



Russia's Hostile Measures

Combating Russian Gray Zone Aggression Against NATO in the Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of Competition

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Russia has historically succeeded in using various hostile measures to sow disorder, weaken democratic institutions, and undermine Western alliances. However, it also has a long track record of strategic shortfalls and even ineptitude. Exploring opportunities to deter, prevent, and counter Russian hostile behavior will benefit NATO and other Western powers in the so-called gray zone short of war, as well as in a conventional warfare scenario.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What hostile measures has Russia employed historically, and in what circumstances?
- What motivates Russia's use of hostile measures, and what are the warning signs of their use?
- How does the history of Soviet power dynamics inform Russia's use of hostile measures in the post-Soviet era?
- Where have hostile measures been successful in helping Russia achieve its tactical and strategic objectives, and where have they fallen short?
- Where are there opportunities for NATO and other Western powers to deter, prevent, or counter Russian hostile behavior and limit the risk of conventional military engagement?



KEY FINDINGS

Russia's use of hostile measures is not new

- The foundations for Russia's recent use of hostile measures date to the Russian Revolution and the development of the political and security institutions that reinforced the Soviet sphere of influence.
- Over the past century, Soviet and, later, Russian leaders have exploited vulnerabilities in a range of sectors in the countries they have targeted with hostile measures—for example by intervening in political movements, enlisting proxies to engage in a country militarily, launching disinformation

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campaigns, implementing economic sanctions, leveraging cultural influence, and reinforcing dependence on Russian energy supplies.

- A particular hostile measure may have several target audiences beyond the direct party to a dispute with Russia, including Russia's domestic public, Russian populations in other countries, former Soviet republics that are considering strengthening their relationships with the West, countries that are economically dependent on Russia, and potential allies and partners of the primary target country.

Patterns in Russian gray-zone behavior make it possible to forecast Russia's use of hostile measures

- General patterns in Russian gray zone behavior lend themselves to forecasting, and Russia often issues formal indications and warnings before making use of hostile measures.
- There are patterns to the motivations behind Russia's decisions to employ specific types of hostile measures and in the sources of influence it chooses to leverage.
- Russia's use of hostile measures is not infallible. On the contrary, it is tactically adroit but strategically shortsighted. Russia typically fails to achieve strategic success, and this trend points to opportunities to deter and counter these behaviors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- NATO has engaged in a limited effort to resist Russian hostile measures in Eastern Europe, but this effort would benefit from strategies informed by a historical understanding of Russian motivations, tactics, patterns of behavior, and record of success.
- NATO can improve the prospects of deterrence if it can increase Russia's perception of the risk of using hostile measures and reduce its aggressive behavior without triggering a war. This may involve using forces that are also capable of deterring a Russian conventional attack.
- NATO should sustain a measured forward presence in Europe indefinitely and leverage conventional force enablers to deter and counter Russian hostile measures.