



A Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa®) Report

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Russia's Sentimental Revisionist Approach to Competition and Conflict

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What is ViTTa?

NSI's Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) provides rapid response to critical information needs by pulsing a global network of subject matter experts (SMEs) to generate a wide range of expert insight. For the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Future of Global Competition and Conflict project, ViTTa was used to address 12 key questions provided by the project's Joint Staff sponsors. The ViTTa team received written response submissions from 65 subject matter experts from academia, government, military, and industry. This report consists of:

1. A summary overview of the expert contributor response to the ViTTa question of focus.
2. The full corpus of expert contributor responses received for the ViTTa question of focus.
3. Biographies of expert contributors.

Cover image: https://www.prosperity.com/application/files/thumbnails/small/3114/7802/0180/Russia_header.jpg

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Question of Focus

[Q4] How does Russia perceive the continuum of conflict? How does Russia plan for, operate within, and manage risk within the competitive space? From the Russian perspective, what constitutes legitimate or acceptable deterrence, compellence, and escalation management? What are the implications of those differences for senior political and military decision makers in the US?

Subject Matter Expert Contributors

David C. Gompert (US Naval Academy), Dr. Edward N. Luttwak (CSIS), Dr. Sean McFate (National Defense University), Robert Morgus (New America), Dr. Jaganath Sankaran (University of Texas at Austin), Dr. Yuval Weber (Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security), Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski (US Central Command)

Summary Overview

This summary overview reflects on the insightful responses of seven Future of Global Competition and Conflict Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) expert contributors. While this summary presents an overview of the key expert contributor insights, the summary alone cannot fully convey the fine detail of the expert contributor responses provided, each of which is worth reading in its entirety. For this report, the expert contributors consider how Russia perceives the continuum of conflict and how it plans for, operates within, and manages risk within the competitive space.

Russia's Perception of the Continuum of Conflict: Sentimental Revisionism

Contributors describe Russia's perception of the continuum of conflict as encompassing a wide range of asymmetric, adversarial foreign policy interests, objectives, and activities. Russia's leadership and foreign policy elite "view international relations as a state of perpetual conflict" in which "very few actions are 'illegitimate' when applied against the United States and its allies."¹ Contributors attribute this unrestrained adversarial perception, in part, to 1) Russia's displeasure with the current United States-led international order, which often clashes with Russian interests and values, and 2) Russia's central interest in re-establishing itself as a global power on the international stage and recovering what it had once lost.² Dr. Yuval Weber of the Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security, for example, asserts that "Russian behavior is rooted in deep status concerns about Russia's 'rightful' place in the world." Similarly, David Gompert of the US Naval Academy describes Russia's interests as being "laced with nostalgia," "driven by [a] political need for patriotism," and

¹ See contributions from Morgus and Weber. Additionally, McFate offers an example to further detail this Russian perception that few actions are "illegitimate" when applied against the United States and its allies: "An example of a present-day scenario for how Russia acts to disunite Europe may start with it deliberately bombing civilian centers in Syria. This creates a tidal wave of refugees that hits the EU and causes Brexit and a rise of right-wing national politics. This, combined with information warfare, is disuniting Europe. Russia has weaponized refugees."

² See contributions from Gompert, Luttwak, Morgus, and Weber.

centered around “whipping up and riding waves of nationalism at home, responding to Russians’ preference for central authority, taking back former-Soviet lands where ethnic Russians reside, sowing dissension within and among Western polities, and blaming the United States for disrespecting Russia and adding to its woes.” Dr. Edward Luttwak of CSIS also highlights the centrality of nostalgia to Russia’s interests and adversarial nature. “All Russia wants,” Luttwak asserts, “is to recover the historic Russian-ruled lands.”

Ultimately, Russia appears to view the United States as an “unrestrained revisionist power” that has been encroaching on Russian interests since the Cold War. Russia, therefore, perceives its own actions across the conflict continuum to be entirely justified responses to “American violations” of a more pluralist international order that more closely aligns with Russian interests.³

Russia's Asymmetric Approach to Competition and Conflict

Despite its ambitious adversarial interests and objectives, Russia is constrained by economic and military limitations that put it at a clear disadvantage to its leading competitors (e.g., the United States).⁴ These constraints, contributors explain, drive Russia toward “asymmetric” and “unconventional” activities and strategies in the competitive space because its conventional capabilities are “inferior” to that of the United States.⁵ Instead of planning for or engaging in sustained conventional conflict against the United States, which would almost certainly end in failure, Russia uses asymmetric and unconventional activities that are adversarial, but below the conventional threshold of warranting response from the international community, to advance its competitive interests (and counter United States interests) without escalating to conflict. As Weber explains, “when Russian foreign policy elites and military officers consider the continuum of conflict, what they are trying to do is test the limits of Western responsiveness. None of them believe that Russia could engage in sustained conventional conflict against the United States (actions against the Ukrainian military and Syrian rebels have shown the limits), but what they can do is keep United States policymakers off-balance and incrementally increase what is ‘acceptable’ behavior when they engage in actions inimical to United States interests but which do not produce a response.”

Contributors highlight several of these types of competitive, asymmetric activities in which Russia is currently engaging, including

- undermining the legitimacy of international institutions and rules;⁶
- conducting cyber operations against Western networks and through social media;⁷
- using unconventional, paramilitary forces (e.g., “little green men”) to extend Russian influence;⁸
- modernizing and brandishing nuclear forces to offset US and NATO superiority;⁹

³ See contribution from Weber.

⁴ See contribution from Gompert in particular. Gompert notes that Russia can sustain only one-tenth of what the United States spends on defense, one-third of what China spends on defense, and one-third of what non-US NATO spends on defense. Gompert contends, “though [Russian] forces could seize a small patch of NATO territory (e.g., Northeastern Estonia), they would eventually be defeated by superior NATO forces.”

⁵ See contributions from Gompert, McFate, Morgus, and Weber.

⁶ See contributions from Gompert, Luttwak, McFate, Morgus, and Weber.

⁷ See contributions from Gompert, McFate, and Morgus.

⁸ See contributions from Gompert and McFate.

⁹ See contributions from Gompert and Sankaran.

- using energy exports to manipulate the policies of recipient states;¹⁰ and
- exploiting instability in the Middle East and Latin America.¹¹

Conclusion: Implications for United States Policy Making

Russia's perception of the conflict continuum encompasses an array of aggressive, adversarial foreign policy interests, objectives, and activities. Because of its inherent economic and military constraints, and conventional limitations in relation to the United States, Russia pursues its competitive interests using asymmetric and unconventional means across the spectrum of competition to "test the limits of Western responsiveness" up to the point of triggering a conventional military response.¹² However, the deeply engrained and nostalgic nature of its interests and aspirations (e.g., re-establish its "rightful" place as a global power on the international stage and recovering what it had once lost) means that significant challenges to Russian pursuits of those interests may be viewed by the Russians as an "existential threat."¹³

Nevertheless, contributors agree that Russia will likely "do all it can to avoid armed conflict with the United States and its allies."¹⁴ Therefore, the most effective strategy for the United States to neutralize Russia's competitive pursuits is likely to be one that both 1) strongly counters Russia's asymmetric strategy and forces Russia to "pay a high price" for its unconventional activities in the competitive space and 2) ensures the United States' conventional military preponderance. Such a strategy, Gompert argues, is affordable for the United States but will force "the disconnect between Russia's conduct and its resources to grow, leading Russia to draw back its strategy or fail." Although Russia may threaten United States interests in the short-term, Russia will have a difficult time supporting a "belligerent external strategy" over the longer-term given its economic limitations, "especially if and as the US compels it to pay a high price for that strategy."

¹⁰ See contribution from Gompert.

¹¹ See contribution from Gompert and Morgus.

¹² See contribution from Weber.

¹³ See contributions from Gompert and Weber.

¹⁴ See contribution from Gompert.

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

David C. Gompert

Distinguished Visiting Professor (US Naval Academy)

Adjunct Professor (Virginia Union University)

Senior Fellow (RAND Corporation)

15 February 2019

The goals of Russia's leaders are driven by their political need for patriotism and laced with nostalgia: whipping up and riding waves of nationalism at home; responding to Russians' preference for central authority; taking back former-Soviet lands where ethnic Russians reside; sowing dissension within and among Western polities; and blaming the United States for disrespecting Russia and adding to its woes. Russia's current threats and actions harm U.S. interests, allies, and sovereignty in ways that need not be detailed here. But what stands out is that this behavior is vintage asymmetric strategy, reflecting Russia's economic and military limitations.¹⁵ In particular, Russia is:

- modernizing and brandishing nuclear forces to offset U.S. and NATO GPF superiority
- using para-military ("little green") units to extend Russian influence
- continuing to use pipe-lined natural gas to manipulate the policies of recipient states
- exploiting instability in the Middle East and to a lesser degree Latin America
- conducting cyber-war against Western networks and through social media

Even as it pursues these methods, Russia must and will do all it can to avoid armed conflict with the United States and its allies. This presents the United States with a compound problem: countering Russia's asymmetric strategy while retaining conventional military preponderance. It can do so not only by maintaining superior forces but also by conducting enough nuclear and missile-defense modernization to cause Russia to shovel more and more scarce resources into nuclear forces; selling LNG to Russia's natural-gas customers; retaliating for cyber-attacks against networks of value to the Kremlin; healing NATO divisions and buttressing NATO deterrence. Through such U.S. responses, which are affordable, the disconnect between Russia's conduct and its resources will grow, leading Russia to draw back its strategy or fail.

China's strategic goals can be stated even more simply: to take back territory, including seas, that were stripped from China when it was weak; and to reestablish itself as East Asia's preeminent power. In contrast to Russia, China must and can follow a more traditional great-power strategy, mainly relying on conventional military forces to push U.S. forces far from Chinese shores – not by emulating U.S. capabilities but by developing means to find, target, and strike them.¹⁶ It is important to note that trends in military technology favor A2AD over force-projection and presence, and that China spends at least as much as the U.S. does on capabilities and operations *in its region*. It is not clear that the U.S. has a winning counter-strategy, as of yet.

It is also notable that China finds cooperation with the U.S. and its partners to be more in its interest than confrontational on *global* issues (energy, climate, terrorism, finance, economic development). China's beef with the U.S. is mainly about *regional* disputes, encircling U.S. alliances, and the presence of U.S. strike power. By cooperating globally while competing regionally, China can "choose its fights" and allocate its resources selectively and strategically. Given China's stated interest and strategy, it is wrong to regard and react to it as a wannabe global contestant rather than as the daunting challenger it is in the world's most vital region.

In sum, Russia presents greater dangers to U.S. interests in the short term but, with a fundamentally poor economy, will find it difficult to support a belligerent external strategy, especially if and as the U.S. compels it to pay a high price for that strategy. China has a

¹⁵ Russia can sustain only one-tenth what the U.S. spends on defense (~\$700B), one-third what China spends (~\$200B), and one-third what non-U.S. NATO spends (~\$200B). Though its forces could seize a small patch of NATO territory (e.g., Northeastern Estonia), they would eventually be defeated by superior NATO forces.

¹⁶ See *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*, Gompert et al, RAND Arroyo Center, 2016

sustainable external strategy, which is focused mainly on recovering its losses and its preeminence in East Asia. Though its global aspirations are not necessarily problematic, the importance of the region make China the biggest great-power challenge over the next decade.

Dr. Edward N. Luttwak

Senior Associate (CSIS)

14 February 2019

Neither China nor Russia are normal countries. They are empires, and empires are different. Roughly 97% of the difficulties that the US has experienced since venturing abroad in 1898 are caused by the fact that it is a normal country that engages in imperial ventures (with the best of intentions) while its citizens lack the needed imperial mentality—namely: a powerful conviction that they are entitled to rule lesser nations, and to punish the disobedient who are not properly grateful for the imperial benevolence they receive.

The Russians are an imperial people. They listen to Putin's song:

- “others eat better, others dress more elegantly. But you Russians bravely hold the largest empire in the whole of human history, that our heroic ancestors conquered piece by piece over the centuries, by winning many wars, and by pacifying conquered nations and tribes... My foolish predecessor lost parts of our empire. I will not lose any more, and will try to retrieve what I can. So we spit on the sanctions—we will not give up for pasta and pizza or fancy shoes.”

The Chinese too are an imperial people. Even when they were abjectly poor (I was first there in 1976 when eating enough rice and cabbage was considered abundance) they were calmly confident in their superiority over the smelly nomads to the north, the backward Tibetans, the childish Americans, and the Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese whose cultures were essentially Chinese, but for their local peasant folklore.

Once the Chinese embarked on economic growth from 1977, they worked very hard, saved 50% and not 5%, to invest in more growth, and said not a word about lost territories or any power ambitions.

But Chinese leaders misread the great recession in 2009, thought that the childish Americans had fallen by the wayside, dropped the “peaceful rise” mask & suddenly demanded --very loudly-- bits of Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and an entire province from India. During the Obama years they were very pleasantly surprised at the non-reaction to their destruction of vast coral reefs to build military bases, but misjudged their neighbors, who started coalescing and rearming, slowly but steadily. The Australians lead the way (2008) warning everyone that it was either resist or accept Chinese dominance. The Japanese joined in 2012, and the Americans in 2017—the Vietnamese had been there all along.

With Xi Jinping a new element has been added, because he is autistic when it comes to that strange world, non-China. He is also an infant in the realm of strategy, as exemplified by his reduction of the army to greatly increase the Navy above all, as if China is not a land power, with many neighbors that could make trouble—if rewarded well enough.

Poor innocent XJP thinks that building ships to increase strength at sea automatically generates maritime power. But the latter derives not from having warships but from the ability to sustain good political relations with insular, peninsular, coastal nations and other maritime nations.

Such relations might feed back into sea-strength, by offering sheltering ports, shore supplies, repair facilities, airfield access, ground-based air and sea surveillance, and whatever else a friendly power can provide to visiting naval forces—which is a great deal. But sea-strength does not feed back into maritime power. On the contrary, to build a bigger navy can *reduce* maritime power, if the country doing it is viewed as threatening by the affected insular, peninsular and coastal powers, whose leaders will react by being watchful rather than welcoming—except to its maritime rivals.

All that is perfectly straightforward, yet apparently much too complicated for poor Xi Jinping and his minions, who fail to see the fatal

contradiction between building up the Chinese navy, and loudly asserting inflated maritime claims against Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Sultanate of Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Naturally those countries have reacted by welcoming American and – increasingly—Japanese naval visits, as well as anything that India and Australia send their way, while offering less and less access to Chinese forces.

As a result, the Chinese naval build-up *is reducing* Chinese maritime power which in turn reduces Chinese naval strength –yes, that is a bit confusing linguistically but fortunately it is very simple in practice:

- for example, because it has several times been attacked by the Chinese Navy and threatened yet more often, Vietnam invites Japanese as well as American and Indian naval forces into its own bases, and most importantly submarines from which they can very comfortably intercept Chinese submarines trying to get out discreetly from the major Yulin base in Hainan island, just down the road from Haiphong, just up the road from Cam Rahn Bay. That diminishes the operational value of Yulin-based submarines, just as US naval power out of the major San Diego base would be diminished if the Chinese navy could comfortably operate out of Ensenada bay in nearby Mexico.

The bottom line: the Chinese are naively expansionist. But the counter-China coalition they have created since 2008 better keep reacting, because nothing else will stop the Chinese drive to become number 1 in everything everywhere (thereby restoring the correct world order as they see it, after the tumble of the industrial revolution). Only the population decline now expected will slow the imperial drive.

The Russians are not naïve and much less expansionist. Aside from keeping their Mediterranean garden on the Levantine coast of Syria, all Russia wants is to recover the historic Russian-ruled lands: Belarus, the Ukraine of course, and the northern tip of Kazakhstan, erroneously carved from Siberia by careless Bolshevik bureaucrats in the 1930s. (They do not want the Baltics...)

Only a large-scale European/US aid to the Ukraine & a big military build-up could dissuade the Russians from biting at Ukraine every day, till they follow the Georgians in electing a president properly respectful of Moscow.

Dr. Sean McFate¹⁷

Professor (National Defense University)

7 March 2019

You mentioned mercenaries and privately funded warfare, but what other kinetic and non-kinetic tactics are and will be used by competing powers domestically and abroad to undercut US interests over the coming decade?

Dr. McFate: It is important to think about old rules of war versus new rules of war. For example, Russia has always sought to disunite Europe and NATO and the EU. In the old rules of war, utility of force was supreme, so what Russia would do is have huge military exercises at the East-West border of Germany, (150,000 troops with aircraft—an invasion force) and they would tell NATO, "Don't worry. It is just a military exercise." And, of course, that would threaten NATO and would have ripple effects, which would please Moscow. Today, war is moving from Clausewitz to Sun Tzu. An example of a present-day scenario for how Russia acts to disunite Europe may start with it deliberately bombing civilian centers in Syria. This creates a tidal wave of refugees that hits the EU and causes Brexit and a rise of right-wing national politics. This, combined with information warfare, is disuniting Europe. Russia has weaponized refugees. That is one example. Another example is that, under the old rules of warfare, if Russia wanted to conquer something, it would use tanks or troops or other conventional means to take over territory in Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Today, what Russia does, in Ukraine or Crimea for example, is it uses weapons that give Russia maximum plausible deniability.

Warfare in the future is going underground. It is becoming epistemological, telling truths from lies determines winners and losers. In the global information age, plausible deniability is more powerful than firepower. Russia today uses means like Spetsnaz, mercenaries

¹⁷ Dr. McFate's contribution consists of excerpts from a longer interview session. For access to the full interview session, please contact George Popp (gpopp@nsiteam.com).

and proxy militia (e.g., the Wagner Group or the Donbas Battalion), and a lot of propaganda. And while the West was still trying to figure out what exactly was going on in Crimea, Russia had already created a ghost occupation that was a fait accompli by the time Western policymakers were prepared to do something. So, that is an example of the new rules of war, where information and non-kinetic weapons are more powerful than blitzkriegs.

Robert Morgus

Senior Policy Analyst, Cyber Security Initiative and International Security Program (New America)

5 March 2019

Kinetic and Non-Kinetic Tactics of Near-Peer Competitors

In the context of great power competition over and through the internet, our near-peer competitors leverage a set of tools in a number of forums in pursuit their objectives. Importantly, in large part because of their systems of governance and economy, China and Russia are more able and adept at leveraging quasi- and non-governmental assets in pursuit of national goals than the U.S. and our friends. Despite some differences in motivation and approach, both China and Russia leverage diplomacy, cyber means, and trade in pursuit of their national goals.

China

A range of diplomatic, information, and trade activities emanating from China suggest a concerted effort on the part of the Chinese state to export its model for the digital space. While the activities of Chinese companies appear to comply with an overarching strategy of expanding Chinese digital influence, it is unclear how much of this compliance is driven by business or market incentives versus state pressure, noting that the two need not be mutually exclusive. The Chinese government's approach to global competition is characterized by the notion of expansion without conflict and shaping global institutions and rules.

Activities to watch:

- Regulatory exchanges,
- Participation in standards bodies,
- Technology exports,
- Telecommunications investments.

Diplomacy

In global forums, Chinese activities in the United Nations General Assembly around an information security code of conduct have received the most attention, other activities, particularly in technology standards bodies, are worthy of note. At the International Telecommunications Union, for instance, a Huawei executive chairs the study group tasked with developing standards for next generation (5G) telecommunications standards. Likewise, Chinese nationals and state employees are prominent in the only telecommunications standards body to actually publish a 5G standard to date, 3GPP. Similarly, at the Internet Engineering Task Force, the body that publishes standards particularly relevant to the internet protocols, China has gone from a near non-participant in the late 2000s to the second largest participant last year.¹⁸

In addition to increased participation in key standards bodies, China has increased its bilateral engagement with crucial third-party countries. These bilateral engagements include traditional diplomatic outreach and attempts to secure trade and investment deals as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, but also more direct transfers of ideas and frameworks through training seminars for regulators, policymakers, and lawmakers in Africa and Southeast Asia.¹⁹

¹⁸ <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/c2b/c2b-log/four-opportunities-for-states-new-cyber-bureau/>

¹⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

Cyber

The Chinese government conducts public messaging campaigns in key markets to support economic and political objectives. These campaigns can come in the form of traditional advertisements willing consumers to buy Chinese products, but also take more opaque forms, as Beijing has invested in buying foreign media outlets and training foreign journalists to “tell China’s story well, and properly disseminate China’s voice.”²⁰

In addition, Chinese entities engage in state, quasi-state, and non-state economic espionage pointed at the theft of high tech intellectual property.

Trade

Chinese telecommunications companies Huawei and ZTE are already major providers for internet technologies worldwide. Their comparatively cheap products give them an advantage in markets that are not able to prioritize cybersecurity over cost savings, as is the case in much of the developing world. More research is needed on to understand the relationship between telecommunications projects and investment and the spread of regulatory, legal, and normative frameworks.

Russia

The Russian government views international relations as a state of perpetual conflict occurring along a continuum. For the Kremlin, the current rules and institutions that underpin global order often clash with Russian interests and values. Thus, rather than reshaping the rules or coopting institutions, as is the Chinese approach, Russia seeks to undermine the legitimacy of institutions and rules.

Activities to watch:

- UN initiatives around cybersecurity and information security,
- Information operations,
- Surveillance exports.

Diplomacy

Russia’s primary diplomatic objective is to reassert Russia’s right to sovereignty over the digital space within its borders. For Russia, the global rules governing the internet have been carefully crafted by western powers. It is therefore a primary objective of the Russian state to not only assert Russia’s sovereignty over the network within its borders, but to also “make other countries, especially the United States, accept” this right.²¹ National laws, like the recently proposed amendment to the Federal Law on Communications, provide Russia with national legitimacy to do so. However, the Kremlin still seeks to normalize strict information control at the international level through initiatives like their proposal at the 2018 UN General Assembly to create a treaty reasserting national sovereignty over the internet and various cybercrime initiatives.²²

Cyber

Through a combination of influence operations in key areas and persistent offensive cyber operations, Russia has successfully demonstrated the fragility of the global internet ecosystem, while also achieving other aims (like turning the power off in Eastern Ukraine in the dead of winter). This demonstrated fragility has increased policymakers’ interest around the world in reasserting the role of governments in controlling the environment more tightly.

Trade

²⁰ <http://chinamediaproject.org/2017/09/29/the-fable-of-the-master-storyteller/>

²¹ Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web*, p. 223

²² https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/AI-China-Russia-Global-WP_FINAL_forcopying_Edited-EDITED.pdf, p. 88.

In comparison to China, Russia's trade reach is relatively modest. Nonetheless, Russia has successfully cultivated markets of its surveillance exports in its near abroad, parts of the Middle East, and Latin America. Russian companies like Prrotei and Peter-Service, for example, provide technology to help internet service providers in countries with legal and regulatory frameworks similar to Russia's SORM system comply with those regulations to monitor and filter traffic.²³

Dr. Jaganath Sankaran

Assistant Professor (University of Texas at Austin)

8 March 2019

The Russians are probably more confident in their strategic deterrence against the U.S. in comparison to China. They have a large nuclear arsenal and have started to modernize it. However, Russia does have a "escalate to de-escalate" doctrine for regional contingencies. It may very well be designed to force constraint on the U.S./NATO rather than a genuine of military capitulation. The implication of the doctrine for the U.S. is to figure where the Russian threshold lies and Russia domestic politics influences that threshold.

The Russian conventional military power is also markedly better now. Since the Russo-Georgia War when Russia was widely seen as inept, Russian forces are now seen as highly capable. Their actions in Syria may be seen as validation of their conventional military might and may embolden similar actions in the future. This may weaken the U.S. ability to protect former Soviet states from Russian interference.

Dr. Yuval Weber

Kennan Institute Associate Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies

(Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security)

4 March 2019

For the Russian foreign policy elite and leadership, very few actions are "illegitimate" when applied against the United States and its allies because they treat the U.S. as an unrestrained revisionist power following the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, having reneged on the commitments they believe George H.W. Bush made to Mikhail Gorbachev at the December 1989 Malta Summit that ended the Cold War.

The source of Russian dissatisfaction with the U.S.-led international order is that they believe the deal reached by Bush and Gorbachev (the latter agreeing not to send in the Red Army to intervene in Central Europe to save socialist allies, the U.S. would support Gorbachev's perestroika efforts at home, and the USSR would end its reflexively hostile foreign policy agenda against the U.S.) would have been the best outcome for international peace: the Soviet Union no longer a hyperpower but incorporated into the international affairs with appropriate status as second leading superpower maintaining an independent foreign policy and veto power on European and international security questions needing to exercise those less and less as they worked together with the U.S. more and more. That did not occur as spinning off the external empire led to a similar process with the internal empire, and within two years, the USSR ceased to exist. The nearly three decades that followed have been seen as endless Western encroachment on Russian interests rooted in the 1989 understanding that ended the Cold War, hence the view of the American side being the revisionist one to which Russian responses are legitimate because they are responsive to American violations. Their goal is to make the world look more like 1989 than 1991 and to return to their rightful place in the international order, and very little is illegitimate when it serves such "legitimate" ends.

When Russian foreign policy elites and military officers consider the continuum of conflict, what they are trying to do is test the limits of Western responsiveness. None of them believe that Russia could engage in sustained conventional conflict against the U.S. (action against Ukrainian military and Syrian rebels have shown the limits), but what they can do is keep U.S. policymakers off-balance and

²³ https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/AI-China-Russia-Global-WP_FINAL_forcopying_Edited-EDITED.pdf, p. 89.

incrementally increase what is "acceptable" behavior when they engage in actions inimical to U.S. interests but which do not produce a response.

What U.S. policy and military decision-makers should understand, then, is that Russian behavior is rooted in deep status concerns about Russia's "rightful" place in the world, and that Vladimir Putin has been in power for nearly two decades because he has framed himself as the only person able to accomplish this task and the elite believe him and back him to get it done. Moreover, stoking the feeling of national humiliation and indefinite revival maintains the social pressure on the public at large to subordinate economic decline to patriotism. Thus, Russia will use alternative or unconventional methods to increase their relative standing because their conventional capabilities are inferior to the U.S., but they have elite unity and large public buy-in around one person and one idea. Any response by the U.S. to that person or that idea will be treated as an existential threat, so U.S. strategy needs to be guided by the knowledge that any action also needs to consider off-ramps for others within the elite.

Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski

Analyst, Combined Strategic Analysis Group, CCJ-5 (US Central Command)

11 March 2019

After the so-called collapse of the Soviet Union, most Western decision makers believed that Russia lost the status of great power. Unipolarity, with the US at the center, which characterized the new world order after the collapse of the Iron Curtain, encouraged the West to focus on policies and strategies which apparently allowed the Russian Federation to not just recover and almost regain previous position, but also (to a significant extent) rebuild, restructure and modernize its armed forces and defense capabilities within a very short period of time. Despite numerous attempts by Central and Eastern European countries to alert their Western allies about the still present and actually growing Russian threat, the West seemed to neglect the alarms. NATO almost entirely (with just a few exceptions) focused on deployability, and the majority of Western allies downsized or almost demobilized their defense forces and allocated the released financial resources far from defense needs and commitments. Meanwhile, the United States declared its 'pivot to Asia' and Western European powers became overwhelmed with internal European Union issues. Only a handful of NATO border Allies recognized the importance of events such as wars that Russia forced upon Georgia (in 2008) and Ukraine (in 2014).

Regardless of how much the West desired to trust Russia, Putin's state remained a significant global spoiler, "surprising" the international community on numerous occasions. The world keeps on watching acts of Russian aggression, while limiting reactions to condemnations, expressing concerns, or suggesting 'strong actions'. All empty words in response to repetitive acts of violence. Even sanctions placed on Russia seem pathetic when accruing in concert with the West continuing to pursue behind the scene business and trade deals with Russia.

Putin realized long ago that the West is, and will remain, focused on deterring aggression against NATO members. He understands that actions by Moscow that pose no direct threat to NATO members will go mostly unpunished. Moreover, based on the threat of Russian nuclear capabilities and concerns of escalation into a nuclear holocaust, the West will relatively easily sacrifice some relationships and countries by turning a blind eye to Russia's aggression. The idea of the West turning a blind eye is best exemplified in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine that don't fall under the protection of NATO membership.

Kremlin leadership understands very well that the Russian Federation cannot compete on equal terms with the economic and military might of the US. Russia's frail budget, so narrowed and almost completely dependent on exports of natural resources, does not provide any solid foundation for peer-to-peer competition against the US and on the Western 'logic of the market' terms. Therefore, Russian strategists developed and pursue alternative thinking, allowing their country to reject the logic of the Western economy and challenge the US with efficient actions demanding as little investments and resources as possible.

From a larger perspective, Russia will pursue its preferred methods, such as direct, bilateral engagements (especially undermining unity of alliances and common efforts), opportunism and exploitation of foreign internal conflicts, which can be easily exploited, especially in domains such as cyber or information. For this reason, Russian views on continuum of conflict will remain focused on actions countering the US and NATO allies in domains in which a direct and decisive response of the US economic or military strength would be less likely, or where economic and military supremacy becomes less relevant. From the Russian perspective, the 'irritation' is NATO's

spread into Russian traditional zones of influence (or buffer zones), or NATO/US presence at Russia's borders. Consequently, Russia will pursue quick actions and small wins (i.e., through fait accompli scenarios) while at the same time avoiding direct military confrontation with NATO. Nuclear capabilities shall remain one of the main Russian deterrence arguments, especially to threaten smaller Western European allies and undermine unity of allied efforts (such threatening works especially effectively against Belgium, Netherlands or Denmark based off of what can be observed in those countries' leadership statements). On the other hand, Russia will continue the so called '*маленькая заграница*' [Eng. 'small/near neighborhood'] policy towards neighboring countries. The policy should be seen as the Russian equivalent to the German *Mitteleuropa*²⁴ and in a nutshell aims at economic and political subordination of direct smaller neighbors to Russia, which are also seen by the Kremlin as a buffer or security zone. The meaning of this policy is best expressed in a Russian saying: '*Курица не птица, Польша не заграница*' [Eng. 'chicken ain't no bird, Poland ain't no abroad'].²⁵

Competitive space and timing are usually chosen by Russian leadership and are mostly based on specific internal needs and external opportunities. Therefore, the Kremlin's planning seems to be more oriented on rather shorter perspectives, open pathways and abilities to adjust actions. Open, direct military confrontation with any other major power is less likely and not preferred by Moscow. Risks seem to be included and mitigated by Russian capabilities to maintain communication channels or to find partners in any potential situation, as well as to have influence in every region around the globe. If the quick action/quick success strategies fail, Russia will always have an alternative to pursue an attrition scenario when forced into longer engagement. Benefiting from its vast operational and strategic depth and having ability to communicate and collaborate with numerous partners around the globe, Russia enjoys some abilities allowing it to outlast mighty opponents coming at the Kremlin's gates (what proved to be the ultimate Russian solution historically, i.e., during Polish occupation of Moscow at the beginning of XVII century, Napoleon's campaign against the Russian Empire or German Barbarossa plan during World War II).

In order to properly prepare for competition against opportunistic, spoiling and malign Russian activities, US policies and strategies should focus on pragmatism and rational judgement, rather than trust and hopes. Russia has always respected only strength and power. Promotion of trust or hopes in politics or security matters have, on the other hand, been considered by Russians as weakness. Proper and deep understanding of Russian influence abroad (including influence within the US allies) and the ways and means to counter it, should be examined very seriously. The West cannot afford the loss of transatlantic ties resulting from Russian spoiling, wedging actions, especially in times of 'marriage of convenience' between Russia and China.

²⁴ https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/concept_of_mitteleuropa

²⁵ The same sentence is also used by Russians regarding i.e. Finland, Baltic States, Ukraine, Bulgaria or Mongolia

Subject Matter Expert Biographies

David C. Gompert

Distinguished Visiting Professor (US Naval Academy)

Adjunct Professor (Virginia Union University)

Senior Fellow (RAND Corporation)



The Honorable David C. Gompert is currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, Adjunct Professor at Virginia Union University, and Senior Fellow at RAND. Mr. Gompert was Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence from 2009 to 2010. During 2010, he served as Acting Director of National Intelligence, in which capacity he oversaw the U.S. Intelligence Community and acted as the President's chief intelligence advisor. Prior to his most recent government service, Mr. Gompert was a Senior Fellow at the RAND Corporation, from 2004 to 2009. Before that he was Distinguished Research Professor at the Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University. From 2003 to 2004, Mr. Gompert served as the Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq. He has taught at RAND Graduate School, U.S.

Naval Academy, the National Defense University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Union University. Mr. Gompert served as President of RAND Europe from 2000 to 2003, during which period he was on the RAND Europe Executive Board and Chairman of RAND Europe-UK. He was Vice President of RAND and Director of the National Defense Research Institute from 1993 to 2000. From 1990 to 1993, Mr. Gompert was Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush and Senior Director for Europe on the National Security Council staff. He has held numerous positions at the State Department, including Deputy to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (1982-83), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe (1981-82), Deputy Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (1977-81), and Special Assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1973-75). Mr. Gompert worked in the private sector from 1983-1990. At Unisys (1989-90), he was President of the Systems Management Group. At AT&T (1983-89), he was Vice President, Civil Sales and Programs, and Director of International Market Planning. Mr. Gompert has published on international affairs, national security and information technology. His books (authored or co-authored) include *War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable*, *Blunders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*; *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific*; *The Paradox of Power: Sino-American Strategic Restraint in an Age of Vulnerability*; *Underkill: Capabilities for Military Operations amid Populations*; *War by Other Means: Building Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*; *BattleWise: Achieving Time-Information Superiority in Networked Warfare*; *Nuclear Weapons and World Politics (ed.)*; *America and Europe: A Partnership for a new Era (ed.)*; *Right Makes Might: Freedom and Power in the Information Age*; *Mind the Gap: A Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs*. Mr. Gompert is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Advisory Board of the Naval Academy Center for Cyber Security Studies and chairman of the board of Bobcats Sports League. He has served on numerous for-profit and not-for-profit boards. Mr. Gompert holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering from the U. S. Naval Academy and a Master of Public Affairs degree from the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. He and his wife Cynthia live in Virginia and New Hampshire.

Dr. Edward N. Luttwak

Senior Associate (CSIS)



Edward N. Luttwak is Senior Associate, Center for Strategic and International Studies of Washington DC., Chairman of AP Fleet, (aircraft leasing), Dublin, Ireland, and is active as a consultant to governments and international enterprises. He founded and heads a conservation ranch in the Amazon. Has served/serves as a consultant to the US National Security Council, the White House Chief of Staff, the US Department of Defense, US Department of State, US Army, US Air Force, and several allied governments. At present he is working as a contractor for the Office of the Secretary of Defense OSD/NA. Has taught at Johns Hopkins and Georgetown Has been an invited lecturer at universities and higher military schools in the US, UK, China, Israel, Japan the Russian Federation and other countries. His book *The*

Rise of China versus the Logic of Strategy (Harvard University Press, 2012), reflects an engagement with Chinese affairs that dates back to an extensive visit in 1976. His previous books, which include *Strategy: the Logic of War and Peace* and *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* have also been published in 23 foreign languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Korean and Russian. C.V. Born in Arad, Transylvania in 1942, attended schools in Sicily and England, then the London School of Economics (B.Sc.Econ) and Johns Hopkins University (Ph.D.). LLD Honoris Causa University of Bath (UK). Worked for some years in London and Jerusalem before moving to Washington DC. Speaks several languages.

Dr. Sean McFate

Professor (National Defense University)



Dr. Sean McFate is an author, novelist and foreign policy expert. He is a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC. Additionally, he is an Advisor to Oxford University's Centre for Technology and Global Affairs. A specialist in national security strategy, McFate was a think tank scholar at the RAND Corporation, Atlantic Council, Bipartisan Policy Center, and New America Foundation. Recently, he was a visiting Scholar at Oxford University's Changing Character of War Program, where he conducted research on future war. McFate's career began as a paratrooper and officer in the U.S. Army's storied 82nd Airborne Division. He served under Stan McChrystal and David Petraeus, and graduated from elite training programs, such as Jungle Warfare School in Panama. He was also a Jump Master. McFate then became a private military contractor. Among his many experiences, he dealt with warlords, raised armies for U.S. interest, rode with armed groups in the Sahara, conducted strategic reconnaissance for oil companies, transacted arms deals in Eastern Europe, and helped prevent an impending genocide in the Rwanda region. In the world of international business, McFate was a Vice President at TD International, a boutique political risk consulting firm with offices in Washington, Houston, Singapore and Zurich. Additionally, he was a manager at DynCorp International, a consultant at BearingPoint (now Deloitte Consulting) and an associate at Booz Allen Hamilton. McFate's newest book is *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (William Morrow). Admiral Jim Stavridis (retired), the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, said: "Stunning. Sean McFate is a new Sun Tzu." McFate also authored *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order* (Oxford University Press) which explains how the privatization of war is changing warfare. The Economist called it a "fascinating and disturbing book." McFate also write fiction based on his military experiences. He co-authored the novels *Shadow War* and *Deep Black* (William Morrow), part of the Tom Locke series. *New York Times* #1 bestselling author Mark Greaney said: "I was blown away.... simply one of the most entertaining and intriguing books I've read in quite some time." A coveted speaker, McFate has appeared before the British House of Commons, top universities and popular audience venues. He has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico*, *Daily Beast*, *CNBC*, *Vice Magazine*, *Aeon*, *War on the Rocks*, *Military Review* and *African Affairs*. He has appeared on CNN's *Amanpour*, MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, *Fox and Friends*, NPR, BBC, *Economist*, Vice/HBO, The Discovery Channel, and American Heroes Channel. As a scholar, he has authored eight book chapters in edited academic volumes and published a monograph for the U.S. Army War College on how to raise foreign armies. McFate holds a BA from Brown University, MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and a Ph.D. in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He lives in Washington, DC.

Robert Morgus

Senior Policy Analyst, Cyber Security Initiative and International Security Program (New America)



Robert Morgus is a senior policy analyst with New America's Cybersecurity Initiative and International Security program and the deputy director of the FIU-New America C2B Partnership. His current research focuses on mechanisms to counter the spread of offensive cyber capability, cybersecurity and international governance, and Russian internet doctrine. In the past, he has authored reports on international cybersecurity

norms, internet governance, cybersecurity insurance, amongst others. Morgus has spoken about cybersecurity at a number of international forums including NATO's CyCon, the Global Conference on Cyberspace at The Hague, and Cy Fy 2015 in New Delhi, India. His research has been published and recognized by the *New York Times*, *Slate*, the IEEE, peer-reviewed academic journals, and numerous other national and international media outlets. Morgus serves as a member of the Research Advisory Network for the Global Commission on Internet Governance, as well as the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, and has served as an expert advisor for the World Economic Forum. Before joining New America, Morgus provided research and logistical assistance for a variety of organizations ranging from sustainable development firms to political action committees. Morgus received his BA with honors in diplomacy and world affairs from Occidental College in Los Angeles in 2013 where he focused on international security. While at Occidental, he was the recipient of the Young Fund Student Grant to conduct research on ethno-nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. His capstone thesis "Economic Shocks as a Catalyst for Instability: Conditions and Transmission Channels" was one of six honored by the college. He hails from Idaho.

Dr. Jaganath Sankaran

Assistant Professor (University of Texas at Austin)



Dr. Sankaran works on problems that lie at the intersection of international security and science & technology. Sankaran spent the first four years of his career as a defense scientist with the Indian Missile R&D establishment. His work in weapons design and development led to his interests in matters such as the balance of military power, strategic stability, and arms control. Sankaran received his Ph.D. (in international security Policy) in 2012, writing his dissertation on the role of deterrence, dissuasion, denial and arms control in preserving peace and stability in outer space. The current focus of Sankaran's research is Asia-Pacific. Sankaran studies the growing military and nuclear weapons capabilities of China and the counter military balancing undertaken by the United States, Japan, India and other states. Sankaran has also worked on U.S.-Russia strategic stability and nuclear arms control. Sankaran has held fellowships at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University and at RAND Corporation. Sankaran has published in *International Security*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, *Arms Control Today*, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* and other outlets. His research has also been published by the RAND Corporation and the Stimson Center.

Dr. Yuval Weber

Kennan Institute Associate Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies
(Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security)



Yuval Weber, Ph.D., is the Kennan Institute Associate Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies and was the inaugural DMGS-Kennan Institute fellow. Prior to joining the faculty at DMGS, Dr. Weber taught at Harvard University, where he was a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department on Government and a Kathryn W. and Shelby Cullom Davis Research Fellow at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. His first position was at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics, where he was an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs. He has additionally served as a researcher at the Carnegie Moscow Center and the New Economic School in Moscow and completed his post-graduate education at University of Chicago and University of Texas. Dr. Weber is working on a project on the sources of liberal and anti-liberal dissatisfaction for powers in the international system and the strategies they employ to stake their claims for revising the international order. The first manuscript from that project is about the tension between demands of economic modernization and the security state in Russian political economy (Agenda/Columbia UP). His work has appeared in *Problems of Post-Communism*, *International Studies Review*, *Survival*, *Cold War Studies*, *Orbis*, and the *Washington Post*.

Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski

Analyst, Combined Strategic Analysis Group, CCJ-5 (US Central Command)



Lt Col Maciej Zaborowski is a Polish Air Force officer, currently assigned at Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG), CCJ-5, US Central Command. He serves there as analyst and a member of international sort of 'think tank' structure, unique to USCENTCOM. Lt Col Maciej Zaborowski entered military in 1993 (Military University of Technology, Warsaw; 5-year Master of Science in aviation course, commissioned officer in 1997). He began his professional carrier as a member of 36th Special Air Transportation Regiment (maintenance engineer positions, also JAK-40 and Tupolew 154M flying crew member). Prior to his current assignment, Lt Col Zaborowski served at number of positions in the Polish Ministry of National Defense and the General Command of the Polish Armed Forces as an analyst, defense planner and strategic planner. He also served at the NATO Supreme Allied Command Transformation Headquarters (Norfolk, Virginia, 2008-2011) as Curriculum Design Officer and Concept Developer, and in European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (Field Office Zugdidi, 2013-2014). He is a graduate of National Defense University postgraduate studies, with focus on leadership and negotiations. He is also a graduate of George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Germany (Program of Advanced Security Studies). His current efforts focus on Great Power Competition, with highlight on Central Asia, Russia, Kazakhstan and China.

Author Biography

George Popp

Senior Analyst (NSI, Inc.)



George Popp is a Senior Analyst at NSI, Inc. where he conducts research and analysis on a broad range of multidisciplinary analysis projects that focus on understanding the political, economic, and social dynamics of emerging conflict situations and environments throughout the world. The bulk of George's work has been in support of NSI's government initiatives, particularly leading and contributing to human behavior analytics efforts completed for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) program on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in support of direct requests from US Combatant Commanders to the Department of Defense. George has also supported NSI's commercial initiatives, conducting business intelligence analyses for clients in the video game industry. George's degree is in Economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.