

## SUMMARY MEMORANDUM

**FROM:** Anya Loukianova<sup>1</sup>  
**TO:** Adam Stulberg/Project on Strategic Stability Evaluation  
**SUBJECT:** Implications of Moscow's emerging electronic warfare capabilities

Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East have given Russia an opportunity to test the employment of electronic warfare (EW) capabilities that Moscow has developed over the last decade in order to deter and counter military threats from the West.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Western analysts have foreseen the emergence of Russia's anti-access/area denial capabilities, including advanced electronic counter measures (ECM), for over a decade.<sup>3</sup> What arguably came as a surprise is the demonstrative nature of Russia's use of these capabilities. Since 2014, Moscow has provocatively operated EW systems in close proximity to U.S. forces and widely publicized these developments in state-run media organizations.<sup>4</sup> In response to these actions, U.S./NATO officials have expressed concerns with regard to implications for Western military operations, especially those conducted in close quarters with Russian forces.<sup>5</sup>

EW is an essential part of modern combat engagements. However, "the nature of conventional warfare in the information age is highly escalatory" because both attackers and the defenders seek to gain advantage by disrupting one another's networks of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.<sup>6</sup> In addition, U.S. military planners have a propensity to target an adversary's strategic assets.<sup>7</sup> The implication of all of this is a dynamic of instability in crises in which U.S./NATO forces are faced with a conventionally-inferior adversaries with nuclear weapons. These adversaries also have a high political stake in the outcome of the crisis. In such crises, the power of U.S. conventional counterforce capabilities and their demonstrated effectiveness pushes adversaries to rely on strategies of coercive escalation, including potentially to nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup>

Russian military officials view EW and ECM as an inexpensive, yet key determinants in the conduct and outcome of combat.<sup>9</sup> They posit that "new developments allow to achieve information dominance over the adversary by the suppression of its [C4ISR] systems, achieve air superiority by neutralization of enemy radar, and deal with many other tasks."<sup>10</sup> Russia will continue to develop EW and other anti-access systems and deploy them in theaters of conflict. In addition, Russian officials appear to have made a very deliberate choice to publicize EW developments in domestic media and have been all too happy to re-translate English-language reports that note a U.S./NATO surprise with Russian EW capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Russia's newfound confidence with its nascent anti-access capabilities points to additional headaches for U.S./NATO policymakers in their efforts to manage escalation with Russia. Russia's domestic public relations efforts link the Putin administration's legitimacy to its ability to challenge Western forces and may push Russian policy makers to mistakenly decide to escalate in a conflict with U.S./NATO forces. Managing inadvertent escalation is an even more challenging task for policy makers since it requires mutual understanding with regard to thresholds of escalation. There are persistent dangers of accidental escalation, as recent examples from both Ukraine and

Syria show. Building on the Russian leadership's propensity to flaunt the ability to challenge Western forces, Russian theater-level operators are at a risk of making bad decisions that lead to significant complications for Russian and U.S./NATO leaders alike.

As they learn about Russia's new systems and concepts, U.S./NATO policymakers need to continue to refine both strategies and tactics of dealing with Russia's deployment of anti-access capabilities in close proximity to U.S./NATO forces in Europe and the Middle East. More importantly, in an environment where Russia may be mistakenly confident about its nascent capabilities, there are dangers in both sides' inability to understand or discuss their respective escalation thresholds. As a first step, these dangers need to be addressed through dialogue.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>2</sup> Paul McLeary, "Russia's winning the electronic war," *Foreign Policy*, October 21, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/21/russia-winning-the-electronic-war/>.

<sup>3</sup> See Eric V. Larson, Derek Eaton, Paul Elrick, Theodore Karasik, Robert Klein, Sherrill Lingel, Brian Nichiporuk, Robert Uy, John Zavadil, *Assuring Access in Key Strategic Regions: Toward a Long-Term Strategy* (RAND Arroyo Center, 2004), pp. 11-12, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG112.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See Sputnik, op. cit., and Paul D. Shinkman, "More 'Top Gun': Russian jets buzz U.S. Navy destroyer in Black Sea," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 1, 2015, [www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/06/01/more-top-gun-russian-jets-buzz-us-navy-destroyer-in-black-sea](http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/06/01/more-top-gun-russian-jets-buzz-us-navy-destroyer-in-black-sea).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Tilghman and Oriana Pawlyk, "U.S. vs. Russia: what a war would look like between the world's most fearsome militaries," *Military Times*, [www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/10/05/us-russia-vladimir-putin-syria-ukraine-american-military-plans/73147344/](http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/10/05/us-russia-vladimir-putin-syria-ukraine-american-military-plans/73147344/).

<sup>6</sup> Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, "Conventional War and Escalation," [permission needed](https://www.princeton.edu/politics/about/file-repository/public/Lieber_Press_Article_Esc_030114.pdf), January 3, 2014, [https://www.princeton.edu/politics/about/file-repository/public/Lieber\\_Press\\_Article\\_Esc\\_030114.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/politics/about/file-repository/public/Lieber_Press_Article_Esc_030114.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, "The New Era of Nuclear Weapons, Deterrence, and Conflict," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2013, pp. 3-14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Viktor Khudoleyev, "Na sluzhbe bezopasnosti efira," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 15, 2010, [http://old.redstar.ru/2010/04/15\\_04/2\\_01.html](http://old.redstar.ru/2010/04/15_04/2_01.html).

<sup>10</sup> Oleg Grozny, "Splav opyta i novykh tekhnologii," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 14, 2015, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/news-menu/vesti/iz-vvs1/item/23087-splav-opyta-i-novykh-tekhnologij-i-boevogo-primeneniya-vojsk-reb>.

<sup>11</sup> Anton Valagin, "Pochemu NATO boitsya Russkikh ucheniy," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, November 3, 2014, [www.rg.ru/printable/2014/11/03/uchenia-site.html](http://www.rg.ru/printable/2014/11/03/uchenia-site.html).