SECOND
INVESTIGATION
DEPARTMENT
UNDER THE
MINISTRY OF
NATIONAL DEFENCE

STATE SECURITY
DEPARTMENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF
LITHUANIA

NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT 2020

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VILNIUS, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The National Security Threat Assessment by the Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defence (AOTD) and the State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (VSD) is presented to the public in accordance with the Articles 8 and 26 of the Law on Intelligence of the Republic of Lithuania. The document provides consolidated, unclassified assessment of threats and risks to national security of the Republic of Lithuania prepared by both intelligence services.

The document assesses events, processes and trends that make the biggest influence on national security situation in the Republic of Lithuania. Based on them and considering the long-term trends affecting national security, the document provides the assessment of major challenges that the Lithuanian national security is to face in the near term (2020–2021). The assessments of long-term trends project the perspective up to 10 years.

The assessment is based on information available before 10 December 2019.

The table below outlines the language of probability and definition of terms used in this assessment:

< 25 %	25–50 %	50–75 %	> 75 %
UNLIKELY	POSSIBLE	LIKELY	HIGHLY LIKELY

Short term: 0–6 months | Near term: 6 months – 2 years | Mid term: 3–5 years | Long term: 6–10 years

SUMMARY

■ **The main threat to Lithuania's national security is Russia's foreign and security policies driven by the Kremlin's desire to ensure the regime's stability and demonstrate its indispensability to domestic audience.** While dissatisfaction with declining living standards and actions of authoritarian regime in Russia has been on the rise, even the largest protests in Moscow in recent years have failed to mobilise a largely passive society.

■ **Russia's increasing military potential and activity in the Western Military District and Kaliningrad region, as well as its deepening military integration with Belarus, has a negative impact on Lithuania's military security.** Russia is consistently strengthening its conventional and nuclear capabilities, developing new armaments and conducting large-scale exercises. Russia's military potential and the rapid centralized decision-making create a significant advantage for Russia over Lithuania and other neighbouring states.

■ **The Russian intelligence and security services that are closely cooperating with the Belarusian intelligence and security services pose the main intelligence threat to Lithuania.** The system of free electronic visas to Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg allows Russian intelligence services to collect information from visiting tourists and to look for recruitment targets. Russian intelligence services not only actively collect intelligence information related to Lithuania, but also seek to carry out influence activities through the Russian compatriot community in Lithuania.

■ **Ongoing malicious use of Russian and Chinese cyber capabilities is being observed in Lithuanian cyberspace.** The biggest threat to the security of Lithuanian information systems, and the information stored in them, is the cyber espionage of the Russian intelligence services. The development of 5G technology without sufficient focus on the trustworthiness of the IT service or product provider may become a new risk factor.

■ **In the information domain, events that underpin Lithuania's statehood and testify to its resistance to the Soviet occupation are the main targets of the Russian propaganda and its history policy.** For this reason, Russian propaganda seeks to convince foreign and domestic audiences that those convicted during the case of January 1991 coup case are unduly persecuted political prisoners.

■ **The biggest risk to Lithuania's energy independence comes from Russia's aim to maintain its dominance over the Baltic energy markets.** Russian energy companies seek to establish themselves in the Lithuanian liquefied natural gas market and try to adapt to new conditions shaped by Lithuanian projects ensuring energy independence. The Belarusian nuclear power plant under construction in the vicinity of Lithuania does not comply with international safety standards. Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation 'Rosatom' ignores unfavourable findings of international and Belarusian experts, neglects demands of construction supervisory bodies and seeks to cover up incidents.

■ **Russia seeks to expand its influence in the West through parliamentary diplomacy.** In bilateral and multilateral parliamentary diplomacy fora, the Kremlin looks for foreign politicians and public figures to represent its position internationally and to influence political processes in their own countries. Moscow's main goals are to legitimize the results of its aggression against Ukraine and to incite disagreements among Western countries about the policy of sanctions against Russia.

■ **The Commonwealth of Independent States remains the key area for Russia in terms of maintaining its influence.** Russia's negotiations with Belarus on energy cooperation and deeper integration shift to political pressure. Despite Minsk's relative success in delaying decisions on further integration, Belarus' financial and economic dependence on Russia enables Moscow to pursue deeper political integration.

■ **In order to regain its global power status, Russia attempts to discredit Western policies in geopolitically important regions and expand its influence there.** The Kremlin tries to halt the Western integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and bring them back into the Russian sphere of influence. Russia expands its influence in the Middle East, North and Central Africa, South America, and the Arctic.

■ **China expands its influence around the world by consolidating support on international arena for its global political agenda.** China's pursuit of technological advantage and its penetrating investment activities increase the vulnerability of other states and pose the risk of losing control over the critical infrastructure. Russia's confrontation with the West in international arena encourages Moscow to coordinate its interests with China. These countries maintain close political and military relations and coordinate positions on international issues.

■ **The level of terrorist threat in Lithuania remains low.** While the number of terrorist attacks is on the decline in the European Union, ISIL and Al Qaeda continue to pose a major terrorist threat. The change of the ISIL leader has had little effect on the viability of the organization. ISIL still seeks to fulfil its vision of a 'caliphate', continues its anti-Western propaganda, and incites extremists and supporters online to independent attacks in Western countries. The threat of terrorist attacks by right-wing extremists in Europe is increasing.

REGIONAL SECURITY

REUTERS / Scanpix

WHY RUSSIA POSES A THREAT TO LITHUANIA?

Russia's foreign and security policies pose a threat to Lithuania's national security. In their pursuit Russia seeks to: 1) undermine the sovereignty of other states and increase its influence there; 2) weaken NATO and the EU, confront their policies, and sow discord among Allies; 3) replace international system based on the rule of law with 'pragmatic' agreements made behind closed doors; 4) develop offensive capabilities of its armed forces and intelligence services, increase the effectiveness of their use against foreign countries.

Russia's foreign and security policies are driven by the interests of the Kremlin and its threat perception. The Kremlin's fundamental objective is to ensure stability of the regime. The Russian political and military authorities consider that the West seeks to impose a regime change. Therefore, the Kremlin seeks to halt NATO enlargement, restrict the exposure of Russian society to democratic political culture, and limit the activities of civil movements and media critical of the regime.

Moscow sees international relations as an arena of geopolitical competition between the great powers and their alliances. Moscow considers it necessary to expand its sphere of influence at the expense of its perceived opponents. The Kremlin sees the development of Russia's geopolitical influence as securing its national interests and presents this to the domestic audience as evidence of the regime's effectiveness and indispensability.

The regime effectively combines political and diplomatic activities with economic and military clout. By providing attractive offers for hydrocarbons, arms or other trade deals, the Kremlin is increasing political dependence of other countries on Russia. Moscow uses these methods in an attempt to weaken the unity of NATO and the EU, to undermine the rules based international order, and to secure its global military presence.

Russia is able to use its military power quickly and efficiently in order to achieve its political goals, especially in the situations where potential repercussions do not include unacceptable losses. Russia used such 'windows of opportunity' to occupy part of Ukraine and to consolidate its military presence in Syria. The Kremlin also dispatched its military advisers, instructors, and private military companies to other crisis regions.

THE SURVIVAL STRATEGY OF THE RUSSIAN REGIME IS SECLUSION AND REPRESSION

The year 2019, especially its second half, was marked by the largest protests in Russia since 2011 and 2012, when population protested against the falsification of the parliamentary and presidential elections results. This time, protests also broke out because of elections, when in mid-July 2019 Moscow City Electoral Commission refused to register virtually all candidates opposing the regime.

The use of administrative resources in elections is a common practice used by the Russian authorities. However, this year the refusal to register opposition candidates led to unexpected public resistance. There was outrage over the undisguised application of double standards by the authorities, which rejected the majority of signatures submitted by opposition but accepted all signatures for candidates endorsed by the regime.

Dissatisfaction with the regime in Russia has been on the rise since 2018 when a wave of protests over pension reform occurred. Six months after the record-breaking victory in presidential elections in March 2018, Vladimir Putin's ratings began to decline and the ruling party 'United Russia' had one of the worst performances of the last decade in regional elections.

Citizens' dissatisfaction with the government is increased by the protracted stagnation of the Russian economy. While the country's GDP has been rising marginally for the last three years, the real income of the Russian population has been on decline since 2014. In fact, the Kremlin was so fed up with the pessimistic figures provided by the Russian Federal State Statistics Service that decided to replace its chief executive and to revamp the methodology for calculating real income, which was supposedly outdated and did not reflect the real-life situation. The data since 2013 had to be reviewed and a more optimistic version of the country's economic situation was to be presented. This very much mirrors the use of statistics in Soviet-era propaganda, which had to prove just how good life was in what was supposedly the most powerful country in the world.

The regime also responds bureaucratically to the decline of its popularity. In the 2019 regional elections, a large number of regime-sponsored candidates campaigned as formally independent candidates in order to disguise their ties with 'United Russia'. Even more so than usual, the nomination of candidates

Moscow protest participants were massively detained
AP / Scanpix

was tightly controlled and critics of the regime, or at least more popular personalities, who could take away votes from regime candidates, were prevented from running in the elections.

The regime tried to suppress the Moscow protests by creating an atmosphere of fear. Protest organizers were often detained before protest actions took place, jailed, and significant financial charges were pressed against them for alleged damage. Attempts were made to detain as many protesters as possible and criminal proceedings were launched in an extremely expeditious manner against those who allegedly used violence against law enforcement officers. Court proceedings indicated that Russia is becoming a nation-wide surveillance state. It has not so far been publicly known, for example, that many public areas in Moscow are surveilled with facial recognition cameras. The data collected was used solely for the benefit of the regime – records which could prove that charges against protesters have been fabricated were not accepted as evidence by the courts.

Russia accused the West of organizing protests in Moscow and has set up two parliamentary commissions to investigate this. Their main evidence was the routine embassy safety recommendations to their citizens about places to be avoided during protests. The organization of Alexei Navalny, one of the opposition leaders, that has been most actively involved in organizing the protests has been declared a foreign agent and charged with money laundering from abroad.

The results of the 2019 regional elections confirmed the trend that popular support for 'United Russia' is declining, but not as sharp as to challenge ruling party's dominant position. The opposition has been able to mobilize a small section of the public for protests but has failed to mobilize voters. The intimidation tactics of the ruling regime were also effective – the post-election protest movement began to focus on attempts to protect persecuted protesters, but not on claiming further political rights.

The Russian ruling regime is no longer able to offer its citizens the increase in prosperity and does not have a clear strategy how to halt declining public support – except to restrict political participation and the last vestiges of freedom of expression. However, it successfully conveys to citizens the idea that politics is an evil to be avoided. The situation in Russia is similar to the Soviet period of 'stagnation' with paternalistic politics, ritualized political participation, and indispensable leaders.

THE KREMLIN EXPLOITS INTERPARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY TO EXPAND CONTACTS AND INFLUENCE

The importance of interparliamentary diplomacy as one of the Kremlin's foreign policy tools has been increasing since 2014. As a result of the annexation of Crimea, and the aggression in eastern Ukraine, many democratic states have restricted bilateral relations with Russia, and the Kremlin has begun prioritizing other ways to spread its attitudes and influence. The Kremlin assesses that governments in many Western countries are dominated by anti-Russian parties, but political representation in the parliaments is more diverse and often include persons willing to mend ties with the Kremlin. Interparliamentary diplomacy enables the Kremlin to convey important messages through these individuals, to reach broader audience abroad, and to convince its intermediaries to exert pressure on their own governments to adopt a softer policy towards Russia.

More than 800 participants from 132 countries, including 41 speakers of national parliaments and 14 international interparliamentary organizations, attended the Second International Forum on the Development of Parliamentarism in Moscow in the summer of 2019.

***"Interparliamentary cooperation can and must become one of the cornerstones of international relations."* Chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko**

duma.gov.ru

Interparliamentary diplomacy in Russia is a centralized process serving the interests of the authoritarian regime and not an independent initiative of parliamentarians. In Russia, foreign policy is strictly coordinated and controlled by the Presidential Administration. In terms of the functions it actually performs, the Parliament – both the State Duma and the Federation Council – is the rubber-stamp of decisions made in the Kremlin. This is illustrated by the fact that in 2019 members of the Duma voted against legislative proposals in less than one percent of all individual votes. It is therefore highly likely that no parliamentary initiative, especially concerning foreign policy, is implemented without the knowledge and consent of the Russian Presidential Administration.

Russia exploits interparliamentary cooperation in its bilateral relations with foreign countries, as well as through active participation in various international parliamentary structures and through the organization of conferences on parliamentarism. The State Duma has established interparliamentary liaison groups with many countries (including Lithuania) and 14 interparliamentary

commissions with foreign countries. The Duma is a member of 17 interparliamentary assemblies, including the Inter-Parliamentary Orthodox Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly.

Russia is inviting foreign parliamentarians to Crimea to justify and legitimize the results of its aggression against Ukraine and to demonstrate to international and domestic audiences that at least some political forces in the West support Russia in this conflict. Interparliamentary diplomacy is also often used to establish informal contacts and to gain direct influence over foreign politicians while offering them and their families travel arrangements with hospitality packages, media publicity, and financial support.

Russia exploits contacts for its own interests, even with foreign politicians who are critical of Russia's ruling regime. The Kremlin presents any attempt to engage in dialogue as an alternative to allegedly ineffective policy of containment and sanctions against Russia and seeks to sow discord among allies.

In 2019, Russia regained voting rights in the PACE, which were suspended in 2014 following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Dissatisfied with the suspension, Russia has repeatedly stressed that membership of the PACE is not a necessity and has threatened to withdraw from the Council of Europe. But its actions did not match its rhetoric – Russia has consistently made diplomatic efforts to bring together a majority in support of its return. The PACE is the most representative assembly in Europe and Russia seeks to exploit it for advancing its foreign policy agenda.

To the Russian domestic audiences the return of full rights to the Russian delegation in the PACE is presented as actual recognition of the annexation of Crimea and thus a significant victory for Putin's policy. The composition of the new Russian delegation at the PACE is also telling. Of the 18 delegation members, five have direct links to Russian aggression against Ukraine. Duma members Leonid Slutskiy, Leonid Kalashnikov, Igor Lebedev, and Svetlana Zhurova are currently subject to EU sanctions for their active role in supporting the annexation of Crimea. The delegation also includes senator Vladimir Kozhin who, as a former influential official of the Presidential Administration, faces US sanctions for Russian actions in Ukraine. Another senator, Sergey Kislyak, was Russia's ambassador to the US from 2008 to 2017 – his activities were exposed during the investigation on Russian meddling in the 2016 US elections.

Leonid Slutskiy, a member of the Russian delegation to the PACE and chairman of the Duma's Committee on International Affairs, actively cooperates with radical movements across Europe in favor of the Kremlin. As head of the Russian Peace Foundation (*Российский Фонд Мира*) he organizes election observation missions in annexed Crimea.

TASS / Scanpix

BELARUS-RUSSIA RELATIONS: DEEPER INTEGRATION IN EXCHANGE FOR ECONOMIC SUPPORT

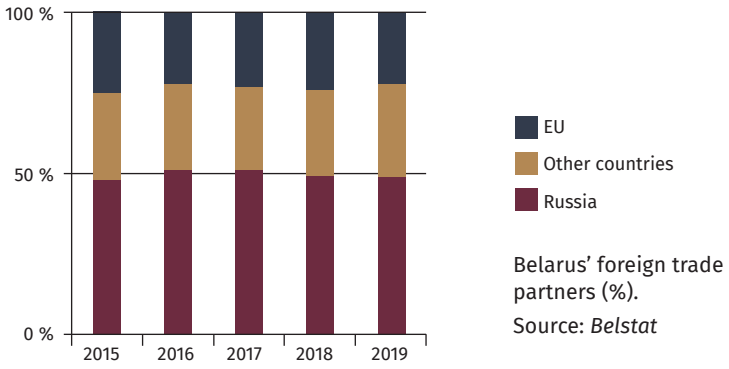
Russia seeks to increase its influence on Belarus by using its weak, non-diversified and dependent on Russian energy resources economy as the main lever. Periodically renewed bilateral negotiations on energy cooperation often evolve into political pressure and confrontation. Moscow ties its economic support to Belarus to the implementation of the 1999 treaty regarding the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

Negotiations for deeper integration between the two countries are complicated by divergent positions and interests. Belarus seeks first to resolve major bilateral economic problems before negotiating any deeper integration. The main demands of Belarus are compensation for Russia's gradually implemented tax reform in the oil sector; supply of natural gas at the Russian domestic market price; stable and unrestricted export of Belarusian diary and other agricultural products to Russia; and refinancing of Belarusian debt with new Russian loans. Meanwhile, Russia seeks closer political integration by imposing unacceptable conditions on Belarus.

The envisioned integration program covers energy, industry, agriculture, taxation and customs, monetary, social security and labour policies. The program is expected to be implemented between 2021 and 2023 thus it is highly likely that in the mid term Russia's pressure on Belarus will only increase. So far, Minsk has succeeded in delaying Moscow's intentions to develop the political dimension of the Union State which would include the creation of supranational institutions. Due to the conflicting interests, the complexity of the integration objectives, and the ability of Belarus to delay the implementation of already signed agreements, at least in the near term the Union State project is unlikely to make any substantial progress.

Putin's increasing pressure will not allow Belarus president Lukashenko (on the left) to relax. *Sputnik / Scanpix*

Although Belarus declares foreign trade diversification as its goal, Russia remains its main trading partner. In order to reduce its dependence on Russia, Belarus looks for alternative sources of financing and energy supplies, including cooperation with China on granting loans and with Kazakhstan and other countries on supply of oil and petroleum products. Nevertheless, in the mid-term Belarus is unlikely to reduce its financial and economic dependence on Russia. The increase in Russia's political influence over Belarus, fuelled by this dependence, will negatively affect regional security.



Belarus' foreign trade partners (%).
Source: *Belstat*

AN UNDEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM IS AT THE ROOT OF BELARUS' WEAKNESS

As expected the Belarusian parliamentary elections in November 2019 – a rehearsal for the Belarus presidential election in 2020 – did not meet democratic standards. From the start of the election campaign, opposition parties faced with unfavourable and discriminatory conditions, opposition-nominated individuals were not allowed to serve as members of electoral commissions. Currently, political opposition in Belarus is not capable of posing a more serious challenge to regime's candidates. This is due to a longstanding policy of persecution and control of the political opposition, as well as a lack of unity among regime-critical political organizations.

Unlike in previous elections, no opposition representatives were 'admitted' to the country's parliament. Real democratic change remains a threat to Lukashenko's rule, furthermore, president's longstanding authoritarian leadership has not only de facto destroyed civil society and rendered other authorities ineffective, but has also diminished the importance of politics in general. Perception of politics in Belarus is reduced to routine management of economic affairs.

In order to maintain power without democratizing the country, the Belarusian political regime gradually became hostage of its own policies. Although the president presents himself as a defender of the Belarusian sovereignty, his longstanding authoritarian policies and procrastination of necessary structural reforms have weakened Belarus and reduced its ability to withstand increasing pressure from Moscow.

In March 2019, Lukashenko inspected a dairy farm in the Mogilev region. Outraged by the housing conditions of the cattle, the president dismissed three local officials, including the district governor. AP / *Scanpix*

MILITARY SECURITY

RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES ARE GAINING STRENGTH

Russia steadily increases its military power and uses it to enable foreign and security policy endeavours. As a result, Russia's military and security remains one of the most generously funded sectors and the pace of strengthening the armed forces is steady – military infrastructure is being developed, new military units are being created, and the armed forces are being equipped with modern weaponry and combat equipment. By 2020, a phase of State Armament Programme will be complete, with the share of new and modernized armament and combat equipment expected to reach 70 percent. The number of professional contract soldiers increases, but Russia does not intend to completely abandon conscription.

Launch of cruise missiles Kalibr
TASS / Scanpix

Russia continues to strengthen its conventional capabilities and maintains the ability to rapidly generate forces in its Western Strategic Direction, which includes Lithuania. The manoeuvre units (brigades and regiments) are able to form battalion tactical groups (700–800 soldiers), which are fully manned and equipped. These groups are fully professional and are capable to operate with 24 to 48 hours' notice. Russia's ability to generate forces quickly and its particularly rapid and centralized decision-making would enable (at least in the early stages of the conflict) it to gain military advantage over its neighbours.

In addition to developing conventional capabilities, Russia focuses on strategic nuclear forces. Consistent re-arming of the nuclear triad – strategic missile troops, strategic nuclear submarines and long-range (strategic) aviation – with new missiles and their carriers is ongoing. Newly developed hypersonic missiles are designed to overcome missile defence systems.

Large-scale strategic exercises take place on a regular basis, enhancing Russia's capability to act simultaneously in multiple conflicts on various scales. For example, in August 2019, Russia held a large-scale strategic naval forces exercise Ocean Shield which involved combat and support vessels from

Russian strategic exercise Tsentr-2019
SIPA / Scanpix

several fleets and multiple aircraft. Geographical coverage of the exercise ranged from the Baltic and North Seas to the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea in the Arctic.

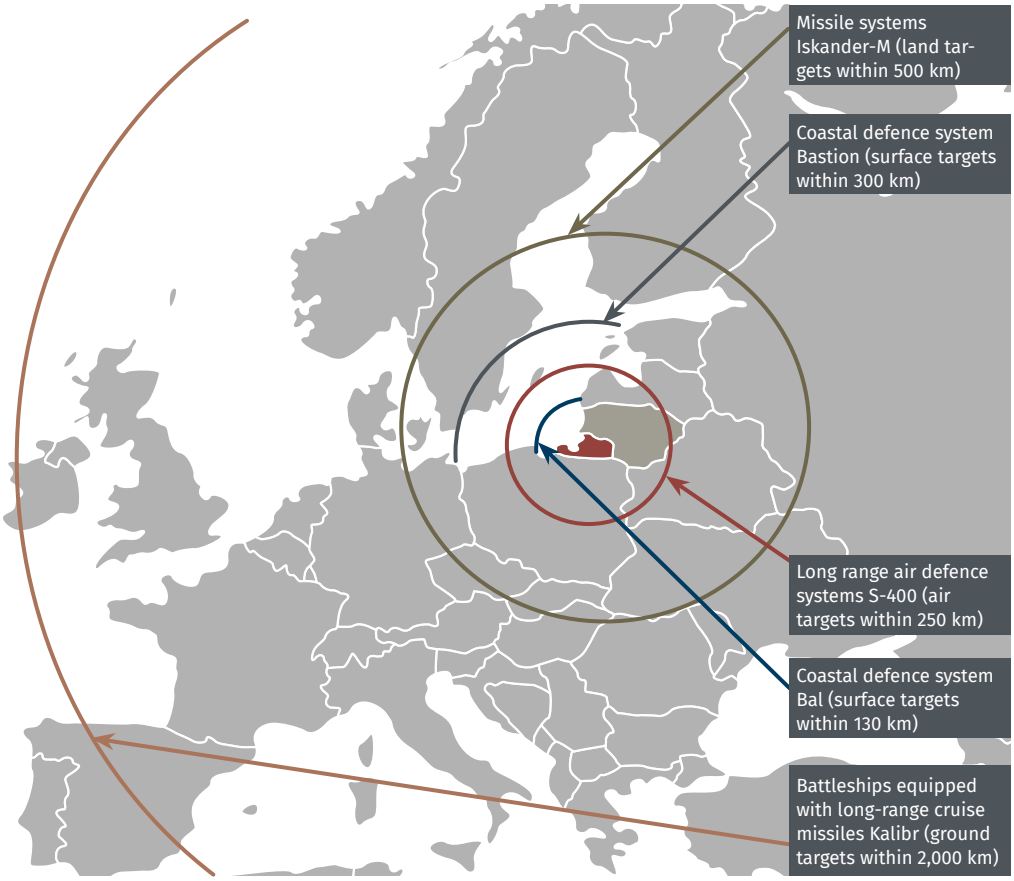
The biggest strategic exercise of the year Tsentr took place in September. According to official announcements, it involved 128,000 troops, with about 2,000 of them coming from other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Those were mainly Chinese troops (about 1,500), while the rest came from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Although the exercise took place not only in the central part of Russia, but also in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, the participation of many foreign countries in the exercise was rather a symbolic demonstration of solidarity than a real improvement of interoperability with the Russian armed forces. Nevertheless, Russia's decision to invite representatives from seven different foreign countries to the exercise demonstrates Moscow's efforts to become a key mediator in global security issues.

In October 2019, during the nuclear exercise Grom Russia launched ballistic and cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. According to official figures, approximately 12,000 personnel from Russian strategic missile troops, long-range aviation and transport aviation, Eastern, Southern, Central and Western military districts participated in the exercise.

KALININGRAD MILITARY GROUPING IS DESIGNED TO DENY WESTERN ACCESS TO THE BALTIC REGION

Military development in the Kaliningrad region reflects the process ongoing in all Russian armed forces. In the vicinity of Lithuania, Russia develops its capacity to create anti-access and area denial A2 / AD effect which would allow Russia to maintain a favourable balance of forces during the initial phase of a potential conflict. This set of military measures is designed to isolate the region and to minimize NATO's access during a crisis or a war.

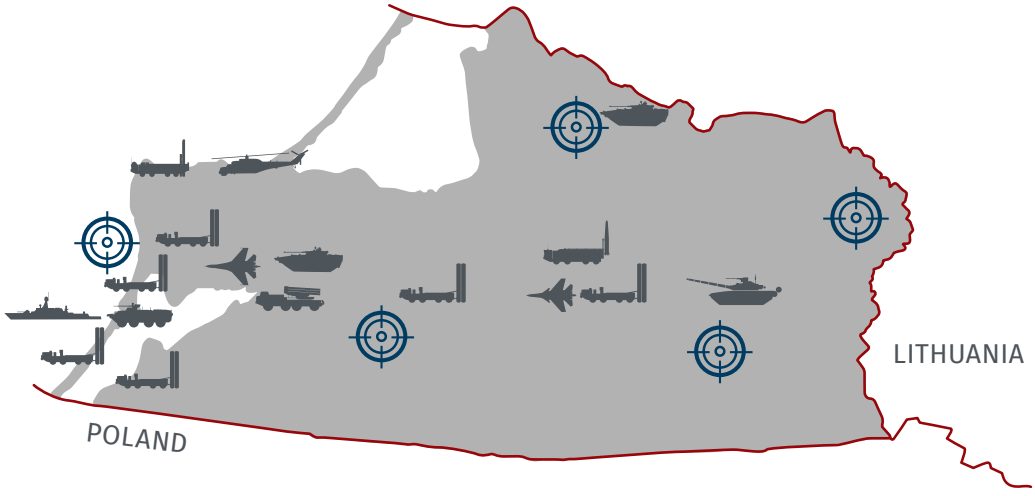
KEY A2 / AD WEAPON SYSTEMS DEPLOYED IN THE KALININGRAD REGION



CONSISTENT STRENGTHENING OF MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN KALININGRAD REGION

2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019

- **S-400** — **Rearmament:** range 250 km; replaces S-300 (90/120 km).
- **Bastion / Bal** — **Rearmament:** SSC-5 range 300 km; SSC-6 range 130 km; replaced Redut SSC-1 (300 km).
- **SS-N-30 Kalibr** — **New capability:** range 2,000 km against ground targets; nuclear capable.
- **Su-30SM** — **Rearmament and new capability:** multirole fighterbomber, „air-air“ and „air-ground“.
- **Iskander-M** — **Rearmament:** range 500 km, ballistic and cruise missiles, nuclear capable.
- **Khrizantema-S** — **New capability:** reinforcement of antitank capabilities.
- **Msta-S** — **Rearmament and new capability:** better combat characteristics.
- **T-72B3** — **New capability:** better combat characteristics.
- **BM-27** — **New capability:** range 35 km; supplements BM-21 (20 km).
- **Tor-M2** — **Rearmament:** better combat characteristics.



- Motorifle Brigade (Bde)
- Naval Infantry Bde
- Artillery Bde
- Iskander Missile Bde
- Bastion/Bal Missile Bde
- Tank Regiment (Reg)
- Fighter Reg
- Bomber Reg
- Helicopter Reg
- Air Defence Missile Battalion
- Baltiysk Naval Base
- Training range

Russia intensively develops and deploys long-range weapon systems capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear payload. The number of vessels capable of carrying 'Kalibr' cruise missiles is steadily increasing. These Russian missile systems can strike a potential adversary's critical infrastructure within 2,000 kilometres range. Kaliningrad witnesses a steady increase of these capabilities. Four ships were delivered there in 2016 to 2019 and the fifth 'Kalibr' equipped ship should be delivered in 2020. In Kaliningrad, Russia retains the tactical nuclear weapon capabilities.

In addition, a mixed aviation division with two aviation regiments – fighter aviation regiment and a bomber regiment – were re-established in Kaliningrad. A helicopter regiment was also formed. In the Kaliningrad region, modern Su-30SM / FLANKER-H multi-role fighter jets are deployed and are actively used in combat training. A new larger military unit – the motorized rifle division will be established in Kaliningrad. It will increase the capability of forces there to conduct military operations without reinforcement from mainland Russia. The development of larger units in the Kaliningrad region demonstrates the long-term intentions of Russia's political and military leadership to continue gradual build-up of military capabilities in this exclave.

Military activity is particularly intense at the Dobrovolsk range near the Lithuanian state border used for training by the units of the 11th Army Corps and the Baltic Fleet aircraft. It has a negative impact on Lithuania's security environment and increases the risk of unintended incidents.

Baltic national armed forces and NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battalions deployed in the region reduce Russia's ability to initiate a potential military conflict and rapidly achieve desirable results, avoiding a large-scale Alliance involvement. This reduces the likelihood that Russia will resort to military force against the Baltic States. However, Russia will further seek to persuade NATO Allies decision-makers and societies that additional security measures in the Baltic region are increasing tensions.

MINSK SEES ITS MILITARY INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA AS ITS SECURITY GUARANTEE

Belarus perceives Russia as a key security guarantor against military threats. Countries conduct combined military exercises to improve interoperability of their armed forces. Russian military industry remains one of the most important sources of modernization of the Belarusian armed forces.

With certain distinctions the Belarusian threat perception regarding NATO is similar to Russia's approach. Belarus, unlike Russia, does not have the 'superpower' mentality. Therefore, Belarusians are less critical of NATO enlargement, even though Minsk regards the Alliance as a risk factor for Belarus. Moreover, lack of trust between Lukashenko and Putin encourages Minsk to avoid permanent deployment of Russian armed forces in Belarus. In the near to mid term, Lukashenko will highly likely try to maintain his freedom to maneuver despite the military alliance with Russia. However, Minsk's security and defence policy will completely correspond to Moscow's interests.

Belarus and Russia pay special attention to military interaction. They constantly renew their plans for military activities and test their effectiveness every two years alternately in 'Union Shield' and 'Zapad' exercises. Belarus and Russia continue to develop and integrate their military elements – the Regional Military Grouping and the Unified Regional Air Defence System. Interoperability of respective units is tested through combined smaller-scale exercises. Belarus and Russia develop and improve the infrastructure ensuring functionality and improving efficiency of the Regional Military Grouping. Belarus pays significant effort to develop host country capabilities.

The Belarusian military leadership aims to modernize the Belarusian armed forces, to provide them with modern armaments and military equipment. However, Russia remains the primary source of new military equipment for Belarus. The Belarusian armed forces have acquired from Russia 12 light attack aircraft Yak-130 / MITTEN and early-warning radars 'Protivnik', continues modernization of tanks. In 2019, Belarus received from Russia its first Su-30SM / FLANKER-H multifunctional fighter jets. By 2021 Belarus plans to purchase a total of 12 of these aircraft.

ACTIVITIES OF HOSTILE INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY IN LITHUANIA REMAINS INTENSE

Effective counterintelligence measures applied by the Lithuanian intelligence community make the territory of Lithuania a hard operating environment for Russian intelligence and security services. However, to offset these limitations Russian intelligence increased the use of technical means and human intelligence from Russian territory. Different counter-intelligence methods are used to observe and prevent the activities of hostile intelligence services and persons related to them against Lithuanian national interests.

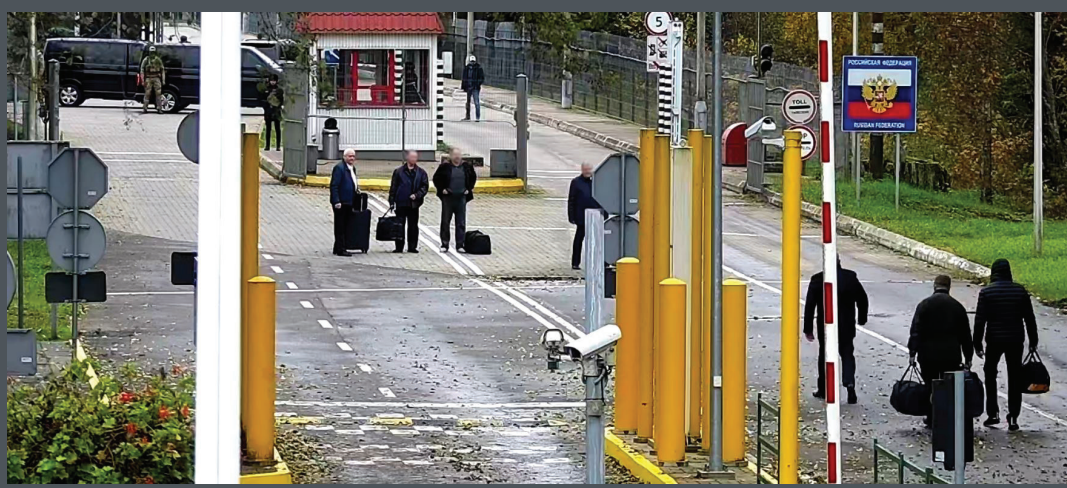
In 2019, three Lithuanian citizens were convicted of spying for Russia. According to the tasks received from Russian intelligence they collected non-classified but not publicly available information about the Lithuanian armed forces, military and other infrastructure of strategic importance. This type of information is used by Russian military for operational planning.

LITHUANIA CARRIED OUT ITS FIRST EXCHANGE OF PERSONS CONVICTED OF ESPIONAGE WITH RUSSIA

In 2019, Lithuania carried out its first exchange with Russia of persons convicted of espionage. Lithuania handed over to Russia convicted Russian intelligence officers Sergei Moiseyenko and Nikolai Filipchenko. Russia handed over a convicted citizen of Lithuania and a dual citizen of Lithuania and the Russian Federation. Along with them, the exchange also involved a citizen of the Kingdom of Norway sentenced in Russia. This exchange became possible when Lithuania and Russia reached a mutually acceptable agreement.

At the time of his arrest Filipchenko was an officer for particularly important cases in the Intelligence Division of the FSB Directorate for the Kaliningrad region. Filipchenko participated in the FSB intelligence operation aimed at penetrating Lithuanian government institutions, Lithuanian law enforcement and intelligence services. One of the goals of this FSB operation was to target officers of the Dignitary Protection Department under the Ministry of Interior who were responsible for protection of the President of Lithuania and could tap communications at both the office and residence of the Lithuanian President in exchange for payment.

The other person transferred to Russia, Moiseyenko, was a Russian intelligence officer who conducted long-term espionage in Lithuania and had formed a circle of trusted persons and agents. In Lithuania, he recruited a Lithuanian armed forces' officer who provided national and NATO, classified and non-classified but not publicly available information to Russian intelligence.



A counterintelligence operation resulted in arrest of two individuals – the head of the meteorological unit of the air operations support squadron and a reserve captain of the Lithuanian armed forces. The head of the meteorological unit photographed official documents containing information about the military infrastructure and equipment deployed at the Lithuanian Air Force air base. Later, he passed this information to the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU). Meanwhile, the reserve captain acted as an intermediary and was exploited for the transmission of technical means for espionage and instructions, and for the collection and transportation of collected information to Russian territory.

Another counterintelligence operation led to arrest of a Lithuanian citizen with no direct links to the national defence system. However, the GRU used him to execute intelligence tasks at the port of Klaipėda. He collected and passed information about Lithuanian armed forces and NATO vessels coming to Klaipėda, military equipment carried by them, as well as information about other objects located in Klaipėda city and Klaipėda port which are of strategic importance for the national security.

All of the above-mentioned Lithuanian citizens were recruited by the GRU in Russia. It is highly likely that the GRU chose the head of the meteorological unit as a recruitment target because of his position at strategic air force base and his regular trips to Russia. On the ground of real and alleged violations of public order, customs, border control, and migration regulations he was detained on Russian territory, interrogated, and recruited. The recruitment of the other two Lithuanian citizens was even easer as they both were living in Russia.

Typical recruitment scheme

Potential target selection

Establishing a contact

Developing friendly relationships

Recruitment

Exploitation for espionage activities

Belarus is Russia's most important ally in intelligence activities against Lithuania. Belarusian intelligence services actively cooperate with Russian intelligence and support their operations in Belarus. Recruitment cases on Russian territory prove that trips to Russia and Belarus can significantly increase the likelihood of recruitment of those Lithuanian citizens who are of interest to Russian intelligence.

FREE VISAS TO RUSSIA OPEN MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

In 2019, Russia introduced free electronic visas for the citizens of Lithuania and 52 other countries to the Kaliningrad region, St. Petersburg, and the Leningrad region. In this way, Russia hopes to promote tourism and generate additional income. This decision not only provides additional travel opportunities for Lithuanian residents, but also poses a risk to national security.

Visa facilitation and the consequent increase of foreigners traveling to Russia are particularly favourable to Russian intelligence services. They systematically search for foreigners able to provide intelligence on foreign countries or perform other tasks. The Federal Security Service (FSB) and the GRU develop and use this foreign intelligence method known as intelligence from the territory. Majority of Russian espionage cases identified in the Baltic States in recent years were examples of intelligence from the territory – residents of the Baltic States who agreed to cooperate with Russian intelligence were recruited in Russia.

Russian intelligence services receive information about foreigners coming to Russia at the moment they submit their visa applications. Among the travelers Russian intelligence services look for individuals who may possess valuable information or who are perceived as vulnerable. The Russian intelligence services pay special attention to former and active politicians, businessmen, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and journalists traveling to Russia.

However, Russian intelligence services increasingly tend to recruit anyone they can and decide later how to use them as agents. For instance, they can be tasked to collect visual information, disseminate propaganda, act as intermediaries or provide operational support.

In Russia the FSB and the GRU operate aggressively, and particularly often use compromising information and blackmail in their recruitment operations. NATO security services identified many cases where Russian intelligence services used aggressive measures when establishing contacts with foreigners. They simulate incidents with local law enforcement, migration or financial institutions threaten to restrict business or personal trips to Russia, initiate acquaintance with co-optees of Russian intelligence to establish intimate relations.

Those traveling to Russia are advised to avoid traveling alone and violating public order; to possess valid documents and necessary permits; to provide truthful information in visa application; to consume moderate amounts of alcohol; to avoid carrying primary mobile and computer devices; to critically assess new acquaintances, offers and requests.

RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES SEEK TO EXPLOIT RUSSIAN COMPATRIOTS IN LITHUANIA

In order to expand its influence in the post-Soviet space, Russia employs 'soft power' means such as influence over the Russian-speaking diaspora, history policy, promotion of Russian language and culture, strengthening of cultural cooperation. Plenty of institutions engage in cultivating the Russian 'soft power', including means the Russian Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic missions abroad, the federal agency 'Rossotrudnichestvo', multiple foundations and government-controlled 'non-governmental' organizations (GONGO's). In addition to these relatively openly operating institutions and organizations, the Russian intelligence services are secretly engaged in Russian 'soft power' activities with the aim to influence foreign audiences.

Systematic and covert attempts by the Russian FSB to spread certain historical narratives and to influence the Russian compatriots are observed in Lithuania. One of the most active individuals in these activities is the FSB officer Pyotr Chagin. For intelligence activities against Lithuania he uses the cover of 'Fond Pobedy' (*Фонд Победы*), a non-existent organization in the Kaliningrad region. In his legend the FSB officer adopted a fictitious identity of Petras Taraškevičius and claimed to be representative of 'Fond Pobedy' in Lithuania.

FSB officer Chagin who also uses a fictitious identity of Petras Taraškevičius

Operating from the Kaliningrad region, Chagin developed contacts with representatives of Russian compatriot organizations in Lithuania and exploited them to organize and fund multiple events. These events were meant to underline a positive impact the Soviet Union and Russia made on the development of Lithuania. For example, the FSB officer took a keen interest in the organization of the 'Immortal Regiment' (*Бессмертный Полк*) campaign in Klaipėda that corresponded with the overall goals of Russian history policy. Similarly, without disclosing the true authorship Chagin used his contacts to publish articles prepared by the FSB in Russian language media in Lithuania.

Through his contacts Chagin not only tried to influence Lithuanian public opinion, but also collected intelligence on the situation in the Russian compatriot community, political situation in Lithuanian municipalities, and showed interest in certain Lithuanian citizens. Chagin observed conspiracy typical to intelligence officers – he never came to Lithuania, set up meetings with his contacts only in Russia, communicated with them via multiple electronic means.

Chagin's case shows that Russian intelligence services try to take advantage of the Russian compatriot community and engage them in illegal activities.

EVENTS FUNDED BY THE FSB

11-04-2018 Concert in Vilnius to commemorate the International Day for the Release of Prisoners of Concentration Camps

29-05-2018 Commemoration of Victory Day in Klaipėda

22-06-2018 Event in Klaipėda to commemorate the beginning of the Soviet Union war with Germany

12-04-2019 Concert on the Day of the Russian Border Guard in Klaipėda

09-05-2019 Concert of Victory Day in Šiauliai

22-06-2019 Event in Klaipėda to commemorate the beginning of the Soviet Union war with Germany

However, Chagin's intelligence activities in Lithuania were short of success. The events he funded neither attracted nor influenced the intended audiences. On the contrary, the FSB actions undermined the Russian-speaking community in Lithuania and discredited their legitimate cultural activities.

We ask Lithuanian residents who know or have information about Kaliningrad resident Pyotr Chagin or Petras Taraškevičius to contact VSD on the Trust Line 8 700 70007 or by e-mail pranesk@vsd.lt

CHINESE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES LOOK FOR TARGETS IN LITHUANIA ON LINKEDIN

Hostile foreign intelligence services increasingly use online social networks to find and recruit sources abroad. Chinese intelligence services are particularly aggressive in this area and they mainly use the opportunities provided by the social network LinkedIn.

SIGNS OF RECRUITMENT BY CHINESE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES VIA LINKEDIN

- The message is received on LinkedIn platform from a Chinese company, research center or recruitment company
- LinkedIn account with Western name and Chinese surname; fake photo, sometimes generated by artificial intelligence; abstract and often meaningless description of company; usually the company has no history or does not exist; poor English; high number of account connections
- Proposal to provide consultancy services
- Invitation to China with all expenses covered
- Meeting with a LinkedIn contact and his alleged colleagues in China
- Meetings that resemble regular work interviews in hotels
- Request for an analytical assessment of trends in a given country, summary of public and non-public political or military information
- Payment in advance
- Request for confidentiality
- Further contacts via mobile apps (such as WeChat) or e-mail
- Agreement on the next meeting in China
- Consistent involvement in espionage activities

A wide range of private and public sector professionals use LinkedIn to establish professional contacts and find potential employers as well as recruitment companies look for employees for their clients. Similarly, Chinese intelligence services exploit opportunities provided by these features.

Chinese intelligence uses LinkedIn to establish contacts with selected targets abroad in the early stages of recruitment operations. The most common targets are civil servants, information technology specialists, defence sector employees, scientists, and experts in multiple other fields. The ultimate goal of the Chinese intelligence is to recruit targets in China. Such operations are extremely cheap and pose no risk to Chinese intelligence officers.

Thousands of LinkedIn users around the world have received offers from fictitious Chinese companies – used as a cover for Chinese intelligence – to become their consultants or employees. Such activities of the Chinese intelligence were also identified in Lithuania.

NEXT-GENERATION TECHNOLOGIES EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CYBER-ESPIONAGE

Malicious activity in Lithuanian cyberspace remains high. Russia, China and other countries gather technical intelligence on Lithuanian information systems. They seek to collect information on vulnerabilities of Lithuanian individual and corporate user systems that can be used for hacking and spying. There are attempts to gain access to critical infrastructure and private sector information systems and use it for espionage. The biggest threat to the security of Lithuanian information systems and the information stored in them is the cyber espionage of Russian intelligence agencies. It is conducted, for example, by the GRU group *Sofacy* / *APT28* and the FSB group *Agent.btz* / *Snake*.

The fifth generation (5G) communication technology which will enable a much larger number of devices to connect to the Internet and allow new sectors to manage systems via the Internet may become a new risk factor for the national security. 5G should contribute to the economy, innovation, and technological progress in medicine, transport and other areas. However, the 5G-enabled critical systems will become potential targets for cyber attacks. Such attacks will be able to intercept information previously unavailable on the Internet and to disrupt newly created critical infrastructure. Sectors that are new to connecting their systems online may not have the necessary experience and knowledge to deal with emerging threats. While the convenience and speed of 5G technology is widely recognized as an offset for its drawbacks, putting its benefits above security could pose risks to the security of personal data and critical infrastructure.

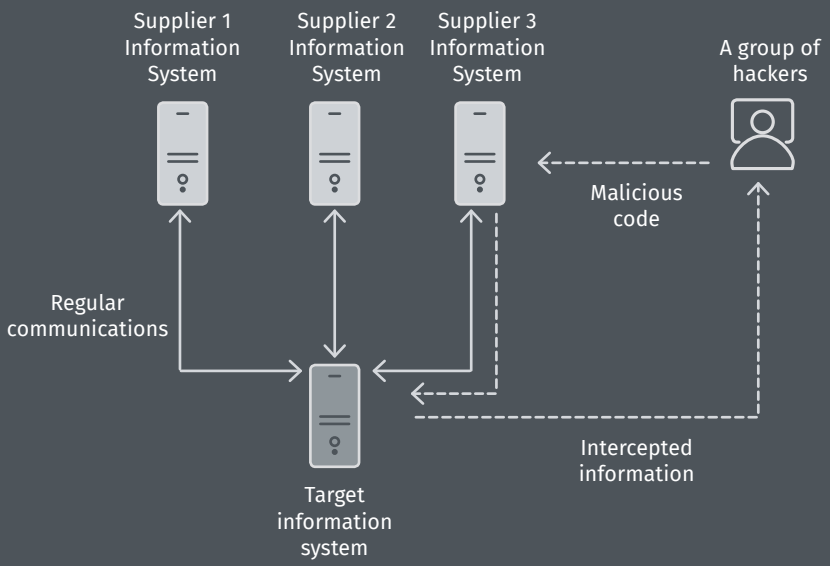
Another new and particularly dangerous risk factor is supply chain violations when a selected target is not attacked directly, but through its supplier networks, IT products or services. While the common cyberattacks are usually carried out by third-party hackers, trustworthiness of providers remains crucial for protection of sensitive data and the integrity of the information systems. Evaluation of a provider should not only encompass potential links with well-known hackers, their groupings or hostile intelligence services, but also the assurance that it is able to ensure security of their products. Vulnerabilities found in both hardware and software components of information systems allow hackers to perform malicious activities against these systems, disrupt them, and exfiltrate information stored on them. Although so far the damage caused by similar attacks in Lithuania has been relatively insignificant, due to the global nature of these operations it is possible that in the long term the impact of these attacks on Lithuanian private companies and critical infrastructure will increase.

USE OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN ATTACK METHOD

- **Since 2016 the cyber grouping *APT10* conducted operation *Cloud Hopper* which attacked IT service companies remotely controlling the IT infrastructure of businesses and government agencies. Through these companies *APT10* sought to penetrate the information systems of their end targets – customers of those IT companies. One of the targets of this operation was a foreign-owned enterprise operating in Lithuania. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Chinese state authorities were linked to this operation.**

- **In the 2017 *NotPetya* ransomware attacks linked to Russian intelligence services the malware entered the victims' information systems through an accounting software used to access the Ukrainian tax system. The malware encrypted systems data, the loss of which not only affected Ukrainian state and private organizations, but also spread to other countries. Although *NotPetya* virus affected only a few dozen companies in Lithuania, the impact of the attack worldwide was massive, with damage estimated at hundreds of millions of euros.**

A simplified example of a supply chain attack



PROTECTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

RUSSIA FACES UNFAVOURABLE CONDITIONS TO SEEK POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN LITHUANIA

Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and its exposed attempts to meddle in foreign elections mobilized international community. The increased awareness of decision-makers and the public of the threats posed by the Kremlin has considerably reduced its ability to influence Lithuanian political system. Conditions to impact on strategic political decisions are limited, but Russia does not abandon its objective to interfere with Lithuania's domestic political processes.

Russia monitored the 2019 elections and other political processes in Lithuania, however there were no large-scale attempts to influence their outcome or manipulate public opinion. During the election campaign Russian propagandists did not focus on campaigning for any particular candidate, but rather ran slander campaigns against Lithuanian politicians who were most critical of actions of Russian authorities.

RUSSIA USES INTERNATIONAL EVENTS TO LOOK FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN REPRESENT ITS INTERESTS

In order to reduce its international isolation and to pursue its strategic foreign and domestic policy goals the Kremlin is interested in developing ties with decision-makers at all levels of government. International events organized by Russia provide ample opportunities to recruit their participants and engage them in a process of non-transparent lobbying of Russian interests.

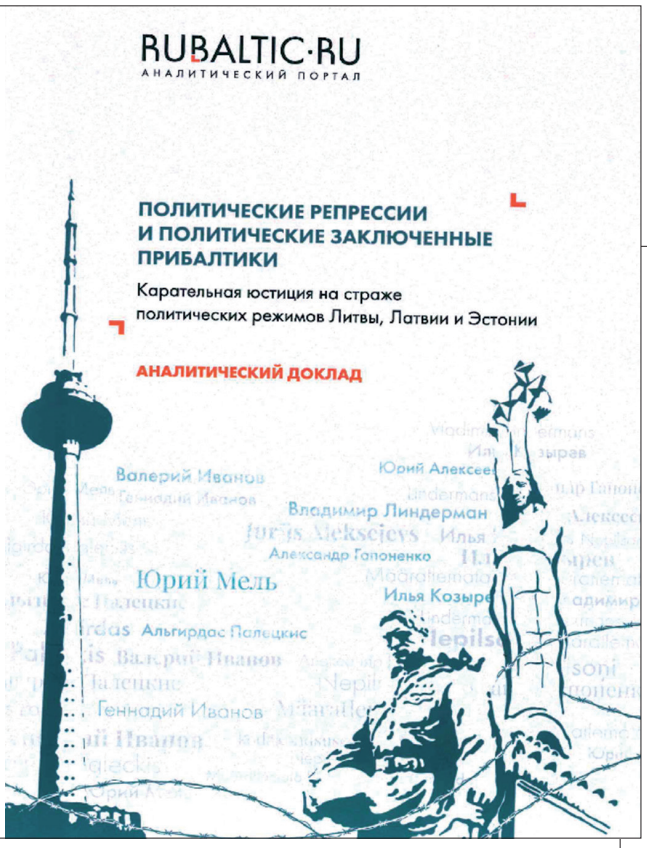
Lithuanian politicians and public figures also receive invitations to attend conferences and forums on social and political issues, including those organized in Crimea. The events on the peninsula are aimed at justifying and consolidating its annexation. For several consecutive years certain Lithuanian political figures have been invited to attend the International Yalta Economic Forum in Crimea. Since 2015, the annual forum has been organized by the Crimean Council of Ministers and the Foundation of the International Yalta Economic Forum, and sponsored by the Russian Presidential Administration. The organizing committee of the event is led by the Russia-appointed head of the annexed Crimea Sergei Aksionov. The Livadia Forum, another large-scale event in Crimea to which leaders of foreign non-governmental organizations are invited, is an integral part of the international slavic festival 'The Great Russian Word', organized in Crimea since 2015.

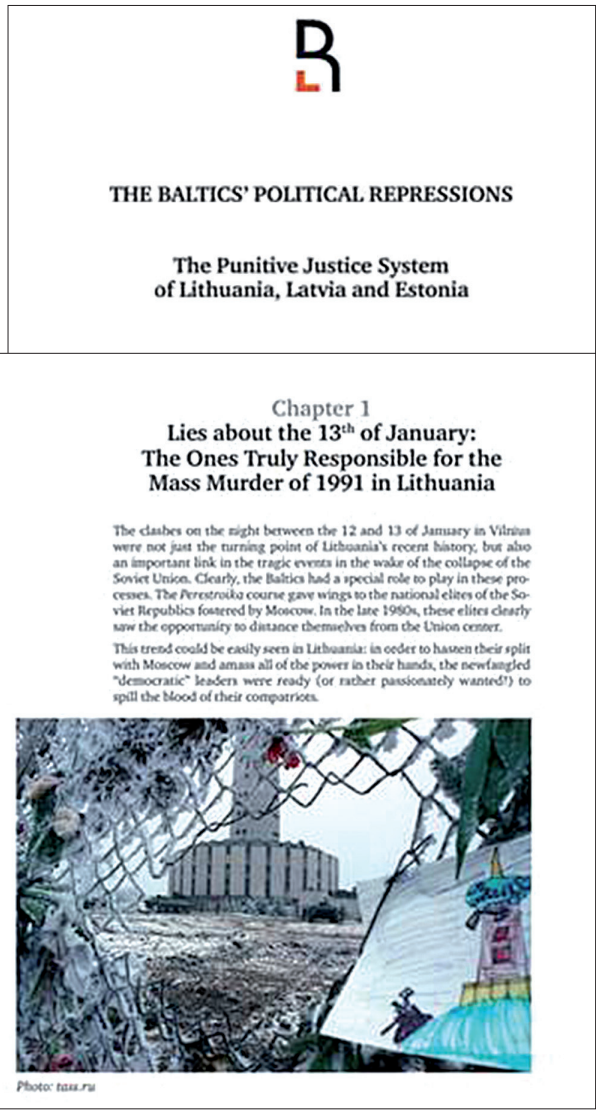
The Kremlin organizes international events looking for individuals who can represent its interests

The Kremlin covers all travel expenses for individuals attending such events. Representatives of the Russian authorities show exclusive attention to foreign guests and seek to establish and maintain contacts. Therefore, very often those who attend the event for the first time later receive similar invitations to other not necessary related events.

By organizing events that correspond to its agenda Russia seeks to create a fiction of international solidarity and neutrality. Russia presents the participation of politicians and other public figures from foreign countries in such events as alleged evidence of strong international support for the Kremlin's policies. In some cases attempts are made to conceal the Kremlin's links to such events or their participants' links to the Kremlin, especially when it concerns international organizations. For instance, the Kremlin exploits OSCE events to 'defend' the rights of allegedly persecuted Russian speakers in the Baltic States and elsewhere. In these venues individuals acting on behalf of the Russian interests often take the opportunity to disseminate false information and further Russia's agenda.

INFORMATION SECURITY





THE BALTICS' POLITICAL REPRESSIONS

The Punitive Justice System
of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia

Chapter 1
Lies about the 13th of January:
The Ones Truly Responsible for the
Mass Murder of 1991 in Lithuania

The clashes on the night between the 12 and 13 of January in Vilnius were not just the turning point of Lithuania's recent history, but also an important link in the tragic events in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Clearly, the Baltics had a special role to play in these processes. The *Perestroika* course gave wings to the national elites of the Soviet Republics fostered by Moscow. In the late 1980s, these elites clearly saw the opportunity to distance themselves from the Union center.

This trend could be easily seen in Lithuania: in order to hasten their split with Moscow and amass all of the power in their hands, the newfangled "democratic" leaders were ready (or rather passionately wanted!) to spill the blood of their compatriots.

Photo: tass.ru

Rubaltic.ru distributed a propaganda publication on alleged political persecution in the Baltic States

RUSSIA USES PROPAGANDA TO DISCREDIT LEGAL PROCESSES IN LITHUANIA

The Kremlin uses information policy as an instrument of influence against foreign countries, including Lithuania. Russia's information policy is coordinated at the highest level and is implemented through targeted dissemination of propaganda and disinformation. The Kremlin's propaganda creates images that portray Russia as a better and more credible alternative to the 'failing West'. It presents allegedly 'alternative opinions' and concurrently aims to sow distrust in information unfavourable to the Kremlin by immediately providing a number of 'alternative' but false versions of the event.

One of the main goals of Russia's information policy is to disparage Lithuania's statehood and to discredit anti-Soviet resistance (for example, the June 1941 uprising, Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance Movement, dissident movement, etc.). Therefore, in 2019, the masterminds of the Kremlin's propaganda spared no effort to discredit the January 1991 attempted coup case and pre-trail investigations on espionage in favour of Russia. To that end they created and disseminated propagandistic narrative about alleged "politically motivated persecution and fabricated political cases in Lithuania", which was supposed to justify the Kremlin's policy.

The propaganda campaign based on this narrative intensified after the Vilnius Regional Court announced its ruling in the January 1991 coup case. At the time of the announcement, representatives of the pro-Kremlin media came to Lithuania with the purpose to produce propagandistic coverages. In their comments on the court ruling Russian officials emphasized allegedly politicized trial and denied the validity of the ruling.

Propagandists sought to convince foreign and domestic audiences that those convicted or detained in the January 1991 coup case and in the case concerning espionage in favour of Russia were political prisoners. They used different means to spread this propagandistic narrative. Individuals holding radical attitudes and acting on behalf of the Kremlin organized propaganda events in Lithuania and abroad in support of 'political prisoners' in Lithuania. Petitions, articles and videos against alleged political persecution were actively circulated online, particularly on the most popular social networks.

RUSSIA'S RESPONSE TO THE 13 JANUARY 1991 CASE

Criminal prosecution is one of the instruments used by the Kremlin to control Russia's political and economic processes. Opponents of the regime are prosecuted both directly for their activities and based on fabricated criminal charges. In addition, criminal pre-trial investigations are initiated as blackmail on individuals to stop their activities, to transfer assets, or to fulfill other demands. In case of compliance charges are usually dropped.

Russia started to use this method in its foreign relations. In 2018, the Russian Investigation Committee launched a pre-trial investigation against Lithuanian officials who investigated the January 1991 coup case and judges who heard and decided it. They are accused of illegal persecution of Russian citizens.

Russia publicly announced the launch of the pre-trial investigation in early 2019, before the announcement of the ruling in the January 1991 coup case in Lithuania. The Investigative Committee published a propaganda video titled 'Lithuanian Justice' on their official *YouTube* channel. Defendants of the January 1991 coup case living in Russia and Belarus speak in the video. Russia was thus seeking to influence the decision of the Lithuanian court by indirectly threatening the judges with the actions of Russian law enforcement, in particular to launch international prosecution.

Russia has not yet taken actions against the citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, but the investigation of the case gives Russia the opportunity to put pressure on Lithuania and on the Lithuanian citizens involved in the January 1991 coup case proceedings, as well as to assert its interpretation of the January 1991 events.

Following Lithuania's restoration of independence in March 1990, in January 1991 the Soviet Union tried to suppress it by sending armed forces and the KGB special units to seize government and other public buildings. The ensuing clashes in Vilnius between the soviet forces and peaceful civilians resulted in 14 civilian casualties. In 2019, 67 former soviet officers were convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, most of them in absentia. Russia denies the soviet occupation of Lithuania, holds the actions of soviet military in Lithuania legitimate, and considers the trial in Lithuania over January 1991 events harmful to Russian interests.

The dissemination of Kremlin propaganda was accompanied by intimidation aimed at influencing investigators and judges in these cases. Russian officials have unequivocally and publicly stated that they will respond to the court ruling in the January 1991 coup case.

Russia sought to discredit legal proceedings in Lithuania in the eyes of the international community. On 20 February 2019, *rubaltic.ru*, a Russian online propaganda outlet, announced its so called investigation on political repressions in the Baltic States in the European Parliament. Most of it was devoted to the January 1991 coup case. Later, Russian GONGOs supporting Kremlin's aggressive foreign and domestic policies addressed the OSCE urging it to draw attention to the alleged political persecution in Lithuania.

CYBER-ENABLED INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGAINST LITHUANIA

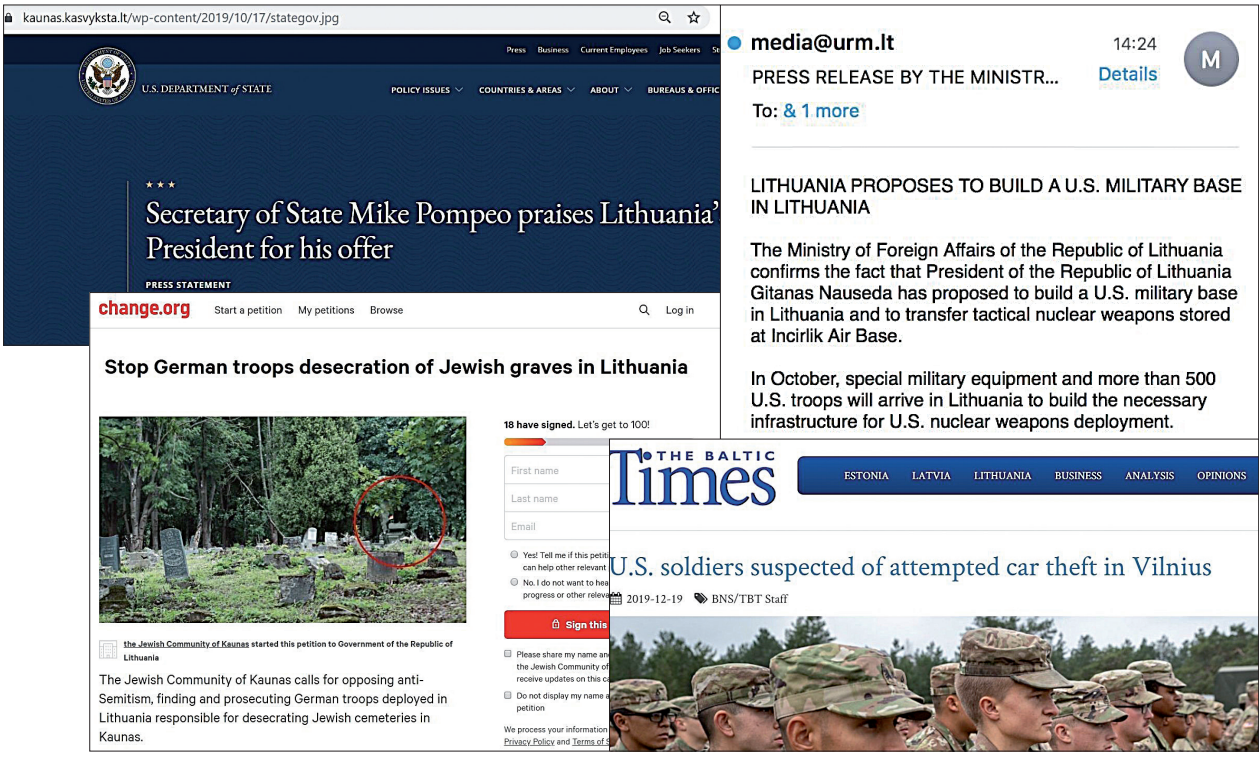
Most cyber-enabled information operations target national defence system. These attacks have the aim of polarizing society, discrediting the Lithuanian armed forces and Allies, and diminishing trust in state institutions. On average, 4 to 5 incidents of this type are identified in Lithuania every year. Creators of fake stories strive to be more compelling and sparsely use techniques that failed in the past. The new attacks differ in quality from the ones in previous years – stories are more often based on real events, messages are more widely spread in foreign media, new institutions and social groups are involved, which facilitates the spread of the disinformation. Publicly available information about current events in the country as well as contacts of civil servants and media are actively used. However, these efforts do not bring desirable results as dissemination of fake stories is low and does not generate much interest.

It is highly likely that the targets of the attacks will not change significantly in 2020. In the near term, entities in Lithuania and abroad will contribute to organization of cyber-enabled information operations or dissemination of fake information.

Topical issues, for example, environment protection, will be used to provoke a negative public sentiment. As long as unavailable to a wide range of users, the advanced technologies (Internet of things, artificial intelligence, deep fake) contribute to evolution, but not revolution of information manipulation. A critical approach to information, self-restraint in sharing sensations, and the security of information networks are among the most effective ways to increase resilience to various forms of manipulation.

POTENTIAL TARGETS OF CYBER-ENABLED INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN 2020

- **Lithuanian Armed Forces' capabilities (upgrades and funding)**
- **Allied forces in Lithuania**
- **International exercise Defender 2020**



Cyber-enabled information attacks in 2019 disseminated fake news about allied forces in Lithuania

KREMLIN AGGRESSIVELY RESPONDS TO RESTRICTIONS ON THE RUSSIAN HISTORY POLICY PROJECTS THAT SERVES THE SPREAD OF KREMLIN'S IDEOLOGY

The most important goal of Russian history policy in Lithuania is to form consistently an exceptionally positive image of the Soviet influence on Lithuania's development, while simultaneously denying the occupation and annexation of Lithuania. Such a goal is based on the Kremlin's geopolitical outlook in which the Baltic States have always belonged to Russia's sphere of influence and therefore cannot be independent states.

The alleged positive soviet influence on the development of Lithuania is embedded in the propaganda narrative of the Great Patriotic War which is pivotal in the Russian history policy. In attempts to shape and disseminate this narrative the Kremlin makes extensive use of the soviet memorial sites in formerly occupied territories. The Kremlin finances the maintenance of soviet soldiers' cemeteries and the restoration of military monuments and other memorial sites. Russia also provides funding for events that underpin its history policy and are often organized at these sites. Any attempts to challenge the Kremlin's ideologically-charged history policy is met with intimidation and aggressive response. For instance, Russian diplomats threatened Lithuanian municipal officials who refused to bypass national regulations on the use of soviet symbols while restoring soviet memorial sites.

RUSSIA WILL COMMEMORATE THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VICTORY DAY

Russia portrays the second Soviet occupation which began in the summer of 1944 with the entry of the soviet armed forces into Lithuanian territory as 'liberation from fascism'. In 2019, activists coordinated by Russian diplomats organized events dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Kaunas and Vilnius in Lithuania. In 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defence also launched a series of 17 events to commemorate the 'liberation' of other Eastern European cities.

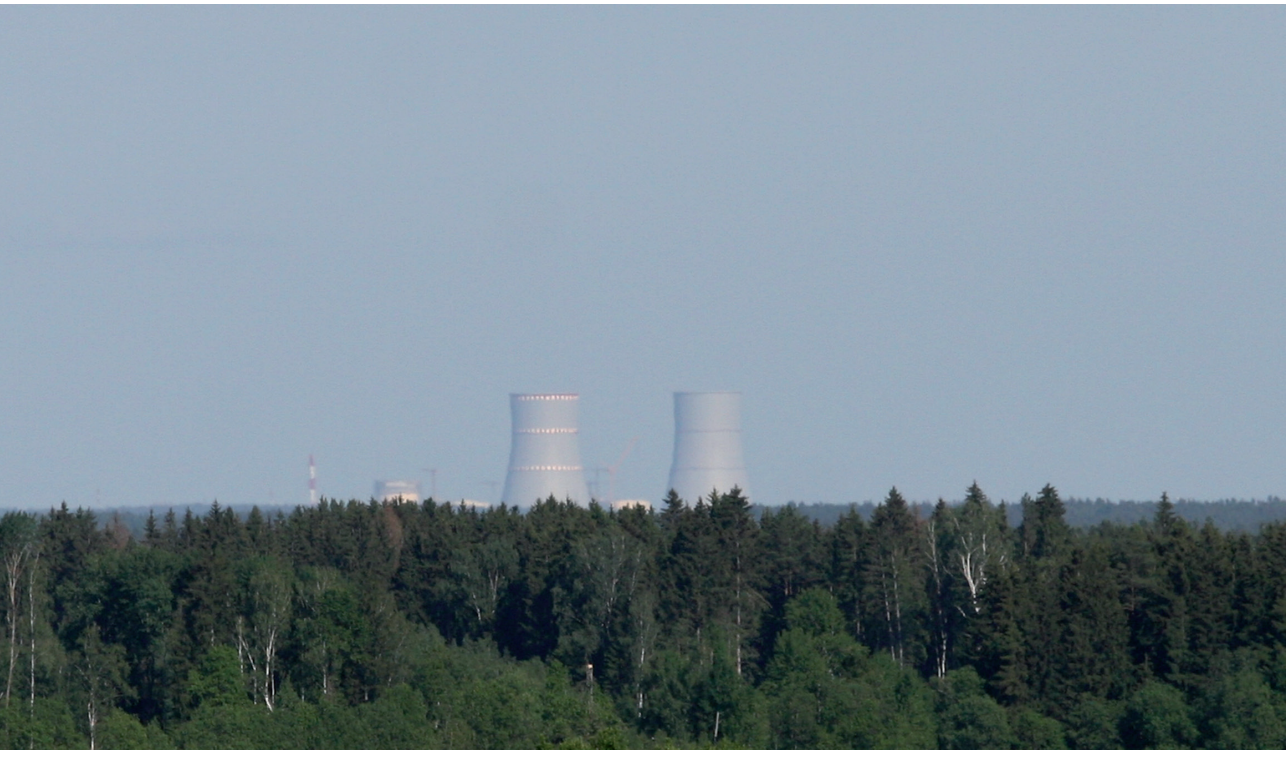
In 2020, Russia will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Victory Day which will contain many propaganda events. The Kremlin is interested that such events fulfill the objectives of Russian history policy and reach out to the international community. Not only the Russian state institutions, including the intelligence services or the regime-controlled media, are used for this purpose, but also international cooperation formats. It is highly likely that Russia will seek to attract multiple dignitaries and state officials from abroad to attend these events.

In denial of the soviet occupation, an event dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of Vilnius took place in 2019 in Moscow
ITAR-TASS / Scanpix

The Kremlin is also in denial of those historical facts that attest to executions, imprisonments, and deportations perpetrated by the soviet authorities. The Kremlin restricts initiatives of Lithuanian non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate these events and pay respect to their compatriots who perished. For the second consecutive year, Russia did not issue visas to participants of the 'Mission to Siberia' who were planning to take care of the graves of Soviet repression victims. Russian officials also detained, interrogated, intimidated, and later fined Lithuanians in Russia, Perm region, who were taking care of the graves of Lithuanian and Polish deportees.

In 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defence initiated a draft law and amendments to the Russian Criminal Code, introducing sanctions and criminal liability for those responsible for the destruction of Russian 'combat glory' sites abroad. The draft law provides for the establishment of a special list of foreign nationals who have been involved in the destruction, damage or desecration of monuments, publicly agitated to do so or made decisions to do so in the exercise of their administrative powers. Listed persons would be barred from entering Russia, any property and funds held in Russia would be seized, all real estate and investment transactions would be banned, and any legal entities owned by them would be suspended.

ECONOMIC AND ENERGY SECURITY



Scanpix Baltics

THE RISK OF INCIDENTS AT THE BELARUSIAN NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IS INCREASING

Stakeholders and contractors of the Belarusian nuclear power plant (BelNPP) project in Astravyets continue to ignore international nuclear safety standards. In the beginning of 2019, the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention concluded that Belarus commenced the construction of the BelNPP without proper site selection procedures and environmental impact assessment. Experts analysed the BelNPP stress test report and identified significant deficiencies. Although the Nuclear and Radiation Protection Department of the Belarusian Ministry of Emergency Situations has announced a plan to eliminate the deficiencies identified during the stress tests, the construction contractor, the company Atomstroyexport owned by Rosatom, has taken no real action. Rosatom gives priority to the on-time schedule over the security of the BelNPP. At least since mid-2018, Belarusian authorities have been under pressure to allow the delivery of nuclear fuel, even though BelNPP's facilities have not been properly prepared.

Rosatom representatives flippantly consider the demands of the Belarusian authorities overseeing the construction and ignore the findings of Belarusian experts. Rosatom considers Gosatomnadzor, the Belarusian agency responsible for project oversight, as an incompetent institution that only impedes smooth construction of the BelNPP. Even when Belarusian experts took a tougher stance, Rosatom was reluctant to follow their recommendations. On the contrary, they made claims about allegedly delayed construction, putting pressure on Belarusian authorities and seeking political leverage.

On the other hand, Gosatomnadzor lacks not only the competence (without the necessary experience its experts cannot manage without the assistance from the Russian agency Rostechnadzor), but also the will to properly supervise the work of Rosatom. Gosatomnadzor often failed to ensure contractor's compliance with the requirements and decisions or recommendations of Belarusian experts. During the implementation of the project the regulations for drafting documentation and licensing of equipment were constantly violated and the supply of adequate equipment for the BelNPP was not ensured. Some equipment was not properly certified and in some places equipment parts were installed that did not conform to the project.

Due to the rushed construction work, the negligent approach to nuclear safety, and the poor work ethics, numerous incidents in the BelNPP have occurred which could have a negative impact on its safe exploitation. The most significant incidents occurred in 2016, but incidents and violations continued in subsequent years, including in 2019. At the end of June 2019, workers' negligence caused a fire in Unit 1 of the BelNPP near the reactor building. Despite the fact that the Unit 1 is already in preparation for loading nuclear fuel, the Belarusian authorities have not provided information on the incident. This fact shows that the situation in the BelNPP has not changed after the incidents in 2016 – information about the real situation in the BelNPP is concealed to avoid publicity. Therefore, it is highly likely that the information will be further withheld after commissioning the BelNPP.

The approaching deadline for the launch of the BelNPP raises tensions between the Belarusian institutions, project stakeholders, and representatives of Rosatom– they all fear responsibility for potential incidents in the hastily-built BelNPP. In early July 2019, the construction manager of the BelNPP Dmitriy Romaniec, resigned. He quitted and left Belarus in a very difficult period – at the start of major preparations for Unit 1. It is highly likely that his departure was not accidental – the former construction manager resigned avoiding responsibility for previous incidents, malfunctions, and further preparations for commissioning. Moreover, the Belarusian Investigation Committee had earlier opened a pre-trial investigation into incidents at the BelNPP construction site. Over the course of that investigation, several people working for Russian contractors were detained. However, due to Russian diplomatic pressure, the cases were terminated.

In our assessment, Rosatom favours the approach to hide information about defects in the BelNPP project, as it fears for its international reputation as a reliable partner in nuclear power plant construction projects.

RUSSIAN ENERGY COMPANIES STRIVE TO SECURE THEIR INTERESTS IN LITHUANIA

In 2019, Russian energy sector companies actively sought to maintain and strengthen their position in the Baltic States' energy market and paid close attention to strategic energy projects developed by Lithuania.

Since the beginning of 2019, Russian energy company Novatek sought to enter the Lithuanian liquefied natural gas (LNG) market. The company's main business activity is the supply of LNG from Vysock, including to the Baltic States via the Klaipėda Terminal. Novatek is able to offer low LNG prices only because of preferential conditions for LNG exports granted by the Russian government. Therefore, by increasing its trade turnover via Klaipėda Terminal Novatek is playing a part in Russia's long-term game to restore its dominant position in the regional gas market.

Although Novatek presents itself as a private and one of the most transparent companies in Russia, there is no doubt that its strategy and goals are coordinated with Russia's top authorities. Gennady Tymchenko, a Russian oligarch belonging to Putin's entourage and one of the Novatek shareholders, is subject to US sanctions. State-controlled company Gazprom also owns part of Novatek shares.

As Lithuania diversified its natural gas supply, Gazprom lost its position in the Lithuanian market and could no longer manipulate prices. In 2019, Gazprom refrained from making direct influence, but sought to strengthen its activities through loyal intermediaries – businessmen with connections to Gazprom and involved in gas trading schemes via companies registered in Lithuania and abroad. Those intermediaries receive Gazprom privileges and thus can gain a competitive advantage. In the hope of even more favourable terms they reward Gazprom with loyalty by coordinating their activities with Russian representatives and providing them up-to-date information on developments in the Baltic States' gas market.

In August 2019, a company registered in Lithuania and involved in Gazprom trading schemes, organized an event – a gala concert which was attended by Ryazanov, the former Vice-President of the Board of Gazprom; Jemelianov, Deputy Chief for Trade with CIS and Baltic region of the International Business Department of Gazprom; and Oruzhev, a former Tymchenko's business partner.

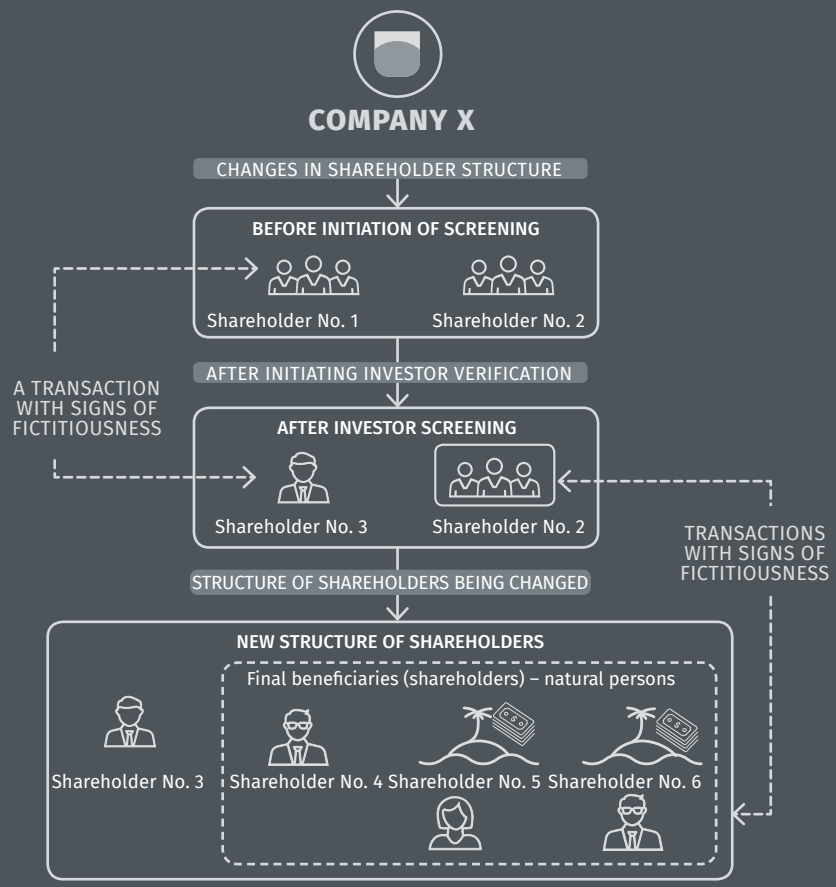
In 2019, the Russian energy holding Inter RAO UES (IRU) also tried to strengthen its position in the Baltic States. The holding is not only interested in maintaining its positions in the electricity trading markets, but also in influencing decisions concerning the synchronization of the Baltic power systems with the Continental European Network. The IRU has an interest in maintaining and increasing the volume of electricity traded in the region. IRU representatives also tried to establish contacts with representatives of the EU institutions hoping to win their favour.

INVESTORS WHO DO NOT CONFORM TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS TRY TO AVOID THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON THEM

The Law on the Protection of Objects of Importance to Ensuring National Security contains criteria for assessing the compliance of investors with the interests of national security. In most cases, investors are recognized as non-conforming with national security interests due to their risky relationships with entities of the third countries.

Entities not conforming to the criteria of national security take the following actions in order to avoid statutory restrictions on their activities:

- Make fictitious share sale transactions with allegedly unrelated entities;
- Use public relations to announce alleged withdrawals from business in third countries and / or sale of shares to allegedly unrelated entities;
- Increase the number of shareholders hiding the actual beneficiaries through offshore structures, mutual funds, and management companies;
- Investors' partners operating in third countries and posing a direct threat to national security change their legal entity names and company logos.



In 2019, the largest flow of potential investors consisted of individuals seeking to invest in the financial and credit sector. There has been a growing interest from third-country investors in setting up financial technology, payment, and electronic money companies. It turned out that a significant number of third-country nationals seeking to invest in the financial and credit sectors were simply testing their capabilities and safeguards applied to foreign investments. Some investors immediately abandoned their investment plans after learning about an ongoing screening regarding their compliance with national security interests or following a negative decision by the Commission for Coordination of Protection of Objects of Importance to Ensuring National Security.

TERRORISM AND MIGRATION

THE THREAT OF TERRORISM IN LITHUANIA IS LOW

The level of terrorist threat in Lithuania remains low. In 2019, no organized groups motivated by Islamist ideology with the intent and ability to plot terrorist acts have been identified. The risk of international terrorism to Lithuania may originate from external factors related to the intentions of Islamist terrorist organizations and their supporters to carry out attacks against Western countries. Lithuania is not a direct target for the terrorist organizations ISIL and Al Qaeda (AQ) or the extremists who support them. However, as an ally Lithuania supports international anti-terrorist coalitions, which may be sufficient to justify an attack. Supporters of extremist ideologies also take advantage of the freedom of movement within the Schengen area thus extremists may intend to use Lithuania for transit, hiding, and planning attacks against other countries. In foreign countries, especially those where terrorist organizations are active, Lithuanian citizens can become accidental victims of terrorist acts at tourist venues or other public spaces.

THE THREAT OF TERRORISM TO EUROPE REMAINS HIGH

Since 2018, terrorist attacks by Islamists in the EU have been declining and this trend has continued in 2019, with five attacks perpetrated by lone extremists inspired by jihadist ideology in France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Other attacks planned by extremists, including potentially highly dangerous ones, were prevented. In most of these cases extremists autonomously planned and funded the attacks. Efforts of the EU member states' law enforcement and intelligence agencies to strengthen prevention and counter-terrorism measures made a positive impact on the security situation in Europe. However, the threat of international terrorism to the EU member states remains high.

Reuters / Scanpix

The death of ISIL commander Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi in October 2019 during a US special operation was a major symbolic blow to ISIL. For the past 5 years, he has been the most prominent leader of the 'Holy War', having managed to establish the 'Islamic Caliphate' for a short time. In the near term, his death could trigger a jihadist movement to react vengefully, including in Western countries.

Chances of the most influential global jihadist groups ISIL and AQ to carry out coordinated terrorist acts against the EU member states have diminished in recent years. Home-grown individuals who were radicalized and inspired by these terrorist organizations pose the main threat to the EU member states. ISIL's ideology remains the major source of inspiration for extremists. It is highly likely that this inspiration has rooted for a long time online, so its impact on extremists in the EU and in other parts of the world will remain viable in the long term.

It is possible that in the near term, some foreign fighters and their relatives will try to return from Syria to Europe. This could negatively affect the security situation in the EU, as these radicalized individuals may be inclined to conduct terrorist attacks. In the short term, AQ could attempt to be more active in conducting terrorist attacks in the West in order to gain visibility and recognition as a leader of the global jihadist movement.

THERE IS A GROWING THREAT OF TERRORIST ATTACKS BY RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS IN EUROPE

Over the last few years groups and individuals promoting right-wing extremist ideologies have become more active word-wide. Proponents of these ideologies are perpetrating more terrorist attacks and ideologically motivated crimes. Many attempts to commit such crimes are thwarted by intelligence or law enforcement agencies and do not gain greater public resonance.

In 2018 and 2019, in Europe the number of individuals sympathizing to one of the most radical forms of neo-Nazism – the so-called 'Siege' ideology – increased. This trend increases the likelihood of terrorist attacks and other violent crimes, as 'Siege' supporters consider violence, terror, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare as the only means of achieving their goal of undermining the democratic order and establishing 'white supremacy'.

The tactics used by proponents of the ‘Siege’ ideology have many similarities to the methods used by ISIL. It calls to conduct independent terrorist attacks and other acts of violence using the ‘lone wolf’ or 'lone cell' tactics. Conspiracy methods and IT tools enabling anonymity are widely used. The list of potential targets of ‘Siege’ violence is very broad: and encompasses not only members of racial, ethnic or religious minorities, but also all those who do not propagate right-wing extremist ideologies.

THE RISK TO NATIONAL SECURITY POSED BY ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Monitoring illegal migration flow and identifying potential extremists remains a priority security task for countries hosting migrants. Although illegal migration flows to Europe have declined significantly over the last three years, the risks associated with this phenomenon remain. Small part of foreign fighters fleeing conflict areas use illegal migration to make their way back.

Persons associated with terrorist organizations, facilitators of extremist movements, and third-country nationals posing extremist threat to the EU countries are constantly seeking ways to enter the EU. They try to make use of various forms of migration, including fictitiously obtained visas, fake businesses, studies and marriages, forged documents, and fraudulent asylum seeking.

In 2019, Lithuania continued to implement the asylum seeker resettlement program and Lithuanian intelligence screened 13 applicants – nationals of African countries – resettled from Italy and Malta. One asylum seeker was denied the entry to Lithuania. So far, only seven asylum seekers of those screened have arrived to Lithuania, but have not been granted refugee status.

Illegal migration flows to European countries from the Middle East and North Africa decline for the fourth consecutive year. By 1 December 2019, more than 117,000 illegal migrants had arrived in Europe (in 2018, over 132,000; in 2017, over 189,000).

The main entry route for illegal migrants in 2019 was the eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey (more than 73,000). More than 14,000 illegal migrants took advantage of the central Mediterranean route to Italy and Malta. More than 30,000 illegal migrants used the western Mediterranean route and arrived in Spain.

In 2019, in Lithuania the number of asylum seekers, mostly women with minor children, from Tajikistan and Russian Federation (North Caucasus origin), increased significantly. Arriving from Belarus territory, some of them used Lithuania as a transit country and did not wait for decisions in their asylum cases, secretly leaving the Foreigners' Registration Centre and departing to other European countries.

GLOBAL SECURITY

Russia is expanding its cooperation with African states
AFP / Scanpix

RUSSIA SEEKS TO MEET ITS GLOBAL AMBITIONS AT THE LOWEST COST

Russia seeks to expand its influence in almost every region of the world in order to regain its status as a global power.

Although Russia increasingly expands its activity into the global arena, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has remained its key area of influence. The Kremlin seeks to halt **Ukraine's** rapprochement with the West and return it to the Russian sphere of influence. Russia is trying to realize this strategic goal by putting pressure on Ukraine to recognize special status to the *de facto* Russia-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, to negotiate directly with representatives of the so-called 'republics' and thereby legitimizing them. A near-term breakthrough in the settlement of the Donbass conflict is unlikely. There are no indications that Moscow would be ready to withdraw its-controlled troops and hand over border control to Ukraine.

In **Moldova**, Russia remains an active participant in the domestic political process, seeing it as an opportunity to pursue its long-term interest to halt Moldova's European integration. In the short term, the Transnistrian conflict is unlikely to break the deadlock as there is no consensus on reintegration.

Russian armed forces sustain constant tension in **Georgia** – at the administrative borders with the occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia – and at the political level, Moscow blocks direct contacts between Tbilisi and the leaderships of the occupied regions. Moscow purposefully pursues gradual integration of the occupied regions, but there is no indication that Russia will formally incorporate them. In the short term, it will be more beneficial for Russia to maintain status quo thereby preserving an important leverage.

In the **Middle East, North Africa and South America**, Russia pursues a low-cost strategy, seizing every opportunity to expand its influence. Moscow is well on its way to developing contacts with all – even conflicting – Middle East states, taking a seemingly neutral stance. For example, the Kremlin refused to blame Iran for attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure, but offered to sell Riyadh Russian air defence systems. Moscow has also been balancing among conflicting groups in Libya and Yemen.

RUSSIAN MILITARY POWER PROJECTION
Russian military base/facility
Short-notice access to use the infrastructure
Conflicts exploited by Russia
Russian Armed Forces abroad
Private military companies abroad
Combined military training with Russia (2019)
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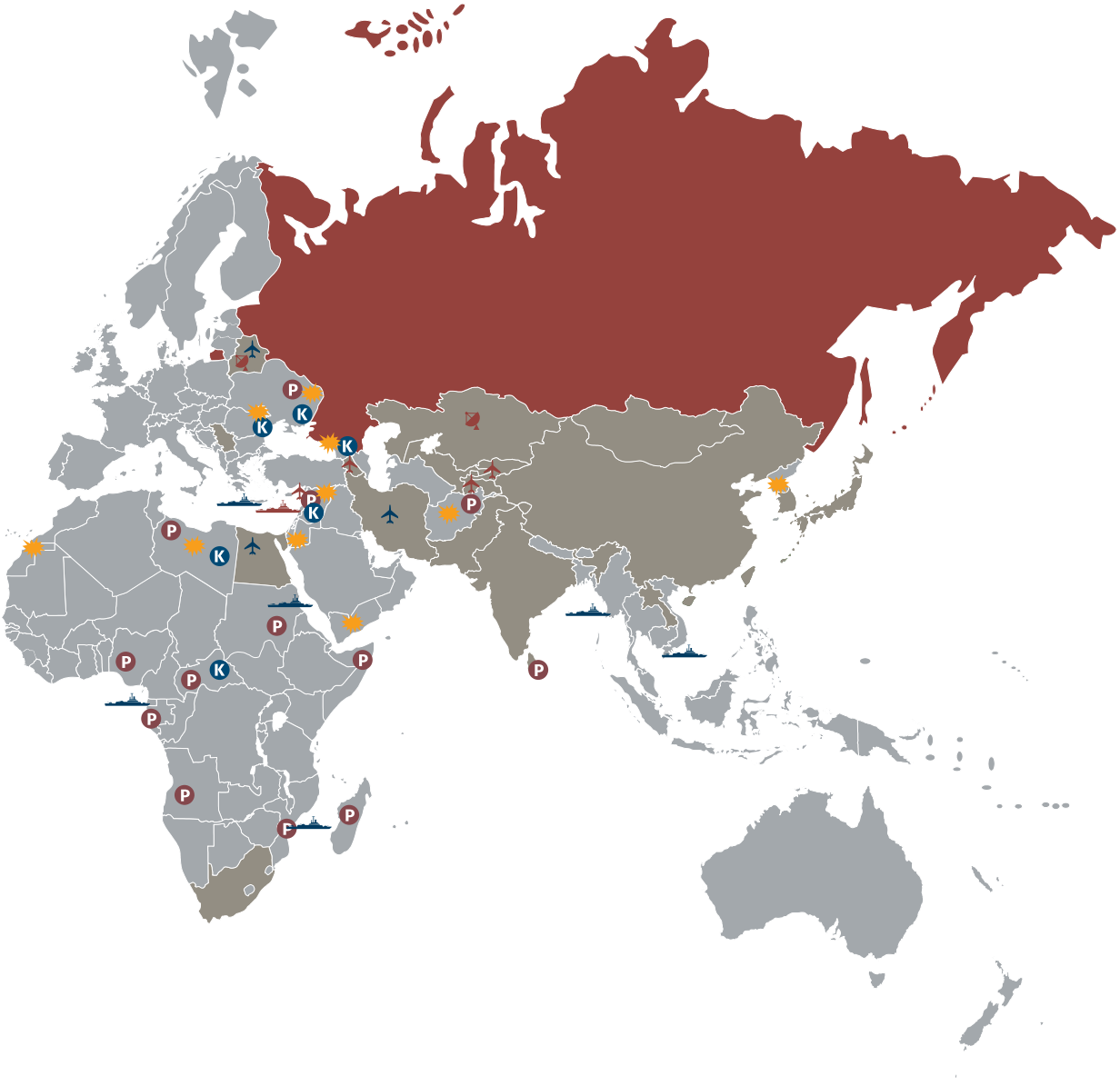
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Particularly beneficial to Russia is the power vacuum in Syria that emerged from the diminishing role of the West. Russia took advantage of the withdrawal of US forces from the Kurdish territories and signed an agreement with Turkey on control of the Syrian border area. Using Ankara's disagreement with the US, Russia began supplying S-400 air defence systems to NATO member Turkey.

Russia exploits unrest in Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, the Central African Republic and other countries and offers to 'export' the Syrian model – protection and support to authoritarian leaders in power. Russia is not only the largest supplier of arms to this continent, but also deepens political cooperation. This gives Moscow access to the natural resources of the countries in the region and provides an opportunity to create the image of Russia as a reliable partner in fight against terrorism and a 'security provider'.

In competition with the EU, Russia develops ties with Serbia. To Venezuela, Russia sends military specialists and mercenaries of private military companies, not officially recognized, but controlled by the Kremlin.

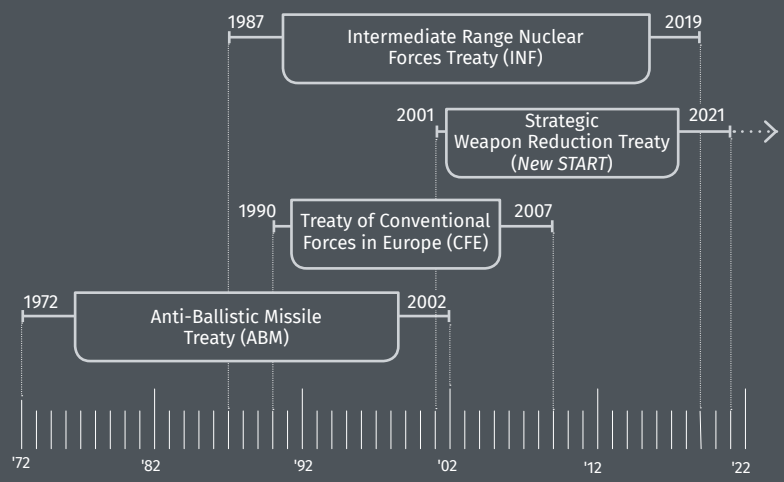
In the Arctic, Russia consolidates its economic and security interests. Melting of polar ice opens up the Northern Sea Route – a strategic shipping lane that cuts the distance in half compared to a seaway through the Indian Ocean for Russian LNG vessels that need to travel from Arctic gas fields to Asian markets. The Northern Sea Route is important to Russia for the export of energy resources to Asian consumers. Therefore, Russia seeks to impose legal restrictions on the navigation of foreign vessels along this route. Russia seeks to ensure its long-term military dominance in this strategic direction and strengthens its nuclear icebreaker forces, air and coastal defence systems, and nuclear capabilities.

THE FUTURE OF ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS HAS BECOME BLURRED

On 2 August 2019, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty expired. An agreement signed in 1987 between the US and the Soviet Union prohibited the use of any mobile ground-based missiles capable of carrying nuclear or conventional warheads within 500 and 5500 km range. The US has withdrawn from the Treaty due to Russia's noncompliance – its cruise missiles 9M729 are capable of ranges banned by the Treaty. However, Moscow tried to cast blame for the demise of the Treaty on Washington. Russian President proposed other parties to join a voluntary moratorium on the deployment of similar missiles in Europe, but the proposal came after Russia had already deployed the missiles in the European part of its territory.

Russia is interested in new medium-range arms agreements, but only if they restrict the West and are tied to the use of nuclear weapons. Russia seeks to involve other European countries in the negotiation of a new agreement. Although China's involvement in a similar arms control treaty would also correspond with Moscow's interests, such an agreement is highly unlikely.

After demise of the INF, the only remaining international arms limitation agreement is the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (*New START*). The agreement signed between the US and Russia in 2010 will remain in effect until 2021, unless both parties agree to extend it for another five years, or to replace it by another treaty on control of strategic nuclear weapons. Even before the demise of the INF, Russia threatened not to renew this agreement. However, the *New START* is useful to Russia, as it allows to preserve its nuclear deterrence capabilities and prevent an arms race that would be too expensive for Russia.



CHINA'S QUEST FOR DOMINANCE WILL CHANGE THE GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

In the long term, growing expansion of China's economic and political clout will lead to major changes in the security environment in EU and NATO members, as well as other regions of the world.

Through technological development and economic leverage, China increases its geopolitical influence and creates preconditions for vulnerability of the states involved in its economic projects. China's Belt and Road Initiative and other strategic development projects are aimed at achieving global economic dominance and technological advantage. State officials, state-owned and private companies, intelligence agencies and Chinese communities abroad are involved in this process. The active penetration of Chinese investments in foreign countries carries the risk of losing control over resources and infrastructure, market manipulation, and political influence.

Through economic leverage, China seeks to exert pressure and secure political support from certain European countries on issues such as the independence of Taiwan and Tibet; meetings of top state officials with Dalai Lama; reform of the World Trade Organization granting China market economy status; issue of Xinjiang Uighurs; and Chinese presence in the South China Sea. Rapid economic development also enables China to promote its political and social governance model abroad.

In August 2019, a wave of campaigns in support of Hong Kong and pro-Chinese counter-protests swept through the world and did not bypass Lithuania. On 23 August 2019, the Chinese Embassy in Lithuania organized a protest in Vilnius disrupting the rally in support of Hong Kong.
A majority of the participants in the pro-Chinese protest were members of the Association of Chinese Expatriates living in Lithuania. The Chinese intelligence services also play their role in arranging and coordinating such protests.

In the military sphere, China actively defends its strategic interests, participates in the United Nations missions, establishes military bases abroad, and rapidly develops military-industrial complex. In the long term, it will pave the way for the projection of military power around the world. In the short term, China will seek economic and technological dominance in strategic sectors.

Due to partially overlapping strategic interests, China develops political and military cooperation with Russia and coordinates positions on certain international issues. Relations between Moscow and Beijing are fuelled by their aspirations to reduce the global influence of the West (especially the US), Russia's economic needs, and China's growing military ambitions.

DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, THE SITUATION IN THE CONFLICT REGIONS IS NOT IMPROVING

By sending troops to international military operations and missions Lithuania contributes to conflict resolution in geographically remote regions of the world – Afghanistan, Mali and Iraq. Prolonged conflicts in Syria and Libya also have a negative impact on the security of NATO and EU countries.

Despite direct talks between the US and the Taliban in 2019, and a nearly achieved initial agreement, the situation in **Afghanistan** remains complicated. Taliban fighters conduct intensive attacks against Afghan security forces in various parts of the country and carry out attacks in the capital, Kabul. The Taliban feels strong enough to continue hostilities and is currently not interested in negotiations with the Afghan Government. In the short term, the prospects for ceasefire and peace in the country are vague. Threat of attacks on local and international forces remains significant.

Despite foreign countries' efforts, the security situation in **Mali** continues to deteriorate. Government forces in the northern part of the country are weak, while former rebel groups retain their influence. In large uncontrolled areas, radical groups thrive. They conduct attacks and expand the geography of their activities. This leads to increased instability in Burkina Faso and in the western part of Niger. Successful expansion of radical groups is determined by their ability to establish themselves in local communities, exploit weaknesses of state institutions, poverty, and ethnic conflicts. Radical groups publicly declare themselves to be defenders of a marginalized ethnic group thus attracting new members for rather pragmatic than ideological reasons. The threat of terrorist attacks in the Sahel is likely to increase.

At the end of 2019, **Iraq** was shaken by spontaneous protests against the country's government and the ruling elite. Peaceful demonstrations quickly escalated into bloody clashes between protesters and security forces. The government fails to get the situation under control as promises about reforms no longer satisfy protesters. Prolonged unrest threatens the stability of the country and could be used by ISIL fighters.

In **Syria**, fighting between the Damascus regime and rebel groups has largely calmed down. The situation of rebel groups, dominated by radical Islamists, is very difficult. They fail to effectively resist regime forces, therefore, in the near

term, the end of hostilities between pro-government forces and militant opposition is highly likely. Turkey conducted a military operation in Syria against the local Kurdish fighters. Following the Russian-Turkish deal, Kurdish fighters were obliged to leave the Turkish border area and the Syrian regime returned its troops to north-eastern Syria after more than seven years.

ISIL has lost its last controlled territories in Syria and all fighters have gone underground. Nevertheless, the group conducted terrorist attacks to show that it has not been defeated. It is likely that ISIL will continue the intense terror campaign in Syria and Iraq striving to get stronger.

In 2019, intensified military actions over control of the capital Tripoli further deteriorated situation in **Libya**. Fighting factions are unlikely to come to an agreement. Driven by various political and economic interests, foreign assistance provided to some warring parties also sustains the conflict. The international community does not have common approach towards the conflict and does not put pressure on the warring parties to resolve it. It is unlikely that negotiations will resume and that a united government will be formed in 2020. The instability in Libya will remain a long-term challenge in the region as it poses security threats to neighbouring countries, impels migration, and creates enabling environment for radical groups to operate.

After seven years, Syrian regime forces returned to the northern part of the country
AFP / Scanpix

NOTES

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