



European Relations with Russia

Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis

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Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea has challenged the integrity of Europe's territorial borders and had a broader negative impact on the European security environment. This report analyzes how Europeans perceive the Russian threat—whether European states regard Russia's policy in eastern and northern Europe as a security priority, how they have responded to Russian behavior, and how officials see the future of Russo-European relations.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do European states see Russia as a major security threat, and, if so, what is it that Russia might threaten?
- How have European states responded to date—either individually, through the European Union (EU), or through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)?
- How might these policies change if Russia takes even more aggressive steps in the future?



KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of Russia as a Military Threat Differ Sharply Across Europe and Appear to be Heavily Influenced by Geographical Proximity to Russia

- Some of Russia's neighbors see Russia as capable of and potentially willing to carry out a conventional attack against them but do not necessarily see such an attack as likely.
- Some European countries, particularly eastern NATO members, are concerned that the Alliance is ill equipped to respond to the current crisis with Russia.

European Countries Have Adopted a Broad Range of Measures in Response to the Ukrainian Crisis

- That Russia's behavior requires a strong response is widely accepted by most European countries.

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- NATO has begun its adaptation to the new threat environment.
- Responses to Russia’s strategic communication efforts and internal destabilization efforts have been limited.
- While agreeing on a firm response to Russia’s aggressive moves, most European countries have also made sure to pursue dialogue with Russia on Ukraine-related issues as well as other matters of mutual interest.

European Officials Interviewed Generally Agreed on Three Key Elements That Shape Their Current Relations with Russia and Likely Will Continue to Do So in the Near Future

- Relations with Russia have changed irremediably.
- Tensions are unlikely to recede anytime soon.
- Future actions toward Russia depend on Russian behavior.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department of Defense should take a serious look at Russian capabilities to politically subvert a Baltic state, including the seizure of a border enclave and/or fomenting internal unrest. DoD could use political-military games to understand the potential Alliance difficulties in reaching consensus, the options open to NATO, and the time required. More-detailed assessment of the Baltic internal security forces and their ability to deal with potential subversion contingencies also would be valuable.
- DoD should seek a better understanding of the Russian ability to prevent reinforcement to the Baltic States; DoD could subject some of the “unusual” scenarios, like the seizure of Gotland, to modeling and simulation. Similarly, for sustained air operations over the Baltic States, how important does access to Swedish (and possibly Finnish) airspace become?
- DoD should seek a clear view of the role that Kaliningrad might play, with its strong anti-air defenses; how would NATO neutralize them?
- DoD should gather support for improving intelligence sharing and decisionmaking within NATO to improve indicators and warnings of Russian activity.
- Looming above all of this is the nuclear issue. DoD should determine how escalation might be controlled, and what levers would be available.