



Russian snap exercises in the High North

NATIONS INVOLVED: Norway, Russian Federation

TIME PERIOD: March 2015

THEMATIC AREA: Coercion through Threat or Use of Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 16 March 2015 the Russian Federation began a combat readiness test (a 'snap exercise') of its Northern Fleet and force elements situated in its Western Military District. The scale of the exercise was much larger than originally announced, and coincided with the Norwegian exercise Joint Viking in Finnmark (the northernmost part of Norway), as well as with the US exercise Dragoon Ride. Since both exercises were announced well ahead of time, it is reasonable to assume that the Russian exercise was intended as a defensive move and/or response to them.

There remains considerable debate as to whether the readiness exercise violated the Vienna Document, a confidence and security-building measure agreed upon with the OSCE. Norway stated at the time that it was monitoring the situation, and did not submit a complaint to the OSCE. However, the consistent use of such snap exercises to circumvent requirements for notification runs counter to the spirit of the agreement and undermines its provisions.

KEY POINTS

- From Norway's perspective, a high level of military activity, including the conduct of such exercises in the High North were considered to be routine. Norway therefore treated this series of events as **part of an accepted normality** and did not identify the combat readiness tests as an exceptional or significant threat.
- NATO, by contrast, regarded the increase in Russian snap exercises as a breach of the spirit of the Vienna Document. This highlights the need to consider the **differences between NATO narratives and national strategic interests**.
- The case study also highlights the **importance of strategic context**. Whether one considers the exercises in the context of NATO activities and the conflict in Ukraine or simply as a bilateral issue has an impact on how different audiences understand events.
- An effect does not necessarily have to be a change in behaviour, but could also be the **maintenance of the status quo**, i.e. considering a high level of military activity to be "normal."

SUMMARY

On 16 March 2015, at 08:00 hrs Moscow Time, Russia began a combat readiness test of its Northern Fleet and parts of its Western Military District (airborne units). The initial announcement on 16 March had stated that the exercise would encompass 38,000 personnel, 3,360 pieces of military equipment, 41 warships, 15 submarines, and 110 aircraft and helicopters.

On 17 March, units of Russia's Southern Military District and Baltic Fleet also began exercises. The combined size of Russian exercises from 16-21 March eventually grew to include 80,000 personnel, 12,000 pieces of heavy equipment, 65 warships, and 220 aircraft.¹ Opinions diverged over whether the terms of the Vienna Document were breached. The Norwegian government concluded that no such breach had taken place; consequently, no representation was made to the OSCE.

The Russian readiness exercise coincided with the Norwegian exercise Joint Viking in Finnmark (the northernmost county of Norway) and the US exercise Drogon Ride. Since both of these exercises were announced in advance, it is reasonable to assume that the Russian exercise was intended as a defensive move in response to their perceived



IMAGE – Map: Military Districts of the Russian Federation / NATO

¹ Thomas Frear, Ian Kearns, and Łukasz Kulesa, *Anatomy of a Russian Exercise*, European Leadership Network, 2015, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html

provocation. Joint Viking was the largest exercise held in the Finnmark county in terms of ground forces since 1967, numbering 5,000 military personnel. The presence of the Norwegian frigate “Thor Heyerdahl” in Kirkenes, 8 km from the Russian border, was described as a provocation by *RIA Novosti*.² Exercise Dragoon Ride was a US exercise which began on 20 March 2015 and involved the movement of 120 US vehicles and 500 personnel through the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.³

Readiness tests are often assessed as being a threat to national security, since they have precluded a number of past conflicts, most notably in Ukraine.⁴ This study finds that the Russian snap exercises did not pose a threat to Norwegian security interests, but were in fact part of conventional geopolitics in the High North. While there seems to be a discrepancy between Norway and NATO’s position on the exercises, it is essential to bear in mind that this ostensible discrepancy is itself part of the conventional balance of power in the region.



Northern Fleet Marines loaded onto naval transports, 17 March 2015 / Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

² Alexander Khrolenko, “Учения НАТО в Северной Норвегии: разведка или провокация,” *Ria Novosti*, 17 March 2015, <https://ria.ru/analitics/20150317/1053024319.html>

³ NATO, *Key NATO & Allied Exercises*, October 2015, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_10/20151007_1510-factsheet_exercises_en.pdf

⁴ Dave Johnson, *Russia’s Approach to Conflict – Implications for NATO’s Deterrence and Defence* (Rome: NATO Defense College, April 2015), 2-3, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=797>

Timeline of Key Events

2015

16-21 March

Russian MoD announces start of military exercises, initially limited to the Northern Fleet and other units of the Western Military District. The combined size of the Russian exercises grows to include 80,000 personnel, 12,000 pieces of heavy equipment, 65 warships and 220 aircraft. Exercises expand to include the Eastern and Southern Military Districts in the east (Sakhalin, Kurils) and west (Kola, Arctic Isles, Kaliningrad, Crimea and Black Sea).

9-18 March

Norwegian exercise Joint Viking, planned since 2013 and with 5,000 troops takes place in western Finnmark.



Norway's Joint Viking exercise. IMAGE – Ole-Sverre Haugli / Norwegian Armed Forces

19-20 March

European Council Summit; leaders align existing sanctions to implementation of Minsk agreements.

20 March – 1 April

US Exercise Dragoon Ride, 120 vehicles and 500 personnel.



Image – Operation Dragoon Ride / US Army photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan

5-28 June

NATO Exercise Allied Shield, involving 11,000 troops.

CONTEXT

Russia, Norway and the High North

The 'High North' is of significant geostrategic value to Russia. It is home to the Northern Fleets' strategic nuclear submarines and supporting base infrastructure. In any conflict, it would be expected that Russia would defend this region by deploying forces into northern parts of Norway, the Barents Sea, and the Norwegian Sea.

Because of its importance, Russian interest in the High North has persisted since the end of the Cold War and is expected to continue. By contrast, NATO and major Western powers' interest in the area has decreased somewhat since the Cold War due to the transformation of relations with Russia, a shift in focus to out-of-area operations, and later to the southern and eastern flanks.^{5,6} Per 2009, NATO's presence in the High North included NATINADS,⁷ fighters on QRA,⁸ regular AWACS⁹ airborne early warning flight, and exercises in Norway and Iceland.¹⁰

Beyond its immediate geostrategic importance, the High North is rich in mineral, energy, and marine living resources. As the ice sheet melts, resources are becoming more readily available along with accessible shipping routes between the east and west. The US, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, and Russia border the Arctic; however, not all of these sovereign borders are agreed upon. The Arctic is also militarised, and unlikely to become de-militarised, as seen in Antarctica.¹¹ All bordering states have issued authoritative Arctic policy strategy documents or statements.¹²

Most current disputes are linked to the delimitation of littoral states' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and the definition of extension of their continental shelves beyond the EEZs. Possible issues include directly overlapping claims by applying different principles or conflicting interpretation of scientific evidence, and application of the UNCLOS regime on 'common heritage of mankind' including mineral resources.¹³ Local escalation of crises is most likely related to the management of fisheries in disputed areas (e.g. Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone).

Potential future sources of tension are the largely unexplored Arctic energy resources and the technological progress in off-shore petroleum extraction. However, the accuracy of estimations, fields in EEZ and the influence

⁵ Sven G. Holtsmark, *Towards Cooperation or Confrontation? Security in the High North* (Rome: NATO Defense College, February 2009), 7. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/97586/rp_45en.pdf

⁶ Ragnhild Grønning, "NATO Reluctant to Engage in the Arctic," *High North News*, 24 November 2016, <http://www.highnorthnews.com/nato-reluctant-to-engage-in-the-arctic/>

⁷ The NATO Integrated Air Defence System.

⁸ Quick Reaction Alert.

⁹ Airborne Early Warning and Control.

¹⁰ Sven G. Holtsmark, *Towards Cooperation or Confrontation? Security in the High North* (Rome: NATO Defense College, February 2009), 10.

¹¹ Kristian Åtland, "East-West Relations in the High North: Challenges and Opportunities," in *Maritime Security Challenges: Focus High North – Papers from the Kiel Conference 2016*, 13-23. https://www.kielseapowerseries.com/files/ispk/content/kc16/Proceedings_KC-16_Digitalversion.pdf

¹² Sven G. Holtsmark, *Towards Cooperation or Confrontation? Security in the High North* (Rome: NATO Defense College, February 2009), 2.

¹³ *Ibid.* 5-7.

of the world petroleum prices remain very uncertain. Arctic states are still expected to take steps to secure long-term interests in the region.

As large-scale resource exploitation is only profitable in a stable region with security of both sustained supply and demand, shared economic interests can function as incentives for regional cooperation.¹⁴ Norway and Russia have never been at war. In 2010, Norway and Russia reached an agreement on a maritime boundary in the Barents Sea. The border line had been the subject of bilateral dispute since the early 1970s.¹⁵

By March 2015, the relationship between Russia and NATO nations deteriorated significantly after Russia's illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea and involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. NATO nations agreed to suspend practical cooperation with Russia and implemented sanctions as punishment for Russian conduct in Ukraine.¹⁶ In a February 2015 interview on CNN, then Norwegian Minister of Defence Ine Eriksen Søreide stated, "We are faced with a different Russia. I want to warn against the fact that some people see this as something that is going to pass. The situation has changed. And it has changed profoundly."¹⁷ Ine Eriksen Søreide also stated that in the High North, Norway and Russia have continued to cooperate in several areas, such as coast guard efforts to combat illegal fishing, working-level contact between the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Russian Northern Fleet, and keeping to the Incidents at Sea Agreement.¹⁸

The High North

From the Norwegian government's High North Strategy: "The High North is a broad concept both geographically and politically. In geographical terms, it covers the sea and land, including islands and archipelagos, stretching northwards from the southern boundary of Nordland county in Norway and eastwards from the Greenland Sea to the Barents Sea and the Pechora Sea. In political terms, it includes the administrative entities in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia that are part of the Barents Cooperation. Furthermore, Norway's High North policy overlaps with the Nordic cooperation, our relations with the US and Canada through the Arctic Council, and our relations with the EU through the Northern Dimension."¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid. 9.

¹⁵ Kristian Åtland, "East-West Relations in the High North: Challenges and Opportunities," in *Maritime Security Challenges: Focus High North – Papers from the Kiel Conference 2016*, 13-23.

¹⁶ Ibid. 16.

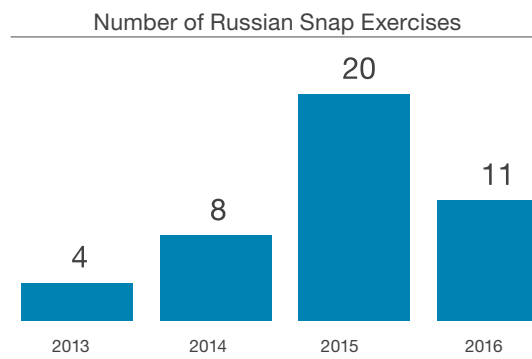
¹⁷ Mick Krever, "Norway: 'We Are Faced with a Different Russia,'" *CNN*, 25 February 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/25/world/amanpour-norway-ine-eriksen-soreide/index.html>

¹⁸ Kristian Åtland, "East-West Relations in the High North: Challenges and Opportunities," in *Maritime Security Challenges: Focus High North – Papers from the Kiel Conference 2016*, 13-23.

¹⁹ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Norwegian Government's High North Strategy*, 2006, 13, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/strategien.pdf>

Readiness Exercises

Readiness exercises, sometimes referred to as 'snap exercises,' often trigger reciprocal military exercises of equal or greater scale.²⁰ As part of Russia's military reform and modernisation plans, as well as the turn to (and reintroduction of) power politics and great power competition, the number of Russian snap exercises has increased since 2013. Russia previously used such exercises as a tool of deception prior to the use of offensive military operations.²¹ While Russian exercises outnumber NATO exercises, NATO and the US also conduct hundreds of military exercises each year.²²



SOURCE: Tomasz K. Kowalk and Dominik P. Jankowski, "The Dangerous Tool of Russian Military Exercises," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2017.

The Vienna Document

The Vienna Document²³ is a Confidence and Security-Building Measure (CSBM) agreed upon with the OSCE in 1990 (and updated several times since). The politically-binding agreement requires participating States to:

- "provide each other with information about their military forces annually, including about manpower and major conventional weapon- and equipment systems, as well as deployment plans and budgets.
- notify each other ahead of time about major military activities such as exercises.
- accept up to three inspections of their military sites per year. Some sensitive areas are excluded.
- invite other States to observe certain activities. It also encourages States to permit journalists from all participating States to cover the activities.
- to consult and co-operate in case of unusual military activity or increasing tensions. The Vienna Document encourages participating States, for example, to voluntarily host military visits to dispel concerns."²⁴

The Vienna Document delineates that military activities of a certain size require a 42-day notice:

(40.1.1) This military activity will be subject to notification whenever it involves at any time during the activity:

- at least 9,000 troops, including support troops, or
- at least 250 battle tanks, or
- at least 500 ACVs, as defined in Annex III, paragraph (2), or
- at least 250 self-propelled and towed artillery pieces, mortars and multiple rocket-launchers (100 mm calibre and above)

if organized into a divisional structure or at least two brigades/regiments, not necessarily subordinate to the same division.

However, exercises carried out without prior notifications to the troops involved are an exception to this rule:

(41) Notifiable military activities carried out without advance notice to the troops involved are exceptions to the requirement for prior notification to be made 42 days in advance.

(41.1) Notification of such activities, above the agreed thresholds, will be given at the time the troops involved commence such activities.

²⁰ Alaina Garrett, Kerrie Ford, Matt Grimm, Nathaniel Haight, and Robert Allison, *Exercises and Adversaries: The Risks of Military Exercises* (College Station, Texas: The Bush School of Government and Public Service, 2016), 7, 24, <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/159129>.

²¹ Dave Johnson, *Russia's Approach to Conflict – Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence* (Rome: NATO Defense College, April 2015), 2-3, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=797>

²² Alaina Garrett et al., *Exercises and Adversaries: The Risks of Military Exercises* (College Station, Texas: The Bush School of Government and Public Service, 2016), 5.

²³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence and Security-Building Measures*, 30 November 2011, <https://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true>

²⁴ OSCE, "Ensuring Military Transparency – the Vienna Document," n.d., <https://www.osce.org/fsc/74528>

Russian Government Narratives

- The purpose of this exercise is to test the Northern Fleet's readiness and capability to protect Russian interests in the Arctic region.
- New challenges demand exercises, particularly of Russian strategic formations in the north.
- Concern over an increased number of NATO exercises, particularly in the otherwise stable north eastern region of the European continent. Exercises increase tensions and destabilise the region.

General Sergey Shoygu, Russian Minister of Defence

16 March 2015: "Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation President Putin has decided on a sudden inspection of combat readiness of the Northern Fleet, (individual compounds in) the Western Military District, and Airborne Troops. Stated that the check will include 38,000 soldiers, 3,360 military vehicles, 41 combat ships, 15 submarines, 110 aircraft and helicopters."²⁵



Alexey Meshkov, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister

16 March 2015: "Russia is deeply concerned about the growing number of NATO drills near our borders. It is especially surprising that this is happening in north-eastern Europe, which is the most stable region not only on our continent, but also maybe in the whole world, [...] such NATO actions lead to destabilisation of the situation in north-eastern Europe."²⁶



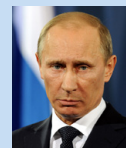
Russian Ministry of Defence

18 March 2015: "March is the most saturated intensity combat training of the winter training period of the Russian armed forces, and precedes the final delivery to the troops and audit."²⁷



Vladimir Putin, President

12 May 2015: "The creation of a joint strategic command on the basis of the Northern Fleet increased security in the Arctic and helped upgrade the military infrastructure in a region that is of great importance to Russia."²⁸



²⁵ Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "По решению Владимира Путина проводится внезапная проверка боеготовности Северного флота, соединений Западного военного округа и ВДВ," 15 March 2015, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010279@egNews

²⁶ TASS Staff, "Moscow Concerned about Growing Number of NATO Drills near Russian Borders – Diplomat," TASS Russian News Agency, 15 March 2015, <http://tass.com/russia/782916>.

²⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Соединение морской пехоты Черноморского флота приведено в полную боевую готовность," 18 March 2015, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010652@egNews.

²⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with Defence Ministry Leadership and Military-Industrial Complex Representatives," Kremlin, 12 May 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49456>

Norwegian Government Narratives

- All nations periodically conduct military exercises, including readiness exercises. This exercise, although large, lies within the scope of what is considered normal, and is thus not considered a threat.
- Norway will register any deviation from what is considered to be normal.
- It does not seem as though Russia should have provided advance notification for this exercise, but no definitive conclusion.

Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norwegian Defence Minister

16 March 2015 (11:36): "We're registering that they are conducting exercises on their own territory, just as we are. We are as of now not yet familiar with the complete scope and background for this exercise, but we are watching all military activity in our surroundings and we will watch this exercise too over the coming days to see if it is within regulations."²⁹



16 March 2015 (15:54): "Russia has conducted several readiness-exercises of this type in recent years. It is therefore not surprising to observe such an exercise in the north as well. We've so far not seen any increase in activity beyond what is normal, but that may change on short notice. [...] It is the Vienna-document that commits signatories to provide advance notification of land- and air-exercises over a certain size. It would therefore not be right for me to speculate as to the scale of the exercise or indicate whether agreements have been breached. If Norway were to conclude the exercise is in violation of the Vienna-document, we can take the matter up with the OSCE, in accordance with the terms of the agreement."³⁰

20 March 2015: "As it looks now, it's not a readiness exercise which required advance notification. But it was large."³¹

Anniken Huitfeldt, Head of the Parliament's Foreign Relations and Defence Committee

17 March 2015: "[We are] watching to see whether Putin violated international regulations by ordering the massive military exercise on its Kola Peninsula just over the borders of Norway and Finland and in the Barents Sea"³²



Norwegian Intelligence Service, via Director Lt. General Kjell Grandhagen

17 March 2015: "This type of exercise activity does not require prior notification according to any international agreements."³³



²⁹ Alf Ole Ask, "Russland hasteinnkaller 40.000 til militærovelse i nordområdene," *Aftenposten*, 16 March 2015, <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/m2Xg/Russland-hasteinnkaller-40000-til-militarovelse-i-nordomradene>

³⁰ Aslak Ballari and Robert Greiner, "Kan være Putin som ønsker å svare Norge," *NRK*, 16 March 2015, https://www.nrk.no/finnmark/_kan-vaere-putin-som-onsker-a-svare-norge-1.12263326

³¹ Øystein Bogen and Kjell Persen, "Den russiske øvingsstyrken er ni ganger større enn det de forteller Norge," *TV2*, 20 March 2015, <http://www.tv2.no/a/6708723/>

³² Nina Berglund, "'No Warning' of Russian Exercises," *NewsInEnglish*, 17 March 2015, <http://www.newsinenglish.no/2015/03/17/norway-following-drama-in-arctic/>

³³ Silja Arvola and Anita Føleide, "Norge vil følge nøye med den russiske storøvelsen," *NRK*, 17 March 2015, https://www.nrk.no/finnmark/_norge-vil-folge-noye-med-den-russiske-storovelsen-1.12264032

NATO Narratives

- **These Russian snap exercises run counter to the spirit of the Vienna Document.**
- **The exercises are a serious concern.**
- **The increasing number of readiness exercises must be considered in the context of Russian aggression in Ukraine.**

Oana Lungescu, Spokesperson

17 March 2015: Snap exercises are a “serious concern” and completely out of proportion with the bloc’s drills. “Russia has conducted about a dozen snap exercises over the past two years [...]. Russia’s takeover of Crimea was done under the guise of a snap exercise. Russia’s snap exercises run counter to the spirit of the Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures.”³⁴



Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General

25 March 2015: “Every nation has the right to exercise its forces, also Russia of course. But the challenge with the pattern of exercises we see in Russia now is that it fits into a broader picture of a more assertive Russia. A Russia which is responsible for aggressive actions in Ukraine and [...] it fits also into the broader picture of a Russia which has invested heavily in new capabilities in defence and which is exercising much more and which has been willing to use force, not only exercise, but to use force to change borders and to annex a part of another country. And what is of particular importance is to note that they are using snap exercises much more and this is not contributing to more predictability and transparency and they use those snap exercise as a cover for sending forces into Crimea. So when we have many snap exercises, we have tens of thousands of soldiers being part of them, [...] this is a reason for concern because [...] it provides less predictability, less transparency and we have seen that they are willing to use this kind of exercises also to launch aggressive actions.”³⁵



³⁴ David Stout, “Putin Puts Russia’s Northern Fleet on ‘Full Alert’ in Response to NATO Drills,” *Time Magazine*, 17 March 2015, <http://time.com/3747239/russia-nato-military-exercises-navy/>

³⁵ “Joint Press Conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Jean-Paul Paloméros,” NATO, 25 March 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_118436.htm?selectedLocale=en

MEASURES

Strategic Logic

Readiness exercises can have a number of underlying motives:

1. Troops need to be exercised, especially the command and control aspects of large scale mobilisation. There is a requirement for any nation to maintain an effective and deployable military capability.
2. Exercises can be used as a domestic show of force to reinforce national pride and boost public support for the government and armed forces. This may occur as a matter of tradition or in response to internal or external factors. Russia frequently portrays military exercises as a response to NATO activities in geographic regions close to its areas of interest, which also appears to be the case here. It is certain that Russia is aware of NATO exercises, and it is almost certain that these timelines are taken into consideration during the planning of snap exercises.
3. Readiness exercises can be part of a country's strategic deterrence – in this case against what Russia described as NATO aggression or encroachment. As such, readiness exercises do not necessarily deviate from conventional power politics.
4. Large exercises initiated without prior warning provoke a reaction which enables Russia to better understand the decision making and military capability of NATO and NATO nations.
5. Russian exercises previously precluded Russian aggression in its near-abroad. Exercises can remind states of Russian capabilities and interests in this area, as well as potential consequences of straying too far from Russian interests.
6. Exercises can be part of an effort to normalise military activity at this scale.

Several of these points may have been the prevailing strategic logic behind this particular exercise, if it was intended to have effects beyond the obvious and immediate benefits of improving military capability. At a time of discord between Russia and the West, the core underlying logic could arguably be to demonstrate Russia's determination not to alter their course under Western pressure.

Diplomatic

- Strategic deterrence (of NATO).
- Typical power politics (High North).

Information

- Giving frequent updates about exercise after commencement.
- Portraying exercise as a natural response to NATO behaviour.

Military

- Conducting snap exercise to test readiness levels without prior notification.
- Expanding scope of exercise.
- Conducting exercises for which the would-be adversary can only be NATO and/or the United States.

Intelligence

- None, but it is reasonable to assume that Russia was attentive to NATO nation responses during the course of the exercises.

Legal

- Taking advantage of the room for interpretation and flexibility of the terms of the OSCE's Vienna Document.

NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

Critical Functions

In 2015 the Norwegian Ministry of Defence identified the High North as Norway's most important strategic area of responsibility, as this region, throughout history, has been an arena for geopolitical struggle and is affected by the tense security situation in Europe today.³⁶

Listing Norway's interests and vulnerabilities in the High North, an Expert Commission tasked by the Ministry of Defence states that Norway needs a robust international framework. As a small country, it is essential that great powers "recognize the importance of common rules of the game and do not threaten the system's existence. Similarly, it is important to maintain international rule of law, institutions, regulations, and norms that regulate behaviour and contribute to conflict resolution."³⁷ The Vienna Document is one such example.

In 2017, the Norwegian government identified the following courses of action as crucial for safeguarding Norwegian security:³⁸

Maintaining and building on the well-established principles of Norwegian security policy by:

- seeking to maintain our close transatlantic ties and further developing our long-term security policy cooperation with the US
- supporting NATO adaptation with a view to strengthening the Alliance's collective defence against both old and new security threats.
- strengthening Norway's defence capabilities and facilitating a greater Allied presence and more frequent Allied exercises in the north.
- further developing cooperation with Russia on the basis of common interests and a consistent and predictable policy.
- seeking to maintain and further develop the international legal order and to strengthen the UN and other international institutions; promoting human rights, the rule of law and democracy; responding to serious violations of international law.

Strengthening the European and Nordic dimension in Norwegian security policy by:

- developing closer security policy cooperation with selected European allies.
- helping to enhance European civilian and military crisis management capacity, and promoting effective control of external borders, close police and intelligence cooperation, and anti-radicalisation and integration measures.
- promoting closer cooperation between NATO and the EU.
- intensifying security policy dialogue and cooperation in the Nordic region.

³⁶ Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy, Unified Effort (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2015), 15, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid. 14.

³⁸ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Meld. St. 36 (2016-2017) Report to the Storting (White Paper): Setting the Course for Norwegian Foreign and Security Policy, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-36-20162017/id2549828/sec1>

Vulnerabilities

- **Asymmetry of Russian-Norwegian relations:** “Russia is outside the Western security community. This limits opportunities for a close relationship in the North. There is also significant regional imbalance between Russia as a great power and nuclear state, and the small state of Norway. An asymmetrical neighbourly relationship requires that Norway, in its own interest, develops and cultivates cooperation with Russia in a number of fields. At the same time, the aim of Norwegian policy is to involve allies and make the High North an arena for multilateral cooperation. This contributes to counteracting the risk of an imbalance that could otherwise make Norway vulnerable to pressure.”³⁹
- **Military capability:** Although the Norwegian Armed Forces “are generally characterised by high quality,” they “have been reduced significantly in numbers, many units are unavailable on short notice, and it may take time for allied assistance to arrive.”⁴⁰
- **Jurisdiction of Svalbard.** An area of concern in the High North is the jurisdiction of Svalbard, an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. Several countries are critical of the Norwegian exercise of authority, with Russia keeping a particularly visible presence in Svalbard. Strategic aims include maintaining its historical position on the islands, securing influence in the western Arctic, and ensuring that Western countries do not use the islands for military purposes.⁴¹
- **Potential disagreements over the exercise of authority in the Fishery Protection Zone.** However, the Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy concludes that extensive use of force in this area is unlikely unless a crisis spirals out of control.⁴²



Reconnaissance units of the Airborne Troops land on Novaya Zemlya and Franz Josef Land, 18 March 2015 / Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

³⁹ Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy, *Unified Effort* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2015), 15-16, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid. 75.

⁴¹ Ibid. 22-23.

⁴² Ibid. 22-23.

Threats

Russian strategic thinking dictates that the Russian armed forces must dominate the early phases of a conflict, rapidly reducing their opponents' potential responses. To ensure such dominance the military needs to maintain a large forward deployment and effective strategic mobility, the exercise of which form an integral part of Russia's unique approach to deterrence.

As such, Russian operations in the far north in 2015 can be interpreted as a demonstration of their ability to achieve dominance in the Kola Peninsula and its environs, particularly against the type of force concentration demonstrated in Exercise Joint Viking. Russia is concerned about the security of the Northern Fleet, in particular the submarines, and regularly exercises the defence of naval installations against special forces raids (incidentally, whilst Norway and Russia have never been at war, Norwegian territory has been used as a basing area for the invasion of northern Russia and for its accompanying bombing campaign).

The official position taken at the time by the Norwegian government was that the exercises posed no direct threat to Norway, and by extension did not have any significant impact on Norwegian national security interests.

Effects

No publicly available information indicates that these readiness tests forced Norwegian authorities to deviate from 'business as usual'. From Norway's perspective, these snap exercises had no noteworthy effect. This raises the question of whether an effect must necessarily be a change in behaviour, or whether an effect can also be the maintenance of the status quo. In this case, the Russian intent might simply have been to normalise these kinds of snap exercises in the High North and maintain the threshold of response at a position favourable to freedom of action in future operations.

The discrepancy between Norwegian and NATO reactions is worthy of consideration. Norwegian officials stated that they were monitoring the situation, but that they considered the snap exercises to be normal and non-threatening. In contrast, NATO officials considered the snap exercises to be a serious concern and at odds with the spirit of the OSCE Vienna Document. While the messages communicated by NATO and Norway diverged, this does not imply a difference in the way NATO and Norway perceived and assessed the events taking place. Rather, this discrepancy is most likely a reflection of the different ways Norway and NATO operate and cooperate as two different entities. In defence and security cooperation, Norway and NATO play different roles: while NATO relies on Norway to keep the level of tension to a minimum, Norway, on the other hand, relies on NATO to more overtly and directly deter Russia from potential acts of aggression. Norway addresses issues in its immediate vicinity; NATO addresses the overall trend of readiness tests in relation to multiple NATO members. A discrepancy between the narratives of the two entities is thus not surprising from a political and strategic perspective. Rather, it is part of the conventional dynamic and division of labour between ally and alliance.

CONCLUSIONS

While Russia has previously used exercises to shape the operational environment for offensive operations against neighbouring states, this does not mean that all such exercises are a prelude to actual armed conflict. There are several possible strategic logics behind such exercises.

Under international law, the Russian Federation is entitled to conduct military exercises, including readiness exercises. It is reasonable to assume that Russia factors the timing of Norwegian and NATO exercises into their own planning processes ahead of snap exercises. Hence, this exercise in particular can be understood as a response to Joint Viking and/or Dragoon Ride – all of which are part of the continual ‘dialogue’ of exercises between actors. It is telling that the 2015 Norwegian Intelligence Service assessment of Russia did not differ from previous years; Russia did not, according to this assessment, pose a military threat to Norway.

No publicly available evidence supports the argument that the series of readiness tests conducted by Russia in 2015 had an effect on Norwegian national security interests by influencing decision-making. It could therefore be argued that the exercise was not necessarily a hybrid threat as it did not fulfil the criteria:

Impacted national security interests. Activity which exploits a vulnerability and impacts on a nation’s critical functions by weakening the military, economic or political strength of a governing authority.

This further suggests that the case is either a failed attempt at a hybrid threat (for which there is no evidence) or that it does not constitute or qualify as one. The data therefore does not indicate that the case meets the following criteria:

Ambiguous. Activity which is ‘ambiguous’ or in the ‘grey zone,’ i.e. short of the threshold for war and where the intent is unclear, concealed or intentionally designed to be misleading. It is also activity which is likely short of the threshold of violence which could be described as ‘war,’ ‘warfare,’ ‘conflict’ or ‘armed intervention’.

A key point in this case was whether the readiness exercise violated the OSCE Vienna Document, a confidence and security-building measure. The Vienna Document states that at least 42 days advance notice should be given for exercises involving more than 9,000 troops, 250 tanks, 500 ACVs, or 250 pieces of artillery, but it also states: “notifiable military activities carried out without advance notice to the troops involved are exceptions to the requirement for prior notification to be made 42 days in advance.” In such cases, notification is to be “given at the time the troops involved commence such activities.”⁴³ Norway stated that it monitored the situation, and commented the readiness-exercise in relation to the Vienna document as the exercise unfolded in time and scope. Norway did not submit a complaint to the OSCE.

⁴³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence and Security-Building Measures*, 30 November 2011, <https://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true>

It is difficult to see how Norway could have perceived or handled this issue differently, at least from a bilateral perspective. The perceived normality of readiness exercises likely influenced the Norwegian authorities' perspective and response to the situation. When evaluating how to respond to such events, the potential need for deterrence (if the threat is real) must be weighed against the risk of unnecessary escalation (if it is not).

Beyond the bilateral perspective, it is worth noting that Russia conducted twenty snap exercises in 2015. Snap exercises have re-emerged not as a single instance, such as this case, but as a trend. That trend has garnered criticism because, according to NATO, it means Russia "has deliberately circumvented the requirements for notification and observation of exercises under the OSCE Vienna Document and has made routine use of the 'exception' for large-scale, no-notice snap exercises."⁴⁴ This perspective was not part of this case study but could possibly provide a more fertile ground for future research. Such a study would have to determine whether the trend is better understood as a hybrid threat or follows well-established patterns in international relations.

Nothing in this study suggests that these exercises should be interpreted as a hybrid threat against Norway. Moreover, reshaping international agreements is not an uncommon goal in international relations, and military exercises are held for a variety of reasons, including training requirements, domestic display of power, or a show of force to add coercive power to strategic deterrence. If evidence suggested this exercise in particular was part of some larger hybrid threat, such as against NATO, we could discuss a more strategically sound response to it. The evidence considered in this case study does not support such a conclusion.

Recommendations

- **Strategic context is everything.** While Norway did not assess the exercise under review for this case study as a threat, NATO placed the behaviour of the Russian Federation in the context of events in Ukraine and the overall increase in snap exercises. The NATO position was, justifiably, that the drum beat of such exercises in general should be considered as a threat to regional stability. Norway, on the other hand, did not interpret this particular snap exercise as a threat to its national security. This highlights the challenge of reconciling the understanding of adversarial activity on a case-by-case basis with the context of broader narratives that develop in the longer term. As the primary responsibility for identifying and responding to hybrid threats lies at the national level, the Norwegian position had primacy. There was a risk that divergent positions between Norway and NATO on the nature of the exercises undermined each other. This reinforces the importance of having messaging which is coherent and mutually supportive at the international level.
- **Military posture is a means to deliver information effects.** While exercises have a function in their own right in supporting the development and sustainment of conventional military capability, they can also be intended to, or perceived to, 'send a message' through what the military call 'presence, posture and profile.' Given the long planning timelines and momentum behind such exercises due to their size and complexity, being able to adjust military posture to achieve different information effects presents a significant challenge. The understanding of events depends as much on context as on the intent articulated during planning. Exercises such as Dragoon Ride and Joint Viking may have been planned with certain effects in mind (such as 'Reassure', 'Demonstrate') but when the context changes, so does the way in which audiences interpret the message. Appreciating that exercises are not the easiest of

⁴⁴ NATO, "Statement by NATO Deputy Spokesperson Carmen Romero on NATO Military Exercises," 12 August 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_122048.htm?selectedLocale=en

endeavours to adjust, information functions (such as Public Affairs) should identify ways of 'adjusting the volume' in order to reduce the risk of failing to achieve the required effects or creating 2nd and 3rd order effects which lead to unwanted escalation.

- **Intelligence fusion.** Nations need the ability to synthesise traditional 'Red Force' intelligence analysis of conventional military forces, such as understanding capability and intent, with the information effect that such forces have on key target audiences within the information environment. This would enable governments to provide accurate information and context without risking escalation. This should also include the consideration of factors relating to the domestic political situation and public opinion of any adversary.



Norway's JOING VIKING exercise. IMAGE – Petter Brenni Gulbrandsen/ Navy / Norwegian Armed Forces



Tactical Naval Strike Group Simulates Naval Battle in the Barents Sea using torpedoes and ship-mounted artillery, 18 March 2015 / Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

APPENDIX

Detailed Timeline

The following section lists key events comprising the string of exercises Russia conducted in the spring of 2015. As will become clear, the exercises were conducted by the Northern Fleet and parts of the Western Military District (airborne units), and lasted from 16 March to 21 March. Combined, the readiness tests included 80,000 personnel, 12,000 pieces of heavy equipment, 65 warships, and 220 aircraft. As seen in the above section, this prompted public statements from Norwegian authorities as well as from NATO.

9-18 March 2015 – Norwegian Armed Forces start Joint Viking exercise (part of the joint operative arenas concept) in the western part of Finnmark, main activity on-shore in Alta, Porsanger, Karasjok, and Kautokeino areas. It is the largest drill in Finnmark since 1967.⁴⁵ It involves 5,000 troops, is designed primarily to train the Norwegian Armed Forces' ability to deploy rapidly across larger distances. The exercise had been planned since 2013.⁴⁶

16 March 2015 – 09:31 (MoD statement, instructed at 08:00) – Russian announcement of exercise. Statement: 'limited to the Northern Fleet (NF) and certain other units of the Western Military District, specifically Airborne Troops (VDV)'.⁴⁷ Directives handed to Chief of the Armed Forces, commanders of troops, and heads of main and central departments of the Defence Ministry.⁴⁸

09:31 (MoD statement, English version) – 'President of the Russian Federation, Supreme Commander-in-Chief

⁴⁵ Thomas Nilsen, "Norway Launches High North Military Exercise," *Barents Observer*, 9 March 2015, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2015/03/norway-launches-high-north-military-exercise-09-03>

⁴⁶ Nina Berglund, "'No Warning' of Russian Exercises," *NewsInEnglish*, 17 March 2015, <http://www.newsinenglish.no/2015/03/17/norway-following-drama-in-arctic/>; Klo Allan and Gyda Katrine Hesla, "22 millioner kilo kjøretøy på veiene i Finnmark nå," *NRK*, 9 March 2015, <https://www.nrk.no/finnmark/stor-militaerovelse-i-gang-finnmark-1.12249552>; Ingeborg Moe and Tor Arne Andreassen, "5000 soldater i Finnmark kan provosere Russland," *Aftenposten*, 5 February 2015, <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/9mxaw/5000-soldater-i-Finnmark-kan-provosere-Russland>.

⁴⁷ Thomas Frear, Ian Kearns, and Łukasz Kulesa, "Anatomy of a Russian Exercise," *European Leadership Network*, 12 August 2015, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html

⁴⁸ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010279@egNews

of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin ordered to put on alert the Northern Fleet units, the Western MD formations and Airborne Troops for inspection. This inspection started at 8:00 on March 16.⁴⁹

14:25 (MoD statement) – Northern Fleet Coastal Forces moved from places of permanent deployment into Kola Peninsula. Includes motorised rifle troops (80th Independent Motor Rifle Brigade stationed in Alakurtti participates for the first time), a rocket artillery brigade, and marine Special Forces.⁵⁰

15:56 (MoD statement) – 98th Guards Airborne Division put on alert, equipment and weapons moved to concentration areas in preparation of loading in airplanes and helicopters (military transport aircraft) for transport.⁵¹

17 March 2015 – 05:00 (MoD statement) – Naval aviation (ASW crew Il-38 and Ka-27 helicopters) of the Northern Fleet take off and start submarine search in designated areas of the Barents Sea (aerial reconnaissance), making use of radar, sonar, and anti-submarine weapons for training purposes. Ground engineering services start the preparation of the second phase of aircrafts. Military transport aircrafts ready to fly cargo to Special Forces deployed on Arctic Ocean islands.⁵²

06:00 (MoD statement) – Military transport aircrafts (334th Military Transport Aviation Command) are relocated from Pskov Oblast to Ivanovo, in order to transfer the 98th Guards Airborne Division (to a military airfield in the Arctic). The movement involves more than 10 Il-76 military transport aircrafts (Ilyushin Il-76) to cover a distance of over 3,000 kilometres. BTA actions specifically allow the transfer of personnel and equipment over long distances.⁵³

07:00 (MoD statement) – Loading of 98th Guards Airborne Division personnel and equipment completed.⁵⁴

08:00 (MoD statement) – Military transport aircrafts (about 50) of the Western Military District Air Force Command and 1st Command of the Air Force and Air Defence, including Su-27, Su-24M, Mi-8AMTSh, and Mi-24 departing to relocate to (forward) airports. Aviation experts moved to destination airport for inspection and preparation of the airfields.⁵⁵

09:00 (MoD statement) – Relocations of 30 crews (Mi-24 and Mi-8 aircrafts) started from airfields in the Leningrad and Smolensk Oblasts. The aircrafts land for refuelling on Karelia air base. The crews practice flying in combat formation, exercises on piloting techniques in units, and flying at extremely low altitudes. Upon arrival they practice the landing of amphibious groups, air strikes against ground targets with rocket-bombs and small arms, and search and rescue/evacuation operations of victims.⁵⁶

10:00 (MoD statement): Northern Fleet marines enter large landing ships for transport to the location of amphibious operations. The deployment includes field communication centres, and practice of resistance of sabotage attacks, reconnaissance groups and air strikes.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ See: http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010279@egNews

⁵⁰ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010317@egNews

⁵¹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010350@egNews

⁵² See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010536@egNews

⁵³ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010538@egNews

⁵⁴ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010540@egNews

⁵⁵ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010545@egNews

⁵⁶ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010547@egNews

⁵⁷ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010550@egNews

11:57 (MoD statement): Airborne Troops of the Baltic Fleet and Southern Military District put on alert (highest degree of combat readiness). Strategic command-staff training takes place in accordance with the plan of operational training of the Armed Forces in 2015. The purpose of the exercise is to test warning systems and command and control to reveal issues in formation and units, and train the practical application of forces.⁵⁸

17:24 (MoD statement): 76th Guards Air Assault Division scrambled (brought to full combat readiness) as part of the strategic command and staff training of Armed Forces Management. Units marched to areas of concentration, deploying field command posts and communication centres.⁵⁹

20:39 (MoD statement): Arctic formations deployed in Pechenga and Alakurtti complete fortification of positions in areas of operation and conducted reconnaissance.⁶⁰ In accordance with Ivanono unit, VDV is transferred to northern landfills at considerable distance from their place of permanent deployment.⁶¹

21:25 (MoD statement): Peacekeeping brigade of Central Military District (normally assigned to CSTO) put on alert.⁶²

23:40 (MoD statement): Combat crews perform conditional missile launches on various classes of targets.⁶³ Anti-aircraft missile battalions target strategic bombers (Tu-95 and Tu-22M3), transport aircrafts (AN-12 and AN-26), and fighters Su-27 and Su-25).

18 March 2015 – 03:00 (MoD statement) – Naval strike forces led by the Admiral Ushakov conduct joint exercises with two shipboard search strike groups including KPUG antisubmarine ships in the Barents Sea. In total about 10 warships of different classes attend, supported by the deck anti-submarine aircraft.⁶⁴

04:00 (MoD statement): Ivanovo Airborne Division (VDV) paratroopers are deployed to a distance of 1 500 kilometres. Crews IL-76 deliver personnel and military equipment to a military airfield in the Arctic.⁶⁵

04:30 (MoD statement): Naval aviation Su-33 fighters conduct a simulated attack against anti-submarine and anti-mine vessels, and successfully repelled.⁶⁶

06:00 (MoD statement): A tactical missile strike group of the Northern Fleet start working on the steps to conduct naval combat with imaginary enemies in the Barents Sea. A variety of situations of naval battle are included. Mine risk education and operations in areas with conventional enemy submarines are included. Northern Fleet forces will also carry out landing on unequipped coast, including battle for landing.⁶⁷

07:00 (MoD statement): The Division Marine Connection (marine units), stationed in Temryuk, Krasnodar Krai is brought to full combat readiness. The personnel equips fortifications and prepares military equipment and weapons for training and test firing. The personnel of the contingent fulfils the tasks of countering sabotage groups and imaginary aviation enemies.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010585@egNews

⁵⁹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010618@egNews

⁶⁰ Thomas Frear, Ian Kearns, and Łukasz Kulesa, "Anatomy of a Russian Exercise," *European Leadership Network*, 12 August 2015, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html

⁶¹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010631@egNews

⁶² See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010639@egNews

⁶³ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010625@egNews

⁶⁴ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010647@egNews

⁶⁵ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010648@egNews

⁶⁶ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010649@egNews

⁶⁷ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010651@egNews

⁶⁸ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010652@egNews



About 30 crews of the Western military district's army aviation relocate to a military airfield in the Arctic, 17 March 2015 / Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

08:00 (MoD statement): Motorised Rifle Units of the Eastern Military District stationed in Sakhalin are brought to the highest degree of readiness. Mechanised infantry, tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft missile units and support units are moved into the area of concentration. They will be followed by more units and supported by Army Aviation, after which they will start practical tasks of the defence of manoeuvre anti landing on the coast.⁶⁹ This involves 3,000 personnel and 1,000 pieces of equipment.⁷⁰

08:30 (MoD statement): More than 20 warships, boats, supply vessels and submarines of the Baltic Fleet are moved to the designated areas in the Baltic Sea where they will perform tactical missions instructed by the high command. Merged into several tactical groups they will fulfil tasks of anti-submarine and air defence, mine maintenance, and routine rockets and artillery fire on different types of targets. Included are Project 20380 corvettes, diesel-electric submarines, small missile and anti-submarine ships, minesweepers, missile boats, and various auxiliary fleet vessels.⁷¹

12:20 (MoD statement): The search and mine-sweeping group of the Baltic Sea Fleet has been sent out to sea to work out intended objectives. The naval strike group including missile hovercraft (guided missile corvette Bora) and two missile boats start a search and destroy simulation. The patrol ship 'inquisitive' and small antisubmarine ships 'Suzdalets' and 'Aleksandrovets' in conjunction with ASW aircraft be-12 and Ka-27PL start a submarine search in designated Black Sea areas. Mine-sweeping ships groups formed from sea trawlers 'Kovrovec', 'Ivan Holubec', 'Valentin Pikul' and 'Mineral water' conduct minesweeping operations. The tasks in the Black Sea involve more than 10 ships and more than 10 naval aviation aircraft units.⁷²

13:05 (MoD statement): A mixed squadron of the Southern Military District including 10 Mi-8 and Mi-24N helicopters relocates from the main airport in Korenovsk and Krymsk airfield in Krasnodar Krai. A squadron of 12 Su-25 assault aircrafts of regiments in the Stavropol Territory prepare for relocation to the operating airport in Primorsko-Akhtarsk (Krasnodar Krai) for execution of combat training tasks using airborne weapons.⁷³

14:22 (MoD statement): Formations and military units of the Land Forces, Army Aviation and Special Forces of the Central Military District stationed in the Volga region, the Urals and Western Siberia scrambled and moved to designated areas. Information is exchanged with the central bodies of military management, the coordination

⁶⁹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010653@egNews

⁷⁰ Thomas Frear, Ian Kearns, and Łukasz Kulesa, "Anatomy of a Russian Exercise," *European Leadership Network*, 12 August 2015, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html

⁷¹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010668@egNews

⁷² See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010677@egNews

⁷³ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010679@egNews



Baltic Fleet repels simulated missile attack (near Kaliningrad) on 18 March 2015 / Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

of practical actions of troops is going through the regional headquarters control centre (CVO) in Yekaterinburg.⁷⁴

16:55 (MoD statement): Missile boat “P-257” targeted the corvette Soobrazitelnyy, the corvette repelled the cruise missile attack and ‘destroyed’ its opponent. The sea range Baltic Fleet, where the exercise took place, was closed to civil navigation. 10 surface ships and fleet support ships observed and guaranteed the high level of security of the event. The marine fleet ranges have more than 20 ships and submarines decommissioned at sea as part the KshT.⁷⁵

17:20 (MoD statement): Intelligence units of the Airborne Troops (VDV) were parachuted and landed near Novaya Zemlya and Frantsa Iosifa Land (Nova Zembla and Franz Josef Land). The main task of the paratroopers is to strengthen the protection and defence of strategically important objects located in the Arctic and to ensure the safe landing of the main forces. Previously 10 military transport aircraft Il-76 from North Airfield Severomorsk-3 were transferred.⁷⁶ Airborne Command was led by Deputy Chief of Staff of the Airborne Forces, Major-General Alexander Shushukin.⁷⁷

18:32 (MoD statement): The commander of the Airborne Troops, Colonel-General Vladimir Shamanov, reports that 5 Airborne compounds are in full combat readiness and have started to perform practical tasks in the interest of the Northern Fleet and four military districts. He also informs of the readiness of subdivision 31st Paratroops Brigade, designed for operations in the Central Asian strategic direction for the benefit of the Central Military District.⁷⁸

19:10 (MoD statement): Motorised infantry and paratroopers take part in large-scale teaching in the Arctic (Murmansk Oblast). The exercises in arctic landfill Balls are controlled by Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Gerasimov. The 200th Independent Motor Rifle Brigade moved from Pechenga to the simulated combat area. Its task is to destroy contingent of paramilitary groups. The 98th Guards Airborne Division arrives in the Murmansk Oblast from Ivanovo. Unmanned aerial vehicles used for exploration of simulated enemy positions and determination of target coordinates. Four Su-24 bombers, 27 fire support helicopters Mi-24 (transferred from St. Petersburg), as well as multiple launch rocket systems “Grad” assisted in the execution of the attack. Mi-24 helicopters delivered a missile and bombs strike on the detected gangs.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010683@egNews

⁷⁵ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010696@egNews

⁷⁶ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010699@egNews

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010703@egNews

⁷⁹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010705@egNews

19 March 2015 – 02:03 (MoD statement): Motorised rifle units of the Eastern Military District stationed in Sakhalin start simulated combat operations on the site “Uspenovskiy,” with communication and coordination through regional headquarters control centre BBO Khabarovsk and making use of weapon systems T-72B3 and MTLB.⁸⁰

03:25 (MoD statement): Units of the 76th Guards Air Assault Division operating at the forefront of the main forces are airlifted to the area of training and conduct a landing at the “Struga Red” site (Pskov Oblast). In total more than 700 paratroopers and 10 units of combat vehicles are involved. Further regrouping of forces involves more than 2,000 paratroopers of the Pskov airborne troops, over 120 military vehicles and 10 military transportation aircrafts. The exercise is supported by 1 500 troops and 100 units of the Air Assault Airborne Division on the ground.⁸¹

05:05 (MoD statement): Naval strike groups (IBM), search (KPUG) and minesweeping groups of the Black Sea Fleet start performing tasks. In collaboration with naval aviation patrol ship ‘inquisitive’, and small antisubmarine ships ‘Suzdalets’ and ‘Aleksandrovet’s’ designated areas of the Black Sea are searched. Two minesweeping groups including ‘Korovets’, ‘Ivan Holubec’, ‘Valentin Pikul’ and ‘Mineral Water’ perform exercises (in contentional minoopasnyh directions and areas). In total the exercise involved more than 10 ships and 10 airplanes and helicopters of the Black Sea Fleet Naval Aviation.⁸²

06:06 (MoD statement): Minesweeping group Kola Flotilla of the Northern Fleet in the Barents Sea starts performing tasks to ensure the deployment of the main forces of the fleet. Two groups including ‘Kotelnich’, ‘Kolomna’, ‘Yadrin’ and ‘Polar’ conduct reconnaissance searches using acoustic, electromagnetic and contact methods.⁸³

07:15 (MoD statement): Crews of Su-27 and Su-24M bombers of the naval aviation of the Baltic Fleet conduct night training flights. Exercises include mock attacks at low speed on air and ground targets, the destruction of command posts and conventional military equipment, and combat manoeuvring at low and medium altitudes.⁸⁴

08:10 (MoD statement): Strategic bombers Tu-95MS coming from Engels airfield perform a simulated attack in the Kola Peninsula, testing radar and command and control systems. Air Defence tasks are carried out by Northern Fleet Crews of Tu-160 ‘White Swan’ and two Tu-22M3 long-range aviation aircraft regiments stationed in Kaluga and Saratov Oblasts.⁸⁵

19:06 (MoD statement): Airborne Troops (VDV) which had arrived in the Arctic on 17 March from an airbase near St. Petersburg landed on the Severomorsk-3 airfield using 20 Mi-8 helicopters. Cover provided by 12 Mi-24 helicopters. In the exercise the commandos completely blocks the airfield, successfully meeting their objectives.⁸⁶

19:57 (MoD statement): Motorised Rifle Units of the Western Military District (ZVO) stationed in Nizhny Novgorod are scrambled/put on alert. Battalions carry out marches to the assembly area, where they set up personnel, equipment, field communication centres, etc.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010771@egNews

⁸¹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010816@egNews

⁸² See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010798@egNews

⁸³ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010789@egNews

⁸⁴ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010780@egNews

⁸⁵ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010807@egNews

⁸⁶ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010980@egNews

⁸⁷ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12010985@egNews

20 March 2015 – NATO began its first 2015 exercise, Dragoon Ride involving 120 US vehicles and 500 personnel crossing the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.⁸⁸

20 March 2015 – 04:04 (MoD statement): Su-27 crews take off from Karelia Besovets airport to support strategic missile carriers Tu-95MS over the Barents Sea, and work on intercepting a simulated enemy aircraft on the outer reach of the attack.⁸⁹

05:02 (MoD statement): Units of marines of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Temryuk Krasnodar Krai hold live fire exercises with standard weapons and driving military vehicles at landfill Iron Horn. The exercise involves countering subversive groups supported by aircrafts.⁹⁰

07:03 (MoD statement): Coastal defence forces of the Baltic Fleet carry out live firing exercises, focusing on issues of cooperation between units, command and control, and the application of new methods of warfare. Most of the training is conducted in the dark, training aimed fire in low visibility conditions using night vision devices.⁹¹

08:04 (MoD statement): The Northern Fleet and individual components of the Western Military District and Airborne Forces crews of Su-24M, Mi-24 and Mi-8 complete a simulated attack against ground targets in Murmansk Oblast, destroying enemy columns and dropping forces of airborne soldiers. Over 50 aircrafts are involved in the exercise.⁹²

15:49 (MoD statement): Simulated enemy sabotage groups attempt to enter and capture the main headquarters from four directions (command post of the Federation Council and the main building of the Navy Staff) of the Northern Fleet in Severomorsk. The attack is successfully repelled by marines and paratroopers of the Ivanovo Airborne Division and the enemy destroyed. Paratroopers march from Olenegorsk Severomorsk airport to defend surface ships and facilities.⁹³

18:49 (MoD statement): Mi-28 'Night Hunter' helicopters and a battery of self-propelled howitzers 'Carnation' from the Western Military District provide fire support to mechanised infantry and attack airborne units in a special operation exercise to destroy an illegal enemy contingent in Struga-Red, Pskov Oblast. The opponent is completely destroyed by fire from light armoured weapons and machine guns (Kord), small arms and howitzers. The focus of the exercise is cooperation between infantry units, paratroopers, gunners and army aviation.⁹⁴

19:39 (MoD statement): More than 50 naval aviation fighters including Su-33 naval aviation, Tu-22M3, Tu-95, An-26, An-12, Su-27, Su-24, and Su-25 from Severomorsk-3 airbase conduct exercises of training and combat tasks over the Barents Sea at altitude from 200 or 10,000 meters.⁹⁵

21 March 2015 – 06:47 (MoD statement): Several sabotage group simulations of up to 100 people with automatic weapons land on the Kuril Islands (Sakhalin) and was countered by a force of 500 personnel and military vehicles including 4-MI 8AMTSh.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ NATO, *Key NATO & Allied Exercises*, October 2015, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_10/20151007_1510-factsheet_exercises_en.pdf

⁸⁹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011008@egNews.

⁹⁰ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011009@egNews.

⁹¹ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011010@egNews

⁹² See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011011@egNews

⁹³ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011064@egNews

⁹⁴ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011075@egNews

⁹⁵ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011077@egNews

⁹⁶ See: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12011089@egNews

