states' governments to fully articulate their reactions would be detrimental. Thus, the secondary sources are added to produce a more complete rendering of these countries' reactions, so that qualitative analysis may yield more comprehensive results.

Primary evidence will mostly consist of official press releases by the governments and various branches of Belarus, Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine. Foremost, these sources will be used to provide official recognition of any studies events taking place; the official stance is very important and never guaranteed when covering the Russian military or foreign policy. Additionally, the primary sources will provide an official narrative for a given event; this can later be contrasted with an analyst's position when secondary sources come into play. This is one of the roles secondary sources will play in the thesis: providing additional perspectives on instances of either military aggression or political reaction. This does not necessarily mean that all official positions will have a counter-argument, but rather gives room for analysts to give more nuance to the discussion. The secondary sources in question will come in one of three forms: academic articles generated out of scholarly intent, open-source analysis from think-tanks and analytical organizations, and government-commissioned research for policy solutions. These secondary sources may also give details that were omitted or overlooked by the official press

releases in the primary sources. Whether an organ of government is refusing to recognize some aspect, or facts did not make the final cut for brevity's sake, secondary sources can reliably provide additional details in order to generate a more complete telling of the studied events.

The target countries in this thesis, Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine, were chosen in order to assist the research in two ways. Foremost, each country may be used as a case study for how Russian military aggression affects different countries in different ways. To reiterate from the introduction, the study of Belarus displays how Russian military aggression affects Moscow's allies, Lithuania shows interaction between Russia, its allies, and the EU and NATO, while Ukraine provides an example of proxy conflict's effect on a country targeted by Russian military aggression. Other countries in the region could have also been used for study, such as Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, or Finland. However, Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine were selected for the thesis due to its ongoing civil war serving as a proxy-conflict with Russia and for being a greater focus of Russia's military exercises. Additionally, while the three series of Russian military exercises covered in this research, Zapad, Kavkaz, and Ocean Shield, will be studied in their effect on all of the targeted nations, there appears to be some correlation between individual exercises and particular target countries that Russia is trying to influence. For example, with Ocean Shield-2020, while the naval capabilities shown here have an effect on all of the target countries, the exercise has a much more profound and immediately relevant effect on Lithuania, as the exercise was primarily executed in the Baltic Sea. The Zapad-2017 exercise was designed to affect each of the target countries in a particular way. Zapad-2017 was designed to intimidate Ukraine by amassing a large military host in military exercise just north of their borders, Belarus was drawn into the exercise as an ally whether or not it wanted to be, and Lithuania was apparent shown to be an intended target of the rehearsed military actions, as the maneuvers' fictional

targets lie in the same direction and possessed similar capabilities. These three military exercises proved to be the most useful in the research, due to their scale, apparent targeting of other countries to affect policy, and having the greatest wealth of literature available for study. How the targeted countries reactions will be measured is by assuming a true neutral, non-responsive stance as the baseline for reactions. Countries that more willingly acquiesce to Moscow's goals can be considered to have a positive reaction (positive for Russia, not necessarily the target country), and countries that resist Moscow's policies will be considered to have reacted negatively.

Chapter Summary

In order to achieve the desired research results, the thesis has been bisected into two chapters. In the introduction, this thesis provides precursory information on both the topic and themes discussed throughout the work. This will allow the reader familiarize themself with the material before continuing on to the research.

Chapter 1 will be concerned with the analysis of three Russian military exercises: Zapad-2017, Kavkaz-2020, and Ocean Shield-2020. Here, each of the exercises will be described in detail. This will not only cover what their military and strategic objectives were, but also what they mean for Russian diplomacy. For example, the subsection on Zapad-2017 will cover the changes in approach from previous iterations of the Zapad-series of military exercises. In the section of Kavkaz-2020, Russia's ability to draw in potential allies to its military exercises is examined. And lastly, in the Ocean Shield-2020 military exercise, the continued evolution of Russia's naval doctrine and advancement of strategic capabilities is explored. Thus, the first chapter not only sets up the reader for a more nuanced understanding of other countries' reactions

in the second chapter, but this also provides analysis of Russia's motivations in carrying out these maneuvers.

In Chapter 2, the thesis will focus on how the countries targeted for study have reacted to the Russian shows of force discussed in chapter one. Chapter two will be organized into subsections for each of the three target countries: Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. From there, each country's subsection will entail how said country has reacted to Russian actions, as well as a best estimation as to why. These will only cover events in which there was some effect on the target country, so that if there was little to no reaction for a specific instance, then that event would not be described. This chapter of the thesis will also assess whether or not the reactions of the target countries were beneficial to the Kremlin's foreign policy goals, with a different aspect of policy examined for each country. For Belarus, this would generally be the country's loyalty as a Russian ally, as well as how reliable President Lukashenko can be for the Kremlin. With Ukraine, the analysis focuses on how well the young president has been able to withstand pressure from Moscow, as well as how divisions within Ukraine have affected its relationship with Russia, both in terms of its ongoing civil war and national demographics. With Lithuania, its position between a rock and a hard place are observed; though not bordering the main body of Russian territory, being situated between Belarus and Kaliningrad put it in an interesting strategic position, as well as having a small yet notable Russian population that Moscow attempts to leverage. The rationale for focusing on different aspects of foreign policy with each targeted country is to produce a broader picture of policies affected by Russian military aggression. This shows very specific uses of military aggression, demonstrating how the Kremlin can use a conventional military unconventionally, and with enough precision, to elicit very precise changes in its neighbors' policy.

Chapter 1: "For Every Action..." - Russia's Military Exercises

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian sphere of influence began to shrink drastically in Europe. As former Warsaw Pact countries were admitted into NATO and the European Union, Moscow's ability to affect the balance of power in Europe has diminished in recent years. Presently, the Baltic States' membership in NATO has allowed the alliance military access as far as the Russian border, a fact that the Kremlin remains keenly irritated by. In order to prevent more of Russia's sphere of influence from ceding to the west, the Kremlin has orchestrated consistent shows of force to remind its neighbors of its strength, or perhaps its proximity. As it stands, Russia is simply running out of buffer states between it and NATO. While Belarus separates it from Poland and Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia have joined the alliance years ago, and Ukraine solicits both NATO and the EU currently. What this forces Russia to do now is to play its foreign policy both very aggressively and very carefully, which by all accounts Moscow is excelling at. For this, the Kremlin has implemented large-scale military exercises as a tool with which it may manipulate its Eastern European neighbors.

As long as Russia is able to retain control of the diplomatic status quo between itself and its neighbors, or prevent a new, unfavorable status quo from forming, then their hegemony over Eastern Europe remains unchallenged. To this end, the Kremlin continually seeks to exert their influence in order to maintain it, in the case of what this research covers, this also includes their military. Their methods for achieving these goals are also generally non-combative, and there has normally been a clear distinction between the active measure campaigns of intelligence

services and the offensive and defensive duties of conventional military forces. However, the behavior of the Russian Federation military forces in the past decade has proven that coercion without violence can provide comparable and equally impactful results. Through the execution of military preparedness exercises, weapons testing, and the redeployment of forces internally, Russia is able to coerce its neighbors into diplomatic positions which are favorable to Russia's European foreign policy goals. Specifically, Russia is able to tailor its military exercises in order to produce specific reactions. Paradoxically, the methods that Russia uses in order to achieve its foreign policy goals are both coercive and non-coercive. Russia is using "violent" coercive methods (military) in non-violent situations (military exercises). Both violent and non-violent coercion exist and are present here; if there is a line between the two, Russia is playing jump-rope with it. This thesis hypothesizes that Russia is able to non-violently coerce its European neighbors, through its military exercises, to take specific diplomatic stances beyond merely reacting to a deterrent, but rather to shape attitudes that are beneficial to Russian foreign policy goals by acting on specific weaknesses of targeted countries. Belarus, Russia's closest yet still reluctant ally in Eastern Europe, attempts to remain friendly at a distance despite being drawn tightly into Russian orbit, as Moscow takes advantage of Minsk's political isolation and cultural ties. While the Baltic states have their security somewhat assured by NATO's Article V, Lithuania feels a unique pressure, as it is situated between Kaliningrad and Belarus. As for Ukraine and its civil war, in which Russia uses the rebels as a proxy, Kiev is forced to cede to Moscow control over the conflict's scale, lest it risk a direct war. The strategic and diplomatic situations for each of these countries is unique, yet Russia is able to apply military pressure that play upon each countries' weaknesses to advance its foreign policy goals with each.

ZAPAD-2017

The Russian Federation's Zapad-series of exercises have always been, historically, a show of force against their European neighbors. The classic example of this has always been the massive buildup of the armed forces for the ZAPAD-81 exercise, though few of its more recent iterations have come close (Sukhankin, 2017). The ZAPAD-2013 exercises were shortly followed by the Russian Federation's intervention into Ukraine; a tactic also pulled after the Kavkaz-2008 maneuvers. In some respects, Zapad-2017 followed and improved upon the standards set for it by the previous iterations of Zapad, but in others it went out of the way to subvert expectations (Johnson, 2017). Zapad-2017 was used to actively subvert western perceptions of the exercises and influence their policy, - unlike previous drills which were more or less displays of numbers, hardware, and tactics. In some aspects, the Russian military acts as expected, by using the exercises as a field test for their latest weapon systems and tactics (Russian MoD, 2017), as well as simulating attacks from a hypothetical state actor suspiciously similar to eastern NATO countries. However, either through negligence or nefarious plans, the total troop count was drastically overreported, and whether or not distant simultaneous drills were a part of Zapad-2017 or not remains unclear (Boulègue, 2017). Some international viewers latched on to the inflated numbers and feared for the worst, predicting another possible military intervention following its exercises, as with Ukraine and Georgia before. Even now, years after the conclusion of Zapad-2017, the details of the total number of troops participating remains unclear. Prior to drills, both western and Russian analysts called for absurdly large numbers for the troop total, ranging anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000. Many western analysts are now saying that Zapad-2017 was only approximately 40,000 strong, while Russian sources tend to range from 11,000 to 16,000. (Russian MoD, 2017). By meeting the goals of a traditional

Zapad-series exercise while simultaneously subverting expectations, Russian military planners were able to confuse and divide western analysts as to what the exercise was supposed to be for quite a while after its conclusion (Giles, 2017).

Perhaps unintentionally, the name Zapad has become somewhat of a double-entendre. The Zapad-series also holds the distinction of being named after its supposed target, as this has always been THE military exercise with which Russia directly confronts Europe, above all other exercises. The Zapad-2017 exercise was of a more limited scope than its predecessors, both in terms of personnel and the strategic goals it emulated through a hypothetical war. This conflict involved an attack on the Union State from their northwest by a trio of fictional coastal states, Lubenia, Vesbaria and Veyshnoriya, which are located between Russia, Belarus, and the Baltic Sea (Sukhankin, 2017). It does not appear that the military planners of Zapad-2017 concerned themselves with subtlety in regards to their simulated enemy (Boulègue, 2017). These states penetrated into Russian and Belarussian territory, attacking primarily with conventional military force while receiving ample assistance from asymmetrical, unmarked soldiers which had already infiltrated, as well as outside military assistance in the form of air and missile strikes. The goals of Zapad-2017 were for the Russian-Belarussian coalition to halt the advance of the Veyshnoriyans, recapture lost territory, and then to begin the early stages of a counter-offensive (Giles, 2017). The forces of the Russian Federation practiced what they do best in warfare: their tried-and-true method of advancing on land under the cover of heavy artillery actions. This method has been updated over the years to include additional support from air and naval forces, as well as special operations units, advanced reconnaissance, and more recently drones, all of which were present in these maneuvers (Russian MoD, 2017), (Kofman, 2017). Russian forces during this exercise first practiced gradual horizontal escalation, and then later switched to

vertical escalation. The exercises stopped short of simulating a nuclear response, but by that point there was little else to escalate into.

The Zapad-series of exercises have served Russia well as field-tests for its response to western aggression, perceived or otherwise. In doing so, it creates hypothetical nations to practice against that are usually obvious stand-ins for real-world rivals. On one hand, this allows Russia to tailor its response to a given state by performing dry-runs against its perceived capabilities; on the other hand, the country that the drills are supposed to emulate tends to become more wary around Russia as they train to best its military capabilities. The fictitious enemies in the Zapad-series have always been an allegory for NATO nations in particular, such as Germany or Poland, so it should come as no surprise that the three simulated attackers in the 2017 maneuvers were thinly-veiled stand-ins for the Baltic states. As members of NATO, any threat that the Baltics would have inherently becomes a problem for the entire alliance as well. While the Baltics are not likely to begin a military excursion into Russia, due to the fact that they are dwarfed by it, they certainly would not be able to resist a concerted assault from Russia either. Naturally, they should take the Zapad-2017 exercises to be a dry-run for a lightning strike by Russia into their territory instead. Russia is also unlikely to blitz the Baltics any time soon, lest they invoke Article V, although this is more than enough to make the Baltic governments worry when dealing with the Russian populations living within their borders. This has not stopped Russia from teasing a rapid deployment in exercises like Zapad-2017 and Ocean Shield-2020, but the threat of a real invasion is far off. Most European military advisors, though naturally worked up anytime Russia holds large exercises at their western borders, generally dismissed the Zapad-2017 exercises as just that, exercises. Nevertheless, the capabilities displayed through the Zapad-2017 exercise were enough to impress into the minds of Eastern

European leaders that the Russian military should not be treated lightly, but with great deference. (Giles, 2017)

It would be remiss if Russia's intimidation of Ukraine vis-à-vis Zapad-2017 was not compared to their actions in Crimea and the Ukrainian civil war. The Ukrainian situation says more about Russian wetworks, special forces, and/or their intelligence work, whereas Zapad-2017 showcased regular, conventional forces. The use of plainclothes or unmarked soldiers, combined with the dissemination of misinformation, in order to secure the annexation of Crimea, stands in stark contrast to a mass deployment of regular military forces.

Paradoxically, the Kremlin was able to make this point without putting forth near the manpower that the West was in such a hysteria over leading up to Zapad-2017. After making wild estimates that reached upwards of 100,000 soldiers, speculations made both within and without, the real number ended up being significantly lower, with professional analysts putting troop totals between 40,000 and 45,000 after the fact (Kofman, 2017). This misinformation campaign, beginning with exaggerated reports from Ukraine and Poland (Day, 2009), would gain traction with officials as high up as German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, both of whom believed in and then cited the 100,000 troop claim in an official capacity. (Singh, 2017), (RFE/RL, 2017). Admittedly, researching this portion of the Zapad-2017 exercises proved difficult, as Russian misinformation efforts began to show themselves with the sources of sources proving difficult to trace and the original Russian press releases long since being redacted. Had many reputable analysis groups and NATO and EU officials not all corroborated these claims of misleading troop numbers, then it may not have been possible to definitively prove Russian misinformation was at work. (Emmott, 2017), (Associated Press, 2017). This operation ended up serving two purposes for Russia, the first

strategic and the latter more political. First, the objective before the exercise was to completely derail any serious analysis of Zapad-2017 before it could take place with greatly exaggerated figures. No clear picture in the west appeared of what actually happened at Zapad-2017 until after the maneuvers were quite concluded. A comprehensive analysis could not be formed with the official headcount intentionally inaccurate and the best guesses ranging wildly. The Kremlin and the Russian press exacerbated this by releasing pre-written memos on what was occurring during Zapad-2017 and immediately before that were not representative of then-current events; as the timed press-releases were evidently indicative of plans changed and personnel since moved or not present. Whether this was intentional or simply poor form remains uncertain, although the end result on its spectators was certainly beneficial for Moscow (Giles, 2017). It is the best estimation of this research that the Kremlin absolutely knew what they were doing, though it is unknown and not easily proven whether or not Russian media was in on it as well, or simply reporting the info provided by the Russian government. This research believes in the likelihood of some Russian media executives being told beforehand what part to play, though again, this cannot be currently proven one way or another.

Following the conclusion of the Zapad exercises, the Russian Ministry of Defense finally released accurate commentary on the whole affair. The official numbers produced were far under western analysts' projections, with the Russian chiefs of the general staff reporting that only "About 12.7 thousand military personnel are involved in the exercise." (Russian MoD, 2017). This then allowed Moscow to claim, now with a greater degree of credibility, that the West was engaging in fear-mongering and its tendency for military aggression was greatly exaggerated. Since Russia was currently feeding the civil war in Ukraine, no one was really convinced, although this did serve the Kremlin to embarrass western military analysts and the European

press. What this has done to western analysis long-term is undermine its ability to assess what is a clear threat from Russia, and what is smoke-and-mirrors. As this military exercise intended, western analysis now will take longer to reach its conclusions about Russia's goals in military exercises and buildups out of fear of "jumping-the-gun" with inaccurate or premature analysis.

KAVKAZ-2020

Following the Zapad-series in 2017, Russia's next district-wide military exercises were Vostok-2018 and Tsentr-2019 (Sukhankin, 2019). While some influence was exerted over the course of these two exercises, targeted influence over Eastern Europe would resume with Kavkaz-2020. The Kavkaz-2020 military exercises were a series of exercises hosted by the Russian Federation in western Russia and the Black Sea. These were among the largest military exercises held by the Russian Federation to date, comprising approximately 80,000 military personnel from six different countries (Kofman, 2020), (*New Defense Order Strategy, 2020*). The exercises stretched across the entire Russian southern military district and into the Russian central military district, located on five ground ranges, as well as the Arzgirsky and Kopansky aerial ranges and in the Black and Caspian Sea. The primary two ground ranges were Kaputsin Yar and Ashuluk, although the Prudboy, Adanak, Tunali, and Rayevsky ranges were utilized to a lesser extent. A portion of these exercises, which lasted from September 21st to the 25th, were carried out by a coalition of all the participant states under the unified command of the Russian Southern Military District (Russian MoD, 2020), (Kofman, 2020). The six countries which contributed military personnel to the simulation's coalition were Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar, Pakistan, and the host country, Russia. The nature of these exercises was a simulated response to a hypothetical attack by a terrorist force that was supported by a conventional military force. The goal of the Kavkaz-2020 drills was to rapidly deploy in order to halt the

advances made by the simulated enemy, and then to organize for a counter-offensive which would recapture lost territory and continue pushing towards the southwest. The exercises succeeded in fulfilling Russia's stated military objectives and provided an excellent showcase for both tactics and hardware; however, the end results were rather mixed of Russian soft-power goals (Sukhankin, 2020)

While the vast majority of the military drills within the Kavkaz-2020 superstructure were carried out by members of the Russian armed forces, some maneuvers were performed as a coalition force with all of the present countries' militaries contributing. This group, in addition to the Russian forces present, consisted of Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar, and Pakistan. (Daly, 2020). Belarus, China, and to a lesser extent Pakistan, all seeming to simply confirm Russia's desire to maintain its existing political-military alliances. The inclusion of Myanmar indicates that Russia seeks to remain politically active in Asia as well. However, though the countries present with Russia in its Kavkaz-2020 exercise show some degree of Moscow's political ambitions, more can be learned by the nations absent from the military show.

Though five additional countries were present for the Kavkaz-2020 drills, the invite list was much longer. Some countries, such as India, Azerbaijan, or Iran, simply sent military observers rather than an armed contingent to take part in the exercises. In the case of India, there was the excuse of there being the risk of COVID-19 for not sending a contingent of their armed forces to the exercises, although the best speculation for their withdrawal was to save face from being in the same maneuvers as their rivals, China and Pakistan. With the absence of India, a rising and influential power, Russia's diplomatic profile is hurting to some degree (Daly, 2020). India, the second most populous country in the world, and a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, could have produced more influence for Russia among such states had they been

involved in their wargames. Unfortunately for the Kremlin, India passing up their offer means a missed opportunity for Russian foreign policy goals, perhaps even hurting their reputation abroad.

What sets the Kavkaz-2020 exercise apart from the other military exercises covered by the research, is that while Zapad-2017 and Ocean Shield-2020 can be characterized by their goal of intimidating target nations, Kavkaz-2020 can be seen as a diplomatic gesture to the guest nations involved. These maneuvers were presented as an anti-terror exercise, and the presence of international forces also boosts Russian prestige. This should be extremely worrisome to Ukraine, that Russia would be pulling off such a stunt in the Black Sea. If Russia is able to put together an international coalition for a mock exercise, then it is indicative of the support Russia has from allies. (Daly, 2020). What this means for Ukraine is that Russian claims on its territory or breakaway republics may be supported by states cordial with Moscow, and that if Russia pushed for a settlement for the conflict in Eastern Ukraine or legitimacy for its Crimean annex, then it could have international support. For Ukraine, Kavkaz-2020 was less an instant of Russian military aggression, but rather a display of diplomatic reach to intimidate Kiev; the fact that it was a military exercise was merely a pretext for this unconventional method of aggression.

OCEAN SHIELD-2020

The Ocean Shield-2020 military exercises, unlike the Kavkaz and Zapad exercises, focused almost entirely on the Russian Federation's naval capabilities. Though smaller than the two aforementioned exercises, Ocean Shield-2020 may be considered to have the largest scope. This series of drills and maneuvers involved ships and aircraft from Russia's Baltic fleet and Northern fleet, as well as naval aircraft from to Caspian Sea Flotilla and the Pacific fleet. Often

working in tandem, these fleets and their aircraft practiced both independent and interfleet operations, covering a wide variety of roles that the Russian navy can fill and their capabilities to accomplish them (Russian MoD, 2020). Specifically, the ocean shield exercises tested the capabilities of these fleets to deny access to submarine and aerial forces of a simulated enemy, the ability of smaller vessels to rapidly deploy and support friendly forces in combined-arms operations, and how well the fleets involved were able to operate outside of their home sea (Russian MoD, 2020). Each of these capabilities tested are complementary to three facets of Russian military doctrine: area denial, combined arms operations, and versatility.

The first point, area denial, is fairly standard to Russian military doctrine. Unlike American military strategy, which revolves around gaining aerial superiority and reflects American global capabilities, Russian strategy reverses this doctrine by denying an opposing force the ability to operate in a given area or eliminating access to a specific field (Grady, 2020). An important type of exercise employed in Ocean Shield-2020 were the anti-submarine and anti-air maneuvers. These focused on shutting down the ability of a simulated adversary to operate in the presence of Russian military forces or to interfere with military plans, in this case naval (Russian MoD, 2020). This assumes that a hypothetical enemy would be advanced enough to challenge the Russian navy for control of the seas in that theatre, implying that said adversary would be a fairly well-equipped country with developed air and sea forces, such as one of Russia's immediate European neighbors, or any NATO member state.

In training for the possibility of symmetrical warfare, a nation must be able to contest all areas of combat, land, air, sea, etc. If a military is unable to at least contest every area, then their enemy is able to operate freely within that field and ensure that the given country's military cannot control any field. For example, if an armed force cannot contest ground control, then their

adversary may freely deploy anti-air and anti-ship weaponry from land to interfere with the armed force's operations. Similarly, an uncontested airspace allows for an air force to make strikes against all surface targets, and an unchallenged navy can serve as a mobile weapons platform against all manner of targets. Thus, victory is best assured through combined-arms operations, in which multiple branches of an armed forces work together to attack or defend across all fronts. The Russian navy demonstrated proficiency in combined-arms during Ocean Shield-2020 by having its naval forces assist marine landing craft deployed in the Baltic Sea, as well as seaplanes work with the Russian navy in anti-submarine exercises in the North Sea (Ltz. Van Lokeren, 2020). These drills demonstrated the ability of the Russian navy to work seamlessly with both ground and air forces in combined arms operations, with neither the size nor number of vessels involved hindering exercises.

For the last tenet of doctrine, the Russian Ministry of Defense has placed special attention on keeping their armed forces versatile, in order to effectively serve the wide variety of defensive needs that Russia has. From counter-terrorism in the Caucasus and South-Central Russia, to maintaining an active military presence in the arctic, to the seasonal arms races and aggressive maneuvers Russia does with the rest of Europe, the Kremlin has to maintain military readiness for every conceivable environment. With forces from four fleets involved in Ocean Shield-2020 operating in both the Baltic and North Seas, the Russian navy has clearly put this doctrine to practice. It is apparent merely from the participation of forces from several distinct regions that the environment has had little bearing on the Russian military's ability to deploy its forces (Hurt, 2020). This gives Moscow's armed forces a much wider threat range if they are not limited by environmental operability, which could prove extremely difficult to counter if an opposing force cannot control the scope or location of a hypothetical conflict.

It is quite notable that the naval forces of the Ocean Shield-2020 exercise mostly contained smaller vessels, nominally corvettes, destroyers, submarines, and some missile cruisers, this is reflective the Russian defense industry not producing "great-ships" such as aircraft carriers or large cruisers, due to either a reluctance or inability, but also hints at a change in doctrine. In place of these hallmarks of naval supremacy, the Russian military-industrial base in recent years has been focused on developing new technologies such as hypersonic missiles and nuclear-armed or mine-laying drones. Hypothetically, with the development of anti-capital ship weaponry, the need to, or utility of, fielding large ships could become a thing of the past, going the way of the dinosaur, dodo, or dreadnought.

Additionally, logistical acumen was also tested. Support vessels of the Russian navy were able to resupply their maritime forces both during operations at sea and at the inter-fleet level. The transport of reserve material amounted to 13 thousand tons in total. According to the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Nikolai Eymenov, the resupplies were carried out without either disruption or delay, accrediting logistical corps by saying "Timely fulfillment of material and technical support measures made it possible to fulfill the tasks assigned to the troops (forces) of the Navy without disruptions and transfers." (Russian MoD, 2020). For a Russian naval task force to be able to continue their mission without constraint from a window of operation is a significant advantage. With the capability to take on or off load more supplies, ammunition, or even change personnel during a mission, a Russian flotilla can remain combat ready until they are actively engaged, greatly increasing their threat rating to anyone planning to counter it.

The implications of the Ocean Shield-2020 military exercises are as far-reaching as the Russian navy's capabilities. These exercises show, in broad strokes, that the Russian navy can

have its ships active anytime, anywhere. Without many realizing it, this puts Russia one step closer to having a sufficiently potent blue-water navy necessary for great-power status. It also seems that Russia has accomplished this while circumventing the expectation that they become master shipwrights and mill out a dozen aircraft carriers. A preference towards smaller vessels, like corvettes and destroyers, allow the Russian Federation to produce smaller ships more quickly and cheaply than their equivalent tonnage or firepower in capital ships. Actually, Russia's advancements in both surface-level and submersible drones, potentially capable of laying mine and nuclear ordinance, as well as hypersonic missiles, may very well set a future standard for naval doctrine. Rapidly deploying ship-killer weapons that are difficult to counter in large numbers on small, maneuverable vessels may very well signal the end of an era for large fleet formations, and future naval warfare may show preference towards smaller task groups. Of course, aircraft carriers will always have utility as a mobile airfield, but their usefulness may become limited to scenarios which guarantee uncontested waters as seaborne drones and hypersonic anti-ship missiles are developed further.

More worrying, to those that feel threatened in recent years by Moscow's military pressure, is that the Ocean Shield-2020 exercises were purely offensive in nature. Establishing access and area denial, on top of supporting seaborne armor and infantry in making landfall, simply smacks of planning an invasion. Granted, Russia remains unlikely to launch a surprise attack on a European neighbor without reason, but simply showing that they can may be enough to skew their relationship with their western neighbors. Nevertheless, this development should still be cause for concern to those worried about Russian interference taking on a more martial tone (Hurt, 2020). In the event that a country should find themselves at odds with the Russian military, then they would not be able to count time and preparation among their advantages, as

the Ocean Shield-2020 exercises have so clearly demonstrated the Russian navy's ability to rapidly and seamlessly deploy to any accessible sea, capable of remaining operational there for an indefinite period of time.

It should come as no surprise that Russia's combined-arms exercise in landing seabourne troops with naval support was targeted at Lithuania. Part of the rationale behind the buildup of Kaliningrad was support for operations in the Baltic Sea. What Ocean Shield-2020 means for Lithuania in particular is that Russian naval capacity allows it to strike quickly and decisively, to the point that not having a land border with Russia's main territory is irrelevant for defensive purposes. Further, the Russian navy has shown through the more endurance-oriented aspects of Ocean Shield-2020 that it has the tonnage to survive some counter-attacks and harassment from opposing forces in a hypothetical Baltic conflict. This exercise has explicitly undermined historic contributors to Lithuanian national security, in that non-contiguous borders with Russia and NATO relief from the sea will not be sufficient to deter Russian aggression in the Baltics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research demonstrates how Russian military exercises specifically target the weaknesses of Russia's Eastern European neighbors in order to undermine their options politically. By presenting itself as an inevitable force, Russia is forcing its neighbors to remain open to Moscow diplomatically, so as not to worsen any military aggression. What has separated these three military exercises from generic military aggression is that each one undermined targeted nation's politics as well. The Zapad-2017 exercise showed that the cost of resistance was too high, so that Russia's neighbors must remain open to Moscow's wishes; Ocean Shield-2020 also reiterated this, though more specifically for Lithuania, as well as producing hard-counters to

former western advantages over the Russian Navy. And lastly, Kavkaz-2020 displayed the diplomatic support the Russian military efforts could get, so as to actualize, for Ukraine, the possibility of diplomatic concessions to Russia or the reality that it may be forced upon them regardless.

Chapter 2: "...There is an Equal And Opposite Reaction." - Russia's Neighbors' Response

Introduction

      While Russia always seeks to come from a position of strength in its foreign policy, this can manifest itself in multiple ways. The most readily apparent show of strength would be traditional military prowess, easily demonstrated with elaborate and massive exercises. Conversely, there is diplomatic strength, in which the weight of one's personality or a nation's influence may be used to sway those around them. What the Kremlin has been so cleverly able to accomplish is the use of what is nominally considered brute force for more subtle ends. Had Russian military exercises merely been tests of combat abilities, then there would have been little need for this research. But to continue with the analysis of Chapter 1, Russian military coercion is much more than a simple show of arms. What this research covers are the reactions that such exercises are able to elicit. Russia carries out its strategic posturing in such a way that it is able to tailor the responses of its neighbors to suit its needs. For Belarus, a country with nominally positive relations with Russia, reactions are produced which strengthen that alliance amidst internal unrest and a seemingly contradictory relationship with Ukraine. As for Ukraine itself, Russian forces are able to operate in a manner which isolates and intimidates the country while preventing the escalation of its civil war. Lastly, while Lithuania seeks to insulate itself against Russian influence through collective defense and membership in western alliances, Russian forces have been able to react well to mutual assistance guarantees and develop unique strategies to counter perceived weaknesses. The impact of Russian military aggression on states can take

on a wide variety of forms, and may not even be readily apparent for some time. Changes could either be a strengthening of ties or a greater separation, depending on the existing relationship between a given state and Russia. At this stage of the research, the reactions of the five target countries are observed. A baseline is determined for a country's relationship with Russia, and then the changes in said relationship resulting from military aggression are observed. This allows for the testing of the first part of the hypothesis, whether or not Russian military actions are able to shape Eastern European policy responses. The second part of the hypothesis, the degree to which non-violent coercion has an effect, is answered later in Chapter 3.

Belarus

Minsk's relationship with Moscow is a complicated one, in that while Belarus wishes to remain close to Russia, it does not want to do so at the expense of its autonomy. By remaining an ally of Russia, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is able to secure the outside support necessary to guarantee a firm grasp on his country. This also earns Belarus a partner for free trade and access to a discounted fuel supply, as opposed to dealing with the sanctions and external pressure that an authoritarian regime like his own might incur if the country associated primarily with NATO and the EU. However, Belarus risks becoming trapped in Moscow's orbit if it were to cooperate too strongly with Russia. In light of Russia justifying its annexation of Crimea by claiming that it was protecting the peninsula's Russian population, President Lukashenko has since reconsidered his policy on suppressing Belarusian identity and is now promoting it as a means to temper Russian nationalism. After decades of promoting Russian as the primary language of Belarus and criminalization of Belarusian nationalism, this sudden reversal of policy has chilled the country's relationship with Russia. Though a renaissance of Belarusian identity continues, both the Zapad-2017 exercises and Lukashenko's need for Russian

support for his regime in the wake of his 2020 reelection will continue to keep Belarus tied to Russia politically and militarily (Tetrault-Farber, 2020). Both instances have presented Russia with ample opportunity to position security forces within Belarus; this ensures that for the time being Minsk will have to remain in lock-step with Moscow, whether it wants to or not.

Belarus' diplomatic balancing act with Russia has allowed it a greater degree of control over its relationship with Russia than other nations. Foremost, Belarus has been able to reap the benefits of being both a key ally of Russia and as a neutral power. While these are seemingly mutually exclusive roles, Belarus has been able to swap between them based on the context of a given situation. For example, Belarus has advertised itself as a neutral power for mediating the Ukrainian civil war. While a country that is normally such a close ally of Russia would never be assumed to truly be a neutral power, Belarus has been able to establish credence towards this claim by acting as a middleman for trade between Russia and Ukraine. With Russian culture, media, and civilian goods so permeated throughout Ukrainian society, it remains essential that some avenue of access to these remains open. Belarus fulfils that role. Russia appears to tolerate this to some degree, due to the fact that this keeps Ukraine close to it economically and culturally. Such an arrangement gives both sides of the proxy war a basis for the notion that if Belarus can be trusted as a middleman for economic and informational exchange, then perhaps it can serve a similar role in a diplomatic capacity as well. Nonetheless, Russia continues to view Belarus as a key ally in its European diplomatic and strategic goals (Belarus MoD, 2020). Most obviously, good relations with Belarus are essential if Russia is to be able to freely access its Kaliningrad territory. Otherwise, Russia would need to rely upon the sea lanes, and the goodwill of several skeptical NATO countries to even access said routes. Belarus also serves as a strategic territory for accessing the Baltic states. This reason for Belarus' strategic advantage in its

relationship with Russia is relatively complex, as it is nominally hypothetical yet often thought out by both sides of the equation, and yet is a double-edged sword for Belarus. Lithuania does not share a land border with Russia's main territory, only Kaliningrad, which maintains only a relatively small military garrison. In the event that Russia was to engage in a conflict with any one of the Baltic states, the mutually agreed upon collective defense of the Baltics would put Russia at war with all three simultaneously, to say nothing of NATO's Article V (Russian MoD), (Belarus MoD), (Shuster, 2014). Therefore, Russia would need the means to engage all three Baltic states simultaneously in order to prevent a prolonged conflict, and access through Belarus allows Russia to strike at Lithuania. This is advantageous for Belarus, as it ensures that it will remain in Russia's good graces, lest either side resort to more drastic measures to maintain their regional goals. Unfortunately for Belarus, this also means that Russia counts on passage through it at any given time, and effectively forces their armed forces to work together. (Belarus MoD). These binding circumstances were evident during the Zapad-2017 exercises, in which Russia orchestrated mass troop movements through Belarus, with some worrying that the military drills were a smokescreen for Russia to maintain a military presence within Belarus.

Initially, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko had reacted somewhat negatively to the concept of Russia military forces passing freely through his country. However, any diplomatic fallout that may have occurred from Minsk not seeing eye-to-eye with Moscow on this was mitigated through the active participation of Belarusian forces in the Zapad-2017 exercises right alongside their Russian counterparts. Russia now seems willing to overlook the encouragement of Belarusian national identity, among other activities of Belarus, so long as they maintain interoperability between their two forces (Lennon, 2019). As time has passed, however, Russia's ability to freely project force through Belarus has become a mixed blessing for the

Lukashenko regime. In the wake of the highly contentious 2020 Belarusian presidential elections, that country experienced a series of protests and civil unrest that called the legitimacy of President Lukashenko's office into question. Fearing that the Belarusian public's outcry would evolve into an anti-government movement similar to Ukraine's Maidan revolution in 2014, President Lukashenko and President Putin moved to hash out a deal in which Russian security forces could be deployed as a stabilizing force as a last-ditch effort. Obviously, President Lukashenko would much rather handle his instability problems independently, but his relationship with Moscow does give him options, namely to ensure the survival of his regime at all costs and Russian intervention as a deterrent against any domestic movement that would pose a serious threat to his rule (Tetrault-Farber, 2020).

Overall, Belarus has reacted somewhat positively towards Russian military actions, although there does remain concerns that Russia may overexert an unwanted military influence upon Belarus. President Lukashenko appears to have accepted the fact that if he wants to maintain internal stability, then he will require Moscow as an outside guarantor. Additionally, the Zapad-2017 exercises appear to have reassured Belarus of its security as an ally of Moscow (Russian MoD, 2017), (Giles,2017), which leads this research to assess that Russia has been able to elicit positive relations from Belarus. (Tétrault-Farber, 2020). This is not altogether a bad deal for the Lukashenko regime, as increased economic ties to the West would do him no good if they came at the come of his government's stability. Further, the Zapad-2017 exercises allowed Belarus to further improve their relationship with Russia through cooperation with the Union State's military maneuvers, so as to promote further coordination and interoperability between the two governments.

Lithuania

Lithuania, as the Baltic state furthest away from both Moscow and its influence, is actively seeking to strengthen its ties with the West as to negate Russian aggression (Lithuania MoFA, 2017). This is a set and steady diplomatic course for the country, noted by its efforts to join the European Union and NATO as soon as it was able following the collapse of the Soviet Union, much like its fellow Baltic nations (MoFA, 2016). Indeed, domestic changes in Lithuania's federal government have hardly ever sought to alter this course of policy, and for good reason. Lithuania's re-emergence as a nation following the Russian Civil War was short-lived, and with Soviet annexation of the country and subsequent deportation of over 100,000 Lithuanians, there is no love lost between Lithuania today and the Russian Federation. Modern Lithuanian foreign policy is heavily Euro-centric. This much is evident from the stated foreign policy of Lithuania. The Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Lithuania reiterates several times in its policy statements how it seeks to draw closer to its (Western) European neighbors in as many ways as it can. The foreign policy of Lithuania seeks to keep both its domestic and international policies in line with those of fellow European Union states. This is also facilitated by seeking to attract heavy foreign investment, as well as keep its exports and imports as tied to Europe as possible. As for its diplomatic stance on Russia, the Foreign Ministry's policy statements are noticeably curt (MoFA Lithuania, 2020). Most mentions of the Russian Federation as worded as if Russian invasion were imminent, and that Lithuania's primary security concern was deterring Moscow's advances (Chichowlas, 2015). To add insult to injury, Lithuanian policy explicitly states that it will not recognize the secessionist movements in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as denouncing any occupations (MoFA Lithuania, 2020). As a result, any aggressive military coercion that would pull Belarus closer to Russia or try to keep Ukraine in line is going to have

an adverse effect on Russia's relationship with Lithuania. There appears to be little to no course of action that Moscow could take that would noticeably warm relations with Lithuania; if Russia wants to keep Lithuania close, it will have to be motivated by a fear of force.

The message that Moscow sends to Lithuania through the Ocean Shield-2020 exercise is one of hopelessness. Since Moscow has little advantage over the European Union or NATO in attracting the Baltic countries, it must instead undermine any promises coming out of the West. To this end, the Ocean Shield-2020 exercises demonstrate specific ways in which Russia can undermine Lithuanian national security if it so chooses. For example, one of the maneuvers performed was a Russian flotilla attacking simulated land targets while supporting a force of Russian marines making a beach landing, with an emphasis on completing the operation as quickly as possible. (Russian MoD, 2020). What this combined-arms exercise tells Lithuania is that Russia is just capable of cutting them off from the west, if an armed conflict were to arise, as it would be in mounting a land invasion from the east, Lithuania is truly surrounded. What's more, the emphasis on speed and accuracy calls NATO's Article V into question: what good is a defensive pact if one capitulates before its allies can even respond. Even as Russia began to modernize its military and build up Kaliningrad in the early 2010's, Lithuanian policymakers began to have doubts about their security under NATO. (Cichowlas, 2015). It is the assessment of this research that Moscow was able to elicit a positive reaction from Lithuania, in which the country on a national level has had its faith in NATO undermined by Russian military activities.

The Ocean Shield-2020 forces Lithuania's hand so that it must deal with Russia. This exercise has demonstrated that despite not bordering the Russian mainland, Lithuania can no longer deal exclusively with the West, the Kremlin's abilities for force projection have overcome historical boundaries of Lithuania's insulation from direct Russian contact. Furthermore, the

Zapad-2017 exercises show that Russia is capable of wiping resistance from the Baltic area at a rate that a sustainable defense cannot be mounted. Lithuania must now take heed to Moscow's whims, as there is no other alternative that would not raise tensions. Thus, Moscow's Zapad-2017 and Ocean Shield-2020 military exercises have ensured that Lithuania will remain amicable to Russian interests under duress of sparking tensions, resulting in a favorable outcome for Russian strategy.

Ukraine

Few countries should envy the political position of Ukraine right now. On one hand, its relationship with Moscow is going as poorly as ever, given that Russia is actively targeting Eastern Ukraine for territorial expansion. Estranged from Russia politically, Ukraine has been forced to maintain a balancing act between consuming Russian goods and media for economic and social needs, and creating an identity independent of its former hegemon. This has proved to be straining at best, and outright destabilizing at worst, with many Ukrainians, their businesses, and even elected officials continuing to maintain ties to Russia throughout the conflict (Kharybin, 2019). On the other hand, Ukraine is very limited in how close it can align itself with Western Europe. Due to the active proxy war going on between Ukraine and Russia, NATO is unable to provide any significant commitments to Ukraine's defense, lest the alliance escalates the conflict and risks war with Russia. This combination has left Ukraine between a rock and a hard place diplomatically. After assuming the Ukrainian presidency, political newcomer Volodymyr Zelensky has attempted to play both sides of the West/Russian conflict of interests, yet so far little has changed in the Ukrainian civil war. Though he has offered concessions during ceasefire talks to both Russia and the separatist territories, as well as keeping Ukraine open for business relations to them, Russian military posturing remains as focused as ever.

It is important to contextualize how Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian civil war by proxy has affected their relationship with Ukraine. Of all the countries affected by Russian military aggression, Ukraine has certainly faced the worst of it. Due to how deeply Russian influence is entrenched in Ukrainian society, they are able to continue openly flaunting their support of the separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine, as well as occupy the Crimean Peninsula and Sea of Azov, and still have Ukraine be willing to conduct trade and conflict negotiations with Russia. Of course, it is still necessary for Russia to maintain plausible deniability with their involvement in Eastern Ukraine, as Russia is less concerned with Kiev's response than it is international outcry. This has had the interesting effect of countries treating the Ukrainian civil war and Russia's military posturing as two separate issues, with the former being a concealment of violent action while the latter is a display of restrained non-violence. Granted, the Kremlin would likely combine the two if it thought it could get away with it, but while Ukraine lacks the capacity to completely resist, the rest of the civilized world would be very up-at-arms at the thought of symmetric state-to-state warfare in the present day. It is solely for this reason that Moscow will not combine its efforts to intimidate Ukraine militarily with its support for the separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. This has proven a silver lining for Ukraine, as by dividing Russian military aggression into two separate issues, formal and informal, they are able to actually somewhat manage the overtures of a much more powerful state's coercion.

Ukraine has gone through two presidential administrations since the conclusion of the Maidan Revolution and the outbreak of their civil war. The first post-Maidan president, Petro Poroshenko, sought to take a hardline stance against Russia from the beginning of the conflict, while the second president, Volodymyr Zelensky, can be characterized as having a more populist

approach and seeking to appease all factions. The Poroshenko administration was characterized by an attempt to make a clean break from the influence of Russian economic and foreign policy interests in his country. This was met with limited success in that it was able to counter Russian influence in Eastern Ukraine, as well as solicit foreign support from the likes of the United States and other NATO countries, but was unable to envision an end to the conflict (President of Ukraine, 2020). This inability to work towards any meaningful conflict resolution was a result of an unwillingness to compromise with separatist movements or Russia, as well as focusing on his appeal solely to the West diplomatically, and mostly to Ukrainian nationalists domestically. Though his arms sales and training deals with the West improved Ukraine's position in the actual conflict, his Ukrainian-centric domestic focus not only cost Poroshenko his next presidential election, but also alienated large swaths of the population, who either still held strong ties to Russia or had mixed loyalties with no strong favorite. This overreliance on a nationalist-bloc would give the Ukrainian presidency to the young political outsider Volodymyr Zelensky, who was able to appeal as a populist and an everyman to most demographics. The agreeable new president has since been able to open channels for negotiations between the separatists and Russia and made limited progress; unfortunately for the Zelensky administration this has also involved a willingness to compromise, which Moscow intends to exploit to the fullest. He has been able to continue to foster stronger ties with the West and secure the continuation of arms sales and training (President of Ukraine, 2020), yet this has not proven enough to gain an upper hand in the conflict. Though an eventual resolution to the Ukrainian Civil War is more likely than ever, it also means that independence for Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Russia's retention of Crimea, have to be considered by Ukraine. Kiev simply is not in a position to achieve all of its war goals, and if President Zelensky is to reach an end to the conflict, may have to accept the

reality of ceding territory to the separatists. Another adverse effect of Zelensky's populist approach is that by letting up on his predecessor's hardline stance against Russian influence, pro-Russian portions of the Ukrainian population have been able to strengthen their position and even claim significant representation in the government (Kuzio, 2020). Though primarily in Eastern and North-Eastern Ukraine, local and regional governments run by pro-Russian politicians give any would-be secessionist movements incentive to take action, since the existing political framework is now in their favor (Alim, 2020). As result, the Zelensky administration has not been able to prevent the spread of Russian influence domestically, which if left unchecked could fuel more secessionist movements and possibly escalate the conflict.

Ironically, for all of Proshenko's hawkishness, it seems that the Zelensky administration has been more successful in deterring Russian military aggression. Poroshenko's mistake was in relying too hard on Ukrainian nationalism, which only seems to have deepened the divide within Ukraine between loyalists and separatists. The show of force from the Zapad-2017 exercises was enough to incite Poroshenko to shore up Ukraine's defenses in order to present some degree of deterrence. However, Zapad-2017 was never a prelude to an actual invasion, as some western analysts might have claimed. Instead, Poroshenko played directly into Moscow's hands by engaging in hawkish behavior. It was very likely that the Kremlin expected this reaction from a President that ran on a strong nationalist platform; by providing Poroshenko his boogeyman of an aggressive Russian military, his hardline reaction deepened divides within Ukraine and helped Moscow to solidify their gains among the separatists. The research assesses that the Poroshenko administration strongly elicited a positive reaction for Moscow from its reaction.

Zelensky has done his best to keep Ukraine from fracturing any further, and by doing so has reduced the mileage that Moscow could get from outright aggression. So in this sense, he has

proven more successful in deterring Russian aggression than his rival. Unfortunately for Ukraine, Russia appears to have already adapted to the situation and changed tactics. The Kavkaz-2020 military exercises, unlike the more aggressive Zapad-2017, was more about promoting cooperation between Russia and allies, old and new. This demonstrates that Russia is adopting a more conciliatory approach to diplomacy; it can be inferred that Moscow wants to be perceived as an amicable partner, likely in an effort to draw Ukraine to the negotiating table. Thus, Poroshenko and Zelensky administrations serve as a two-part act for Russia; first, Ukraine is divided through aggressive behavior from within and without, second, Russian gains are solidified when a new administration comes to Kiev and both sides seek an end to the conflict. While Russia has made little effort to signal an end to hostilities, the Kremlin may prefer Ukraine be the one to first offer peace settlements, so as to not show weakness by wanting a ceasefire. Whether or not Russia has another act planned for military aggression in Ukraine, it is the assessment of this research that Russian military activity with Kavkaz-2020 has provoked a favorable reaction from the Zelensky administration.

The biggest challenges that Ukraine faces is how it will react to an international community that sides with Russia diplomatically. As evidenced by the international cooperation that Russia received when hosting the Kavkaz-2020 exercises, Moscow could have international support if it seeks a status quo between Ukraine and its separatists. Further, Ukraine will be forced to deal with whatever deal that Russia hands them, as the Zapad-2017 exercises demonstrate that the cost of conflict with Russia, even with potential NATO backing, would be too great. In this way, both the Zapad-2017 and Kavkaz-2020 military exercises have been used by Russia to communicate a position of both diplomatic and military dominance, thus, Ukraine has become extremely limited in terms of its potential responses to Russian aggression. And by

controlling the opportunities available to Kiev, Moscow has effectively used its military exercises to frame Russian-Ukrainian diplomacy to its favor.

 Conclusion

All three military exercises discussed in the first chapter, Zapad-2017, Kavkaz-2020, and Ocean Shield-2020 have been used in ways that have produced reactions positive for Moscow. Beginning Zapad-2017 provoking concerns of conflict with Lithuania and Ukraine, Russia has used its major military exercises to shape how it is perceived by its Eastern European neighbors for the past several years. All three of these exercises have been the center of discussion for the targeted nations of Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine's relationship with Russia, regardless of how that relationship varies between states. For Belarus, this has meant the President Lukashenko's destiny as a ruler is directly tied to Moscow's favor, and that while this alliance is generally beneficial, Belarus has little alternative to going along with whatever Russia plans for the two nations. For Lithuania, the Baltic state has been shown first through Zapad-2017 and again with Ocean Shield-2020 that it will have to hedge its bets with NATO. Russia's capability to strike too quickly, and too hard, for NATO to save Lithuania, means that it will always have to at least consider Moscow's wishes when formulating policy. And as for Ukraine, first led on by Zapad-2017 to act defensively, and then shown through Kavkaz-2020 Russia's softening position, both Ukrainian administrations have performed precisely as Moscow has intended. For the reactions to each military exercise in recent years to have been integral to the diplomatic stances Russia's Eastern European neighbors, this research can definitively conclude that Russia has been able to effectively use its conventional military forces as a tool for shaping its neighbors' policy.

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