

Zapad-2013

A View From Helsinki

By Pauli Järvenpää

Washington, DC
August 2014



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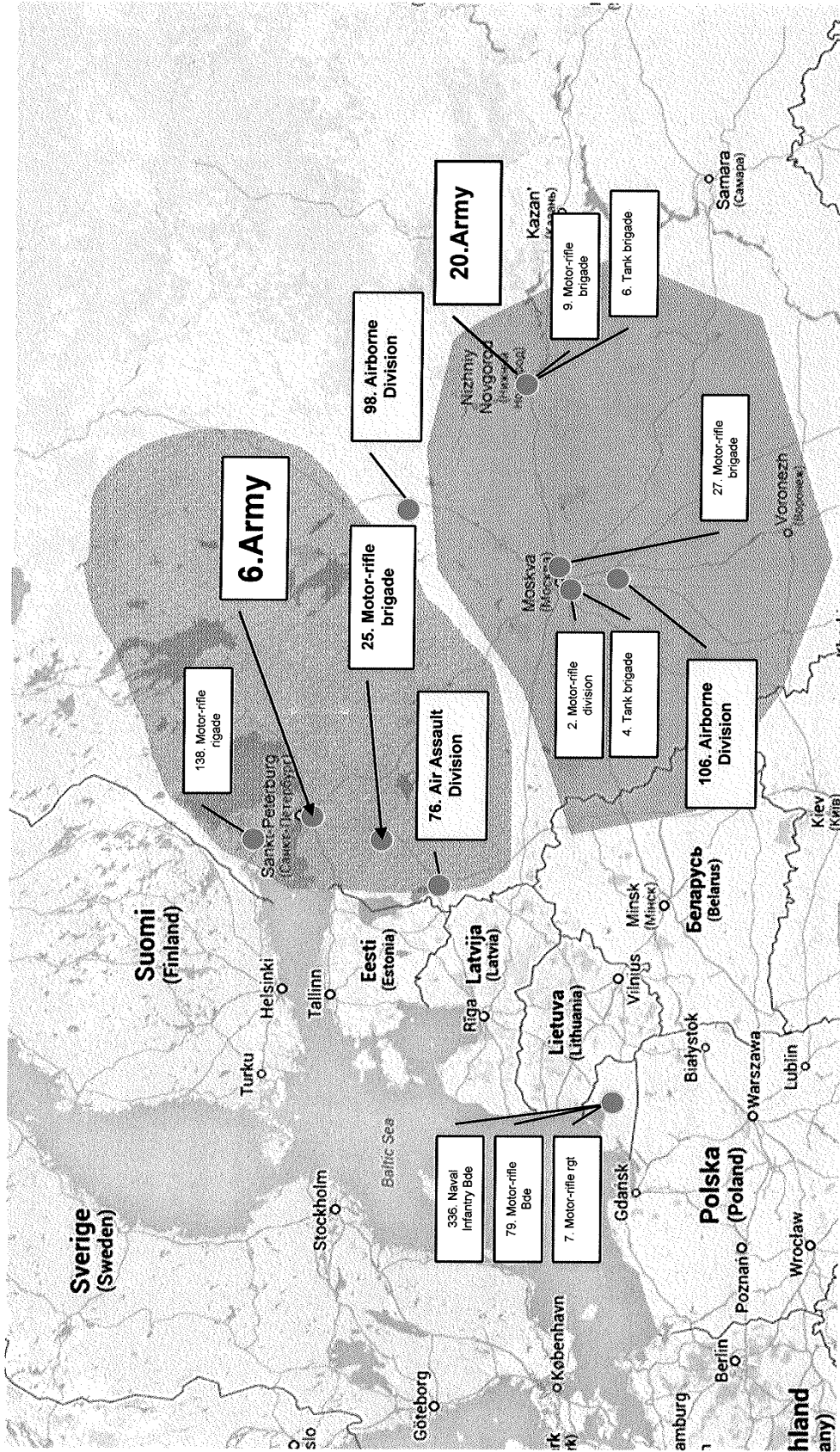
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Main Zapad-2013 Training Areas (In Dark Gray)



Courtesy of: Pauli Järvenpää

Foreword

As a full-fledged war between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed irregulars rages on in Ukraine's eastern region of Donbas, Western defense experts are only now beginning to thoroughly assess the military lessons of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Meanwhile, the Russian military again looks poised to intervene in eastern Ukraine as it launches yet another major military buildup of its forces along the Ukrainian border. Understanding the array of forces the Russian military might use in a potential full-scale intervention of eastern Ukraine in a major conventional war requires that Western experts revisit the strategic dimensions of last year's *Zapad-2013* Russian military exercises. This report by Dr. Pauli Järvenpää closely analyzes the *Zapad* exercise and offers a Finnish perspective on the modernization gains achieved by the Russian armed forces in recent years, as well as the respective areas where these forces are trying to make improvements to their strategic shortcomings.

At this writing, the precarious situation in and around Ukraine continues. The very same troops that took part in the *Zapad-2013* exercise just a few months before—according to Russian sources, roughly 150,000 of them—were put on a high alert in a “snap combat exercise” while the Ukrainian crisis was first developing. Russia's annexation of Crimea earlier this year and the forces Moscow used in its operations across southeastern Ukraine possessed the same sets of capabilities and skills practiced in the *Zapad-2013* exercises. This was brought unmistakably home in March 2014, by the highly publicized and televised appearance of President Vladimir Putin, who was observing a massive live-fire demonstration at the Kirilovski training site on the Karelian Isthmus west of St. Petersburg—all while Russian troops were infiltrating Crimea. As these exercises demonstrated, in many ways *Zapad-2013* and the operations in Crimea were part of the same thread in Russian military thinking and operations. This fact must not be forgotten should Russia opt to launch a full-scale conventional war against Ukraine in the near future.



Glen E. Howard
President, The Jamestown Foundation

August 18, 2014
Washington, DC

Zapad-2013: A View From Helsinki

Introduction

In September 2013, the Russian-led military exercise *Zapad-2013* (“West-2013”) took place in the Russian Western Military District and in Belarus. This was a combined joint forces exercise, which geographically covered the western parts of Russia, western Belarus, the enclave of Kaliningrad, which borders Lithuania and Poland, and the Baltic Sea. Some of the operations extended all the way up to the Barents Sea and its air space off the Kola Peninsula.

The participants in this exercise were the armed forces of Russia and Belarus, and the active part of the exercise lasted from September 20 to 26. Exercise preparations had been launched already on September 1, with the concentration of troops in embarkation areas and in combat training sites. The transportation of the exercise troops was carried out by 25 troop trains and dozens of transport aircraft flights over a distance of up to 1,500 kilometers.¹

Zapad-2013 is particularly relevant in today’s security context. At this writing, the precarious situation in and around Ukraine continues. The very same troops that took part in the *Zapad-2013* exercise just a few months before—according to the Russian sources, roughly 150,000 of them—were put on a high alert in a “snap combat exercise” while the Ukrainian crisis was developing. Thus, as *Zapad-2013* demonstrated, Russian capabilities as well as the Russian moves in Crimea and around Ukraine highlight that Russia also has political will to use these capabilities. This was brought unmistakably home in March 2014 by the highly publicized and televised appearance of President Vladimir Putin observing a massive live-fire demonstration at the Kirilovski training site on the Karelian Isthmus west of St. Petersburg—all while Russian troops were infiltrating Crimea.

A Glimpse Into Russian Military Capabilities

As with all military exercises, *Zapad-2013* serves as a window to observe what the highest political and military leadership in the exercise-organizing country regards as military threats and challenges. At the same time, it gives a rare glimpse into that country’s military

¹ Historically, the Russians have compensated for the relative shortcomings in their strategic and operational air transport mobility by relying on their railway logistics system. Special railway troops are under the command of the Ministry of Defense Railway Troops. The arrangement has, like other parts of the Russian defense system, been under reform, and they are now directly subordinated to the four military districts since December 1, 2010. For a thorough study of Russia’s strategic mobility, see Roger N. McDermott, *Russia’s Strategic Mobility. Supporting ‘Hard Power’ to 2020?*, FOI-R—3587—SE, April 2013.

capabilities, especially into the functioning of its command-and-control systems. And finally, such major exercises as *Zapad-2013* give outsiders a better understanding of what the mindset of that country's military is. In particular, they open up an avenue to analyzing how the military is using its forces and to what purposes.

So, what do the Russian capabilities facing Finland look like today? What military capabilities for conventional warfare does Russia possess in the Leningrad Military District (part of the new Western Military District) next to the Finnish border, and how are they exercised, including *Zapad-2013*?²

First, the new command structure adopted by Russia on December 1, 2010, has major consequences for Finland, as well as for the Baltic States—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Four new commands replaced the six former military districts. All forces, including those of the other power ministries, were to be subordinated to these commands. A new Western Military District, with its headquarters established in St. Petersburg, was formed by combining the forces of the former Leningrad and Moscow military districts, the Northern and Baltic Fleets (but not the strategic missile submarines home-ported at their Kola Peninsula bases), the 1st Air Force and Air Defense Command, as well as the forces based in Kaliningrad.

Second, as a result of Russia's reform of its armed forces, the previous heavy divisions have given way to lighter and more flexible brigades. In the Western Military District, when the reorganization will be carried through, there will be more than 60 brigades or equivalents in permanent readiness or to be established from reserves in mobilization.³ The long-term goal is that all the ground forces formations will eventually become fully-manned, permanent-readiness units. Readiness is defined as these forces' ability to be deployable on short notice, in 6–8 hours. General conscription will not be abandoned, but the high-readiness forces will mainly consist of professional soldiers. That, for its part, will make it possible for Russia to carry out fast, coordinated military operations—a huge improvement over the state of affairs in the Russian military as recently as 10–15 years ago.

Ground forces east and southeast of Finland come under the command of the Russian 6th Army Headquarters located at Agalotovo on the Karelian Isthmus not far from St.

² In this short paper, the answers given to these questions can only be on a highly general level. For an excellent basic detailed study, see the publication coauthored by a well-known Finnish national security scholar and three former high-level Finnish military intelligence officers, Stefan Forss, Lauri Kiianlinna, Pertti Inkinen and Heikki Hult, *The Development of Russian Military Policy and Finland*, National Defense University, Department of Strategic and Defense Studies, Series 2: Research Reports no. 49, Helsinki, 2013. This author is also indebted to a number of military intelligence officials from various countries for the interviews quoted in this study. For obvious reasons, the officials prefer not to be quoted for attribution by name.

³ See *The Military Balance 2013*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2013.

Petersburg. As to the ground forces units, there are three high-readiness brigades on the isthmus, as well as a helicopter unit supporting the brigades. Further south, an airborne assault division is deployed at Pskov, including a Special Forces (*spetsnaz*) brigade. In the north, there will be a combat helicopter regiment redeployed at Alakurtti. In that same area, which lies half way up toward Murmansk from St. Petersburg, there is an equipment depot that, during mobilization, will support a motorized infantry brigade. There is also another depot in Petrozavodsk that has equipment for yet another infantry brigade. All in all, there are then potentially six ground forces brigades in readiness or to be produced in mobilization in the Leningrad Military District.⁴

Third, over the last few years, Russian economic interests in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea basin have noticeably increased. This goes hand-in-hand with the Russian energy production and energy transmission route interests in the north of Russia. As a consequence, Russian military interest has also steadily grown in those parts. The Russian authorities have declared that two Arctic brigades are being planned. It is not entirely clear at this moment what the timetable for the deployment will be. It was originally foreseen that the 200th Motorized Infantry Brigade in Pechenga (the former Finnish town of Petsamo), some 10 kilometers from the Russian-Norwegian border, would be reorganized as an Arctic brigade already by the end of 2011. The other Arctic brigade was planned to be established in the Arkhangelsk area. However, its deployment has been delayed, and now the target date for the first brigade seems to have slipped to 2015. It will remain to be seen if the plans will be implemented and properly resourced, but the current best guess is that the Arctic brigades will be operational by 2015–2017.⁵

All in all, the Russian ground forces units in the vicinity of Finland are in the process of rapid refurbishment. They are in the forefront of modernization, and they will be supported by traditionally strong Russian artillery units with heavy rocket launchers and more regular artillery units. Air force units based in the area have a total strength of more than two hundred combat aircraft and more than a hundred combat helicopters, supported by an equal number of armed transport helicopters and transport planes.⁶ When one adds to this impressive list of modern or modernized equipment, the new missile system *Iskander-M*, deployed in a missile brigade based in Luga, south of St. Petersburg, with its maximum range being potentially as long as 700 kilometers, one gets the message that in the Western Military District the Russian military is back, and with a vengeance.⁷

⁴ Forss et. al, op. cit., Annex 3, “The Development of Russian Military Potential Nearby Finland,” pp. 83–91.

⁵ Interview by the author. See also “Russian commandos train for Arctic combat defense,” October 14, 2013, <http://www.en.ria.ru/military_news/20131014/184143129>.

⁶ Forss et.al., op.cit., pp. 88–89.

⁷ See Stefan Forss, *The Russian operational-tactical Iskander missile system*, National Defense University, Department of Strategic and Defense Studies, Series 4, Working Paper No 42, Helsinki, 2012.

Finally, most of the Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons storage sites are located in the Western Military District. Half of the active depots are in that Military District, supporting more than 20 dual-capable units. Twelve of these units are located on the Kola Peninsula, in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, and in Kaliningrad.⁸

The Official Russian View

According to Russia's official notification to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), *Zapad-2013* was to be an exercise bringing together 12,900 troops in Belarus, of which 2,500 troops were Russian. They were to be supported by 350 pieces of combat equipment, including 70 main battle tanks, 280 armored vehicles and 52 aircraft and helicopters. In Kaliningrad, the exercise included 9,400 troops (200 of them from Belarus) with another set of 350 pieces of combat equipment, including 10 main battle tanks, 170 armored vehicles, 40 aircraft and helicopters, and 10 naval vessels of the Baltic Fleet.⁹ In addition to having notified the OSCE, the Russian authorities briefed the NATO-Russia Council on *Zapad-2013* in August 2013.

The official scenario the Russian authorities offered for *Zapad-2013* was that in the exercise the Russian and Belarusian forces would oust a terrorist element that had seized Belarusian territory. Within that major scenario, the task of the troops was to conduct a special operation for the elimination of illegal armed formations (terrorists) and to stabilize the situation. That included the redeployment of military units of the Regional Grouping of Troops/Forces and the Baltic Fleet to the areas of operation of the illegal armed formations, isolating the areas of terrorist operations.

At the same time, actions by the Air Force and Air Defense Grouping were aimed at supporting the land forces groupings and blocking the illegal armed formations' supply channels by air. Furthermore, the exercise tasking was to ensure the sea blockade by the Baltic Fleet forces, and to interdict the illegal armed formations' withdrawal by sea. Finally, the task of the Russian component of the Regional Grouping of Troops/Forces was to protect the state border in the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

According to Russian sources, the primary objectives of *Zapad-2013* were: 1.) to improve the interoperability of staffs at different levels; 2.) to test the compatibility of advanced command

⁸ Interview by the author.

⁹ The information the Russian authorities provided in their OSCE notification is summed up by Colonel General Alexander N. Postnikov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, to the 732nd Meeting of the Forum for Security Cooperation, October 30, 2013.

and control systems; 3.) to test the provisions of new service regulations developed in the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation; and 4.) to practice the abilities of commanders and staffs in planning of military operations, as well as the command and control of troops during such operations.¹⁰

Furthermore, the official notification to the OSCE stated that the exercise would consist of two parts. The first part was to last three days, September 20–23, and it would include planning by the multiservice grouping of troops in circumstances of a growing threat. That part saw the planning of special operations of the Baltic Fleet and a regional grouping of troops. Also, the troops' command and control during the operational deployment was to be established.

The second part was to last four days, from September 23 to 26, and its main theme was the troops' command and control in operations to stabilize the situation. According to the Russian authorities, that part consisted of four phases: troop control while protecting the borders of Belarus; troops' command and control during special operations aimed at eliminating illegal armed formations and terrorist groups; command and control of multiservice groupings for the prevention of the reinforcement of illegal armed formations and the suppression of their material supply; and, finally, command and control of the grouping of troops of the Baltic Fleet in blocking and eliminating illegal armed formations and terrorist groups during a special operation.¹¹

In their official justifications of the *Zapad-2013* scenario, the Russian authorities continued to envision the exercise scenario as an attack by illegal armed formations and terrorist groups on the sovereign state of Belarus, and the following combined joint Russian and Belarusian operations and actions to repulse the attack to stabilize the situation and to return state sovereignty to the Belarusian state authorities.¹²

A Finnish View

From the Finnish point of view, there was hardly anything that was by itself radically new in *Zapad-2013*. That was reflected in the comments of Finnish Defense Minister Carl Haglund, when he soft-pedaled the issue by stressing the right of each country to exercise its armed forces.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Colonel General Postikov, loc. cit.

¹³ Minister of Defense Carl Haglund, Nelosen uutiset, October 3, 2013.

In fact, large-scale exercises of the Russian military with troops from other “power ministries” have been regularly conducted in different parts of Russia, including the Western Military Command, on a rotational basis every 1–4 years. In August 2008, it was from one such exercise, *Kavkaz-2008*, that the Russian troops continued to the pre-planned aggression against Georgia, instead of returning to their home bases in the Northern Caucasus Military District.¹⁴

Over the years, the intensity of Russian exercises has gradually grown in the vicinity of Finland. Some of the exercises have been used as test-beds for Russian command and control arrangements, including the use of modern means such as various kinds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Some of the exercises have been conducted to test the new military organization. The newly-established brigade organization is more flexible and fits better to operate independently with highly mobile battle groups than the previous division-based organization.¹⁵ All these elements have been exercised, and not only with the other armed forces’ formations but also with other power ministries’ armed elements. Furthermore, over the last few years, plenty of new equipment has been introduced to the Russian armed forces, and that equipment has been tested. This is especially so with the new command and control systems.¹⁶

It is also a well-known fact that the mobilization system of the Russian Ground Forces has drastically changed in recent years. In addition to the cadre brigades, there are numerous depots and storage areas, each with sufficient equipment for a brigade-size unit or even more. Therefore, the new system has been tested in larger and smaller exercises. In areas close to the Finnish borders, the system was tested in the large exercise *Ladoga-2009* and again in September 2012, when a smaller, more local exercise was held in Petrozavodsk in the Karelian Republic under the command of the Western Military District Commander. Furthermore, the local motorized rifle infantry brigade (the 4th Detached Motor Rifle Brigade) was called up from the reserves in early September 2012, brought to full readiness, and performed a combat exercise.¹⁷

¹⁴ Interviews by the author.

¹⁵ For a cautionary note on how far the restructuring has proceeded, one should be aware that “moves to create light, medium and heavy brigades remain at an experimental level,” *The Military Balance 2014*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2014, p. 162.

¹⁶ Interview by the author.

¹⁷ For all these exercises mentioned here, a reliable source is Forss et. al., *The Development of Russian Military Policy and Finland*, National Defence University, Department of Strategic And Defence Studies, Series 2: Research Reports No. 49, Annex 4, “Experiences and Conclusions of the Russian Military Exercises since 2009,” pp. 93–100.

In 2012, there were several additional Russian exercises not too far from the Finnish border. In September, there was a trilateral naval exercise, *The Northern Eagle-2012*, which brought together forces from Russia, Norway and the United States, and then there was a command post exercise in the Kola Peninsula in late October that same year. Earlier in 2012, on April 9–15, there was an air force exercise designated as *Ladoga-2012*, followed by another exercise in June 2012 at the air defense brigade level in the vast area including the Karelian Republic, Murmansk, St. Petersburg and Tver regions. In mid-October 2012, there was an artillery range firing exercise in Kirilovski (the former pre-World War II Finnish artillery training grounds called Perkjärvi).¹⁸

During 2013, in addition to the regular, pre-planned exercises, there were also several military-district-wide, unannounced combat readiness exercises—“snap inspections”—in all Russian military districts. These were launched to find out how ready the troops were on a day-to-day basis. The initiative for arranging such tests apparently came all the way from the top, from President Vladimir Putin and the new Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who in November 2012 had replaced Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

The largest of the snap inspections was launched on July 13, 2013 in the Eastern and Central Military Districts, and its focus was on ground forces readiness. It was designed to test the ground forces mobilization and deployment system, and it involved as many as 160,000 troops in those two huge Military Districts. Before that, the Southern Military District had conducted one snap inspection on March 31, 2013, and its focus was on airborne and naval units. It involved just 7,000 troops. Then, on May 27, 2013, a snap inspection was launched in the Western Military District, involving about 8,700 troops from air and air defense units.¹⁹

Common to all of these unannounced readiness exercises was that President Putin and the highest military command wanted to see how readily deployable the various parts of the Russian military system were and how confident the political leadership could be that the military could be used in rapidly emerging conflicts. Judging from their public comments, it seems that in general they were quite satisfied with how the system responded.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See the document provided to the Forum for Security Cooperation by Colonel General Alexander N. Postnikov, op. cit.

²⁰ There were apparently problems with mobilization, maintenance of equipment and, above all, the capabilities of strategic mobility. Interviews conducted by the author.

The Nuts and Bolts

It is useful to examine *Zapad-2013* in that context. Under the direct interest and involvement of President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu, the Russian military capabilities were improving, the military was in the process of being restructured, and the combat forces were tested and exercised.

By any scale of measurement, *Zapad-2013* was an exceptionally large military exercise. Its predecessor, *Zapad-2009*, had included only about 20,000 troops. The Russian declaration to the OSCE notification regime turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg. The Russians gave the OSCE only the number of the ground forces troops involved in the exercise. They were not breaking any of the notification rules when they gave the figures separately for the two main parts of the exercise (12,900 soldiers in Belarus and 9,400 in Kaliningrad), but some have argued that it was not exactly in the spirit of the OSCE notification regulations to do so.²¹

In addition to the ground forces units, it is now estimated that there were anywhere from 6,000 to 9,000 naval and air (including air defense) forces involved. Other troops participating in the exercise, most likely various staffs, logistics units and railroad troops from the Western Military District, numbered around 18,000–20,000. Also, the Ministry of the Interior troops and civilian defense troops involved in the exercise came up to approximately 20,000 soldiers. Furthermore, at the same time when *Zapad-2013* was carried out, a separate but joint Ministry of the Interior mobilization exercise was conducted, with up to about 25,000 troops being mobilized. All in all, the number of all different troops involved in *Zapad-2013* was not the OSCE-notified figure of slightly over 22,000, but rather over 70,000 troops.²² Some sources put the total figure up to over 90,000, if one counts the simultaneously run interior ministry troops' mobilization exercises as being a part of *Zapad-2013*.

The exercise was conducted in two distinct phases. The first phase started on September 17 and lasted for about a week. It depicted a reaction to a crisis in Belarus caused by some terrorist elements and led to the creation of a joint regional grouping of Russian and Belarusian forces. The second phase took place from September 23 to September 26 and consisted of the combined Russian-Belarusian operations to contain and stabilize the crisis.

All the forces involved in the exercise were brought under the command of the 6th Army Headquarters in Agalotovo on the Karelian Isthmus. Exercises were conducted in three main

²¹ Interviews by the author.

²² Interviews by the author.

areas of operations. The first exercise area extended about 600 km along the north-south axis and had a depth of more than 1,200 km east and northeast of the Estonian and Latvian borders. It included the areas around St. Petersburg and further west along the Karelian Isthmus toward the Finnish border. In that large area, the main ground force formations participating in the exercise were the 76th Air Assault Division in Pskov, the 25th Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade in Vladimirsky Lager, and the 138th Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade in Kamenka.²³

The second major exercise area was a huge swath of land around Moscow, starting from the Belarusian border in the west and continuing beyond Nizhniy Novgorod in the east. The sub-command to the 6th Army Headquarters was the 20th Guards Army Headquarters located at Mulino, not too far from Nizhniy Novgorod. The main formations involved from this area were the 9th Detached Motor Rifle Brigade based at Nizhniy Novgorod itself and the 6th Detached Tank Brigade from the nearby Dzherzhinsk. Further west, around Moscow, the units involved were the 4th Detached Guards Tank Brigade in Naro-Fominsk, as well as the 2nd Motor Rifle Division and the 27th Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, which are based south of Moscow. The 106th Airborne Division from Tula, located further south of Moscow, also saw action in the exercise.

Among some of the major actions taken during the exercise were airborne operations to demonstrate the rapid reaction forces' operational capabilities. One such operation took place from Ivanovo (approximately 350 km north of Moscow) to Pskov, which lies close to the southeastern corner of Estonia. In that operation, the major parts of a regiment were airlifted to meet with their heavy equipment. There was also another airlift of airborne troops from Pskov to reinforce the forces located in Kaliningrad.

Finally, the third major exercise area was located in Kaliningrad. There, the major troop formations involved the 79th Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, the 7th Detached Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, and the 336th Detached Guards Naval Infantry Brigade. Also during this phase of the exercise, a major amphibious landing took place. According to the exercise scenario, the landing was to be supported by an airdrop of men and materiel, but apparently, due to inclement weather, that part of the exercise was cancelled. Furthermore, to support the exercise in Kaliningrad, there were naval maneuvers and live missile firings from ships in the Baltic Sea to block off the terrorist elements and their reinforcements. The Russian naval elements were also active in the Barents Sea, practicing "wolf-pack" salvos of missiles by ships and submarines against the enemy. An interesting detail is that there was a small exercise on September 26 in Kaliningrad depicting combat in urban environment.

²³ All the specifics concerning the exercise areas and the number of troops involved are distilled from interviews conducted by the author.

According to some sources, during the active part of the exercise week, Russian nuclear forces were in a state of heightened readiness, although apparently in *Zapad-2013* there were no aggressive thrusts by any part of the Russian strategic triad against neighboring countries, unlike in *Zapad-2009*, when there were feigned attacks against Poland by the Russian airborne nuclear elements. This time, however, there were tactical ballistic missile launches using the *Iskander-M*, a dual-capable missile, from their home base in Luga to a Russian firing range not far from the Estonian border. That missile's range, depending on its payload, can cover half of Finland, all of the Baltic countries and northern Poland, as well as the Stockholm region in Sweden.²⁴

During the active phase of *Zapad-2013*, the Russian armed forces also carried out strategic bomber activity along the Finnish eastern border all the way up to the Barents Sea, where the bombers proceeded with live target firings. But this time there were apparently no feigned thrusts towards the Finnish border, as had been the case in many of the previous exercises.²⁵

Conclusion

As is the case with military exercises in general, the Russian exercises are important because they reveal where, against whom, and with what kinds of capabilities Russia is prepared to use its military forces. So it was with *Zapad-2013*. Though the exercise scenario and the force strengths submitted to the OSCE notification regime envisioned a penetration of terrorist elements and units into Belarus, *Zapad-2013*'s territorial coverage, scope of operations, and the number of units and force types involved strongly indicate that Russia was training its forces for a large-scale conflict against a conventional enemy.²⁶

Beyond this general point it is also clear that the troop strength the Russian authorities declared to the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council was considerably below their real strength. The actual number of troops in the exercise through its various phases seems to have been 4-5 times as high as the number given in official Russian briefings. The exercise was split into smaller parts, and these parts were connected to each other.

As to the nature of the operations conducted in *Zapad-2013*, while the official exercise description talked about counter-terrorist operations, the Russian forces carried out typical conventional military operations, including rapid reaction force operations, airborne

²⁴ Interviews by the author. See also Forss, op. cit.

²⁵ Interviews by the author.

²⁶ The same conclusion is drawn by Stephen Blank, "What do the Zapad-2013 Exercises Reveal? (Part Two)," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 9, 2013.

operations, tactical operations, and amphibious operations. Naval maneuvers and live missile firings were carried out in the Baltic and Barents Seas, and, in a spectacular case, *Iskander-M* missiles were fired from one shooting range to another. Nuclear forces were put on combat readiness, and strategic bomber flights took place along the Finnish eastern border to their live firing ranges in the Barents Sea. All of this strongly indicates that the *Zapad-2013* exercise went far beyond counter-terrorist operations.

Who, then, was depicted as an enemy in the *Zapad-2013* exercise? From all available evidence it was first and foremost the Baltic countries' troops backed by other NATO forces thrusting toward Belarus and Kaliningrad. But quite intriguingly, Finnish troops were also depicted as attacking the Russian positions on the Karelian Isthmus. This is particularly puzzling, since Finland has, over the past two decades, time and again, stressed its military non-alignment, and the Finnish political leadership has bent over backwards trying to make sure that the Finnish position was crystal clear: membership in NATO for Finland is not in the cards.²⁷

Yet, in Russian military planning Finland does not seem to receive any special classification for being militarily non-aligned. While visiting Helsinki in June 2012, General Nikolai Makarov, then Chief of the Russian Defense Staff, chastised the Finns for carrying out their own, strictly national military exercises in the vicinity of the Russian border. Furthermore, in his opinion, NORDEFCO (Nordic Defense Cooperation) was considered a threat to Russia. He also warned Finland, in tough turns of phrase, not to entertain thoughts of joining NATO. So did Defense Minister Shoigu, when he visited Helsinki in May 2013. Both men spiced up their warnings with the threat of dire consequences—strengthening of Russian forces near the Finnish borders—should Finland not heed their advice. Minister Shoigu went even as far as tying the possible Finnish membership in NATO to the modernization of Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons in the Western Military District.²⁸ All in all, it seems that Finland now lives in the worst of all the possible worlds: Russia regards Finland as a threat, yet Finland, being outside of NATO, is not covered by the North Atlantic Alliance's Article V security guarantee.

Beyond the military exercises, there has also been a surge of other Russian military activities in the Baltic Sea area. The Swedish air force experienced a shock on Good Friday in 2013, when two Russian bombers, escorted by four fighters, simulated an air attack on Swedish territory, primarily on Gotland in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Around the same time, there was a probe against Stockholm, and in that attack the Russian bombers apparently simulated a nuclear attack against targets in the Stockholm area.²⁹

²⁷ For example, see Pauli Järvenpää, "Sitting on the Fence," <www.icds.ee>.

²⁸ "Venäjän puolustusministeri väläytti ydinasetta," *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 29, 2013.

²⁹ "Övade med kärnvapen mot svenska mål," *Expressen*, March 29, 2013.

It might be, as two respected diplomats argue in a recent article, that the Russian operational interests are in the south and their strategic interests in the east, but it is also true that President Putin and his defense ministers have put special effort into developing Russian military capabilities in the Western Military District.³⁰ What *Zapad-2013* has amply demonstrated is that there is growing sophistication in Russia's military capabilities, including the command, control and communications systems. In the ground forces, the transformation to a combined-arms brigade structure is proceeding, albeit more slowly than originally envisaged. Also, interoperability with other government power ministries is improving in leaps and bounds.

In sum, the overall reform aimed at developing better-trained, better-equipped and better-led smaller and more mobile forces is well under way in Russia. It is clear that the Russian forces are steadily marching toward that goal. It is also obvious that the 500 billion euros planned for the development of the military forces is producing results. It is a long-term work in progress but, as *Zapad-2013* demonstrated, that work is proceeding and is producing a new military reality on the ground.

³⁰ Örjar Berner and Rene Nyberg, "Venäjän uhkaa ei ole syytä liioitella," May 6, 2013. Berner and Nyberg are former ambassadors to Moscow from Sweden and Finland, respectively.

Author's Biography

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Dr. Pauli Järvenpää, a former Finnish diplomat and a senior government official, joined the Tallinn-based International Centre for Defense Studies (ICDS) as a Senior Research Fellow on May 1, 2013. At ICDS, he focuses on the security of the Baltic Sea and Nordic region and on issues related to NATO, the EU and transatlantic cooperation, as well as on the security and development of Afghanistan. Ambassador Järvenpää most recently served as the Finnish Ambassador to Afghanistan (2010–2013). Before that he was Director General of the Defense Policy Department at the Finnish Ministry of Defense (2002–2010) and the Defense Advisor at the Mission of Finland to NATO in Brussels (1999–2002). Dr. Järvenpää was born on January 1, 1948, in Noormarkku, Finland.