

# Examining Russia's Gray Zone Tactics in the Baltic Region

By William Hoepner

September 2024



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maintain sufficient fluency of the Latvian language (Alijeva, 2017). While the law guaranteed that the state would make the attainment of language skills possible through state financing, in practice, these programs have not proven to be as ~~watching a~~ ~~ad~~ accessible as intended.

national or ethnic group, but provided certain ~~rights~~ ~~to~~ all permanent residents of Latvia to include an environment promoting educational, cultural, and linguistic practices of all ethnic groups, in contrast to the case of Estonia (Alijeva, 2017). However, the law did clearly afford more privileges ~~to~~ some minority identities than to others, namely the ~~Baltic~~ ~~identity~~ over the Russian ~~speaking~~.

Latvia continues to maintain a strong connection between language and citizenship policy.

is displayed in the overwhelming rejection of the 2012 constitutional ~~reform~~. The reform,

language, was voted down by nearly 75 percent of voters. Furthermore, voter participation in this matter was shown to be the second highest in ~~the~~ ~~history~~ of the republic, signaling the level of importance with which Latvians held the matter. Following the Soviet collapse and the

As of 2020, more than ~~100~~ ~~000~~ remained in that status (Bergmane, 2020). These persons retained the right to form political parties but are not allowed to vote in local elections nor may be elected into parliament and other civil service positions. Furthering the minority ~~struggle~~ the extent to which those desiring to obtain citizenship must go in order to achieve naturalization. Applicants for Latvian citizenship must complete an exam on the Latvian language, the basic knowledge of Latvian history and culture, the basic ~~principles~~ of the Latvian Constitution, and the text of the Latvian national anthem.









Russian



permissive conditions for Russia to engage in gray

and other national frameworks, would be rooted in national security concerns, while outwardly

This idea of a divided nation, which Putin then and now purports, speaks to the preservation of culture, history, language, and identity (Molodikova, 2017). More importantly, it forwards the concept of a broken Russia, needing to be put back together (Molodikova, 2017). Herein we find the true aim of these efforts, regional political goals and national interests.

Russia has been able to gain a foothold in neighboring (d)-4 0 0 9B (h)-4(h)-4j().4 (oow-4 (y (629.5 T



and wellbeing. It also demonstrates the distance a perpetrating nation can put between itself and the action, creating great opportunity for plausible deniability in the matter. The space in which these actions operate is uncontrolled to such a degree that the odds of a responsible nation facing tangible reprimand are quite low; odds lowered further with the likelihood of a non-state proxy utilized as the executing arm of the action.

If cyber threats are known for their shock and awe value, information campaigns are known for their methodical approach and permeating effects. Of the grey techniques most employed by the Russian government against the Baltic states, invading and polluting the information space may be the most extensively utilized and developed. At this point, not only is Russia extremely experienced in implementing this technique, but the communication landscape of the modern world most lends itself to extortion by malicious actors. Modern technologies and communication methods, alternative sources of information and limited government control over the media made cross-border social communication possible (Kuczyrski, 2016). Russia has identified opportunities to leverage this landscape, through both traditional and modern communication platforms, ranging from news media to social media to official government. It is well proven that the ability to control streams of information to shape evolving narrative is of critical importance and can have great impact perceptions within a

have negative influence on rational decision-making processes (Kuczyrski, 2016). A





economic hampering is quite often bypassed via illegal or 3rd party maneuvers and any degradation of international reputation desired tends to hold little weight to the accountable nation when considered against motivations to action, such as threats to regional security (Carment et al., 2019). Overall, there exists a lack of swift and effective justice from the international community.

While entities exist with the charge of instituting agreed upon guidelines for conflict and enforcing international law, in reality, they are often toothless in response to gray zone aggression. This is not entirely a sign of these entities' failure to perform as intended. What it does do is to highlight the immediate need for a shifting of international focus towards

of common understanding of what gray zone conflict entails, but a further lack of agreement on how and when thresholds of state level aggression are crossed. Furthermore, because these collections of tools are not unique to authoritarian rules, concepts of which are legitimate and which operate out of bounds are not expressly states. For instance, within this unshared perspective of gray zone conflict, the idea of forced information stemming from the rules of democratic values, retaining system

striving to follow those same democratic values (Kuczyrski, 2016). It becomes abundantly clear that a need exists for coordinated and coherent strategies for the handling of operations deemed threatening to regional security and/or pose significant risk to unbalancing political and economic interdependency on a globalized level (Mazarr, 2015).

As with any international policy issues, strategies proposed for the collective identification and handling of gray zone conflict are rooted in complexity. As are recommendations for effective mitigation. Ultimately, the two challenges become intertwined. Highlighted among the solutions are some combination of political, economic, societal, and technical changes to be implemented across a broad spectrum. In short, collective security is the answer (Carment and Belo, 2018). Cooperation between all parties existed in the continued, longstanding world peace should be a given, to include Russia. A noticeable growth in informational security would be possible (Kuczyrski, 2016). But, the collective aspect should not stop at the nation level. It must be one that permeates the societies of those collectively aligned. This security is to be counteracting in a way that incorporates public and private sectors alike, with inclusion of the civil sector and its cooperation in information exchange (Kuczyrski, 2016). This exchange strengthens civil societies and instills faith in government. Without a common operating picture and transparency of the information space, opportunity for growth of misinformation will always exist. Building this collective resilience or strong state capacity, authority and legitimacy is vital to effective mitigation (Carment and Belo, 2018).





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William (Bill) Hoepner works in the field of US federal law enforcement, with over 6 years of specialization in national security counterterrorism matters. Concurrently, he serves as a Civil Affairs Officer with the United States Army, mobilized to Europe. His military role entails understanding, engaging, and influencing unified action partners and indigenous populations and institutions, conducting military government operations, enabling military operations, and providing civil considerations expertise. He holds a Bachelor's degree in History from the University of Detroit Mercy, having minored in Criminal Justice studies. Bill is currently

paths and associated experiences have highlighted the value of interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills, often aimed at culturally and politically diverse audiences, allowing for a unique perspective and approach to the global topics faced today.



