

# Transparency of Military Activities—An Aspect of Conflict in Russia and Its “Near Abroad”

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The purpose of this paper is to examine openness and transparency of military activities in Europe. Once viewed as a virtuous norm that contributed to the end of the Cold War, transparency has, to an extent, become a weapon wielded by Russia on one side and NATO on the other in the context of hybrid warfare on Russia’s periphery. The Russian approach can be characterized as one of “managed transparency,” which preserves the patina of responsible behavior of a great power in Europe while allowing for control of a part of the narrative in a competitive environment.

Openness and transparency regarding military forces and activities have been seen, since the later years of the Cold War, as a virtue. Theoretically, this makes perfect sense. Rationalist explanations for conflict identify information asymmetries as a cause for states to engage in conflict behavior. Transparency and the sharing of “private information” about military forces and activities through various means would therefore limit the potential for conflict.<sup>1</sup> A lack of transparency, on the other hand, has appeared as a vice. A constant complaint by the United States about China’s military development, for example, is that it has not been transparent. Likewise, the United States and NATO chided Russia last year for a perceived lack of transparency regarding the Zapad (West) 2017 exercise in Russia and Belarus.

Beginning with the Stockholm Document of 1986, the two sides in the Cold War in Europe exchanged information on military forces and activities and hosted observers at major exercises in an arguably successful effort to reduce tensions and prevent conflict.<sup>2</sup> The codification of measures in the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in Europe (adopted in 1990 and revised in 1992, 1994, 1999, and 2011), the Treaty on Open Skies and arms limitation treaties like the Treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) and the Treaty on Conventional Arms Control in Europe (CFE) institutionalized norms of transparency.

As conflicts emerged in Europe in the wake of the end of the Cold War—especially in Chechnya and Kosovo—military transparency initially fared well, yet began to lose some of its cachet. The United States hosted observers to the Implementation Force (IFOR) for the General Framework Agreement on Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the provisions of the Vienna Document. Two visits to the IFOR took place in 1996 and 1997, the first to staging and support areas in Hungary and the second in Hungary and at Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the same time, the United States and NATO allies pilloried Russia for neither providing notification nor hosting observers to their deployment and operations in Chechnya. Moscow eventually relented and hosted a visit to Grozny. By 1999 and NATO’s Operation Allied Force in and around the former Yugoslavia, the United States’ enthusiasm for military transparency had waned and the Russians (and their ally Belarus) seized the opportunity. After receiving inspections under the CFE Treaty in Hungary and Italy, as well as similar events under the Vienna Document in Macedonia, the United States convinced the Macedonian and Albanian authorities to deny requests for inspections and visits under the Vienna Document, eliciting righteous indignation on Moscow’s part and chagrin from some NATO allies. While the codified norms of openness and transparency did not change, the application of the norms became less rigorous.

The Russians dealt a significant blow to openness and transparency when they suspended their implementation of the CFE Treaty in 2007, citing as rationale a host of sins by the United States and NATO, (e.g. NATO enlargement and ballistic missile defense in Europe). Moscow ceased providing information on its armed forces to treaty partners, including the United States and other NATO countries, and no longer accepted inspections of its armed forces.<sup>3</sup> Russia gained an asymmetrical information advantage, because they deprived NATO allies of information on their armed forces while they continued to be able to receive information on NATO forces through Belarus, their ally, which continued to participate fully in the treaty.

Beginning in early 2013, however, the Russians engaged in a transparency charm offensive. The Russians carried out this offensive in Vienna at the meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Brussels in the NATO-Russia Council. In a series of statements and a presentation to the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) of the OSCE, the Russians aimed to set the bar for openness and transparency in military affairs. “[I]n keeping with... established good practice,” “as a sign of good will,” the Russian delegation reported on the results of training in 2012, activities of the Russian navy, exercises with foreign partners, and even preparations for the annual Victory Day parade in May.<sup>4</sup>

What was going on in 2013? Why the charm offensive with regard to openness and transparency of military affairs? Several complementary explanations come to mind. First, the Russians had been pushing for years to expand the regime of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) beyond what was already captured in the Vienna Document 2011, for example, to apply them specifically to so-called rapid-reaction forces. Given the deadlock over the CFE Treaty and conventional arms control in general, Moscow likely viewed CSBMs as a way to push for greater transparency—perhaps leading to new limitations—regarding the forces of the United States and NATO nations. Second, the deliberate highlighting of the activities of naval forces supported a long-standing Russian quest to include such forces in arms control regimes and CSBMs—a campaign the United States had consistently resisted. Third, the Russians might have been conducting a strategic communications offensive to convey two messages: the Russian armed forces were serious about military reform, especially in light of the shortcomings that were apparent in the war against Georgia in 2008; and no one should doubt the ability of the Russian armed forces to carry out their tasks in defense of the country. This latter explanation—a strategic communications effort—gained additional credence with the Russians’ approach to exercises later in 2013.

The large-scale so-called “snap inspection exercise,” which took place in the Eastern Military District in July 2013, exemplified the Russians’ embrace of openness and transparency. Noteworthy was the attention the Russian authorities devoted to explaining their adherence to transparency regimes associated with the Vienna Document 2011 and the Shanghai agreement on CSBMs in the Russia-China border region. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) notified the Chinese and other “neighbors” about this very large exercise (160,000 troops, 5000 tanks and armored combat vehicles, vessels of the Pacific Fleet, 130 aircraft).<sup>5</sup> The Russian delegation, “as a sign of good will to ensure the openness of the exercise” described to the FSC the specific steps taken by the MOD “...to ensure maximum openness...in order to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of foreign partners.”<sup>6</sup> Four hours before the start of the exercise on 12 July, Moscow sent a message to all OSCE states about the exercise, even though it was taking place outside the area of application for the CSBMs of the Vienna Document.<sup>7</sup> They followed with another notification on 13 July that clarified the numbers of forces involved in the exercise. On 14 July, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov<sup>8</sup> briefed military attachés in Moscow and asked them “to use the information they had received to provide an objective briefing for the senior officials of the defense ministries of the countries they represent.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, the MOD began providing information to the media beginning on 15 July.

In explaining the transparency measures, the Russians emphasized their voluntary character and the expectation that they would foster trust. They also placed these measures in the larger context of the ongoing reform and restructuring of the Russian armed forces. Perhaps having learned a lesson from observing the

reaction to the opacity of China's military buildup, Moscow made it clear that "The Russian Ministry of Defense intends to continue to do everything possible to increase the degree of openness in the process of reforming and developing the armed forces."<sup>10</sup>

The transparency of the large-scale exercise in the Central and Eastern MDs was consistent with Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu's pursuit of publicity for his leadership of reform and development of the armed forces. Shining a public spotlight on the progress of military reforms was, however, not without risk. This risk might explain the venue for the July 2013 exercise. In the assessment of Russian commentator Alexander Golts, it would have been "more convenient" to hold the exercise in the European part of Russia. However, in that case, the Russia would have had to invite observers in accordance with the Vienna Document, "and Putin wanted to avoid a situation where Russian troops would embarrass themselves and the country in the eyes of fastidious foreigners."<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding this risk, the Russians showcased a large-scale exercise in the western portion of Russia later in 2013.

The Russians used exercise Zapad (West) 2013, which took place on the territory of Russia and Belarus in late September, to further their military transparency agenda. In a series of meetings in Vienna, Brussels and Washington, officials from the MOD and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) described transparency consistent with commitments under the Vienna Document and touted voluntary measures above and beyond the requirements. Shoygu placed transparency regarding Zapad 2013 squarely in the context of broader Russian efforts at openness when he participated in a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and their American counterparts in Washington on 9 August 2013. He invited observers from the U.S. to the exercise and indicated that opportunities to observe unannounced, or snap inspections would be broadened.<sup>12</sup> Because it involved "snap" inspections that were unannounced to the troops involved, Zapad 2013 was not subject to prior notification to other countries. What was becoming apparent in late 2013 was that the Russians would exploit this loophole, along with careful management of the number of troops and equipment involved in exercises, to begin to control the transparency agenda.

In providing notifications to OSCE participating States and assessing the need to invite observers to Zapad 2013 (both are based on the scale of the exercise), the Russians took pains to clarify the numbers of forces. Belarus announced on 9 June that the numbers of troops, tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery systems and air sorties "did not exceed the level subject to [observation of] certain kinds of military activity outlined in various contexts and agreements in the arms control area." The Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov noted on 25 July that Russia and Belarus could conduct an exercise of less than 10,000 troops without notification (Zapad 2013 involved 13,000). Gerasimov added, "However, since we invited the military attachés of foreign countries, including NATO countries, to our exercise this...number may change, on the side of being increased."<sup>13</sup> The Russian General Staff Chief seemed to be engaging in some media spin—or, perhaps cooking the books—in order to demonstrate Russia's adherence to their commitments to openness and transparency. Having made the decision to invite observers, the Russians elected to adjust their reporting on forces involved in the exercise to reflect reality.

Deputy Defense Minister Antonov used a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) on 24 July 2013 to promote Moscow's military transparency campaign by contrasting Zapad 2013 with an upcoming NATO exercise. Antonov reminded the NRC that Russia had voluntarily notified OSCE states of the large-scale exercise that had taken place in the Eastern and Central MDs (outside the area of application for CSBMs). In a more targeted shot at NATO, Antonov contrasted the detail he was providing on Zapad 2013 with a lesser amount of information allies had offered on the upcoming exercise Steadfast Jazz two months earlier.<sup>14</sup> The Russians also used two meetings of the OSCE FSC to further promote the goodness and uniqueness of the openness and transparency surrounding Zapad 2013.<sup>15</sup> Following Zapad 2013 and moving into 2014, the crisis in Ukraine took center stage and a new phase of the competition over openness and transparency of military activities began.

In the run-up to Russia's seizure of Crimea and intervention in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, NATO allies and Ukraine invoked numerous transparency measures—overflights under the Open Skies Treaty, on-the-ground inspections under the Vienna Document, and political consultations—to ferret out and publicize Russian military activity. By the time of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, transparency had evolved into a tool (or a weapon) to be wielded in the competition between Moscow and Washington (joined by NATO).

The battle over military transparency initially centered on Western concerns about Russian exercises near Ukraine that appeared as a prelude to military intervention, much as an exercise had preceded the war in Georgia in 2008. Another “snap inspection,” in February 2014, drew Western attention and a Russian reaction. Antonov met with military attachés on 26 February to dispel concerns about the snap inspection in the Western MD. He told them the snap inspection was being carried out in compliance with the Vienna Document. “I would like to draw particular attention of the attachés of the member states of the OSCE that the Russian Federation strictly observes the 2011 Vienna Treaty [sic]. Notifications to capitals would follow. The briefing to attachés was not required but was a “goodwill gesture.”<sup>16</sup> The same day, Shoygu reinforced the benign nature of the snap inspection. Meeting with military commentators and experts, he asserted that the exercise was “in no way connected to events in Ukraine” and that it was “No violation of international law, everything is proceeding in accordance with the Vienna Document 2011.” The consistent message from the Russian MOD was that Russia was fulfilling its commitments to transparency during the snap inspection in the Western MD.<sup>17</sup>

The Russians offered as an example of their willingness to support transparency—even measures beyond those required by existing agreements—a request by Ukraine to conduct an extraordinary observation flight under the Open Skies Treaty. Once again, Antonov took the lead as Russia's spokesman, citing the extraordinary and historic nature of the request, which, although not obligated to do so, the Russians agreed to allow.<sup>18</sup> Although the flight eventually took place 20-23 March (delayed from the original request for 17-21 March), the Russians found themselves on the defensive and having to counter Ukrainian allegations that they were not fulfilling the terms of the Open Skies Treaty. The head of the International Cooperation Department of the Russian MOD, Sergei Koshelev blamed Ukraine for not having followed treaty procedures. Nonetheless, “guided by the principles of guaranteeing transparency of military activities,” Russia agreed to the flight with the proviso that Ukraine pay in advance for expenses. When Ukraine was unable to make the payment, Russia declined to allow the overflight.<sup>19</sup> The flight eventually took place once payment issues were resolved, with one inspector each from the U.S. and Canada joining the Ukrainian crew.

The Russians also wove the conduct of inspections on the ground into their transparency narrative. Russian representatives described how three Vienna Document inspections had taken place on Russia's territory in March 2014 (the full quota Russia was obliged to accept in the calendar year). As if to emphasize the Russians' extraordinary commitment to CSBMs, Antonov noted that an Open Skies Treaty overflight by Germany and the U.S. and a Vienna Document evaluation visit to an airborne regiment in Pskov by a team from Estonia, France, and Belgium were occurring at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

This flurry of activity in the implementation of CSBMs was taking place at the same time Russia faced allegations that it was massing forces on Ukraine's eastern border. Shoygu, in a telephone conversation with U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, countered the assertion of the “massive deployment” of Russian forces by drawing attention “to the extreme transparency of our military activity in regions adjoining the Ukrainian border. Neither overflights under the Open Skies Treaty nor inspections by the Ukrainians in the Western and Southern MDs had uncovered “undeclared military activity, let alone activities, threatening the security of Ukraine.”<sup>21</sup>

Shoygu's and Antonov's statements notwithstanding, aside from the extraordinary Open Skies overflight by Ukraine, the Russians seemed to be significantly less interested in pushing voluntary transparency measures than had been the case during the large-scale exercises in 2013. The tone of the Russians' comments pointed

to a waning enthusiasm for military transparency or, at least, a more reactive than proactive approach to transparency measures. By the end of March 2014, the Russians had acknowledged that “exercise” activity had been taking place in the regions adjoining Ukraine,<sup>22</sup> although openness and transparency regarding this activity was noticeably absent. A report from the MOD about a meeting Shoygu conducted on 31 March covers a number of topics in detail—to include military preparations for the 9 May Victory Day parade—yet makes no mention of any military activities in the Western or Southern MDs near Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

The Russians correctly asserted that a significant number of military transparency events had taken place during the crisis period in Ukraine. The results and findings of these visits, inspections and overflights, however, are not generally publicly available so it was difficult to discern whether Russia was really complying with its commitments. A review of statements by the U.S. and NATO allies, as well as Ukraine, in OSCE forums and elsewhere hinted at shortcomings in Russian implementation of transparency measures. Russia’s refusal to attend a meeting in Vienna requested by the United States, in accordance with the Vienna Document, to address concerns over Russian military activities around Ukraine, seemed to confirm that voluntary transparency measures had fallen out of favor in Moscow. Antonov, commenting on the meeting, reiterated that Russia was strictly fulfilling its obligations, as shown by the number of Vienna Document and Open Skies inspections hosted to date.<sup>24</sup>

The Russians attempted to recapture the transparency initiative on 15 July, when the MOD announced they would invite attachés from, among others, the U.S., Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Ukraine, the PRC and Japan, to visit Donetsk in the Rostov region of Russia to become familiarized with the true situation, i.e. Ukrainian artillery attacks on Russian territory. According to Antonov, “We see this measure as yet one more gesture of good will by the Russian side, a confirmation of our line of openness with regard to military activity, as yet one more attempt to provide a wide slice of world society the real state of affairs in the Russia-Ukraine border region.”<sup>25</sup>

Upon hearing of this initiative from the Russian delegation in Vienna, the U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE was skeptical. “I’m sure they will see whatever the Russian Federation wants them to see... So while this is a modest ‘gesture,’ it comes very late in the game.”<sup>26</sup> The ambassador’s skepticism seems to have been borne out. In a statement to the FSC on 23 July, the Dutch delegation strongly criticized the Russian-hosted visit by the attachés. “I’m afraid to say that the Russian organizers missed a great opportunity that day. Even after several requests by the military attachés to see an exercise area close by to verify that no troops were present, the inspection request, the results of which could have supported the Russian claims, was consistently refused by the Russian host.”<sup>27</sup> The Russians were talking a good game, but when it came time to play, they were found wanting. It seemed that transparency of military activities might not have been their game. Or, perhaps, they just play by different rules.

The most recent round of this military transparency game took place in 2017 and centered on military exercises conducted by Russia and NATO. Most attention focused on the exercise Zapad (West) 2017,<sup>28</sup> which took place in mid-September in Belarus and Russia. This exercise caused significant concern among Russia’s neighbors because of the already-tense situation with Russia and the purported scale of the maneuvers. NATO allies, particularly those bordering on Belarus, exhorted Moscow and Minsk to demonstrate transparency in the preparations for and conduct of the exercise. Allies and the Russians used a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council on 13 July to voluntarily exchange information about Zapad 2017 and an upcoming NATO exercise, Trident Javelin 2017. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, while praising this exchange of information, emphasized the need for Russia to adhere to the Vienna Document and provide the “mandatory transparency, inspections and observation of the exercise.”<sup>29</sup> Russian Ambassador to NATO Aleksandr Grushko said after the NRC meeting that if the number of forces involved met the threshold for observation, then observers would be invited.<sup>30</sup> Belarus eventually invited observers from a select group of countries for “distinguished visitor days,” and NATO sent three observers.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu criticized the controlled and limited nature of this visit, commenting that “Russia and Belarus are...choosing a selective approach that falls short [of the Vienna Document standard]. Such avoidance of mandatory transparency only raises questions about the nature and purpose of the exercise.”<sup>31</sup> By August, it was evident that the Russians were going to minimize the transparency, inspections and observation Stoltenberg had emphasized, while simultaneously protecting their transparency credentials. Belarus notified other OSCE states that 12,700 troops would participate in Zapad, a number that placed the exercise just under the threshold of 13,000 that would have triggered the requirement to host observers. A commentary in a Polish newspaper noted that the Russians had “used a similar ploy during the Kavkaz [Caucasus] 2016” exercise, in that instance notifying 12,500 troops. An article in *NATO Review*, under the heading “Fudging the Numbers,” went so far as to suggest that the Russians had intentionally underestimated the size of the exercise so as to skirt requirements for transparency.<sup>32</sup> The Russian approach had become one of “managed transparency,” whereby they spoke glowingly about how open and transparent they were, hosted small groups of observers or provided briefings to in-country military attachés or the press, yet avoided meeting the commitments for prior notification, provision of information, and the observation regime set out in the Vienna Document.

Going into 2018, both Russia and NATO touted their own transparency and questioned the other’s commitment to openness. When General Curtis Scaparrotti, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and General Gerasimov met in Baku, Azerbaijan on 19 April of this year, both sides reported that discussions had included transparency and an increase of confidence measures.<sup>33</sup> Over the course of about five years, however, Russia and NATO had developed different concepts of openness and transparency of military activities. For the Russians, the standards to which they had committed themselves—those of the Vienna Document—seemed to have lost their usefulness. Perceiving the political value of military predictability, openness and transparency in the competition with NATO in Europe, Moscow therefore adopted a managed approach to transparency, one which allowed them to claim to behave like a responsible power yet better control the narrative about the use of the military instrument of power. Once a virtue, transparency was becoming another weapon of hybrid warfare in Europe.

## End Notes

1 James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49 (no. 3), 1995.

2 On the Stockholm Document of the Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe (CDE), the process of its negotiation, and its antecedents, see John Borawski, *From the Atlantic to the Urals: Negotiating Arms Control at the Stockholm Conference*, Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey’s (1988) and John Fry, *The Helsinki Process: Negotiating Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office (1993).

3 Former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Russian military analyst Andrey Illarionov directly linked Moscow’s suspension of implementation of the CFE Treaty to the 2008 war in Georgia. Rick Fawn and Robert Nalbandov. “The Difficulties of Knowing the Start of War in the Information Age: Russia, Georgia and the War Over South Ossetia, August 2008.” *European Security* 21:1, 57-89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2012.656601>, accessed 26 April 2018. A. Illarionov. “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999-2008,” in S.E. Cornell and S.F. Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe (2009), 49-84.

4 The journals of the meetings of the OSCE FSC can be found on the website of the OSCE, [osce.org/fsc](http://osce.org/fsc). The statements by the Russian delegation were as follows: On 30 January 2013, “in keeping with...established good practice,” the Russian delegation described the results of the armed forces’ 2012 training year and outlined the goals and major training events for 2013. A week later, “[i]n line with the established tradition and as a sign of goodwill,” the Russians went beyond their commitments under the Vienna Document 2011 by reporting to the FSC about the activities of the Russian Navy during an exercise in January 2013 and throughout 2012. The Russians continued this pattern of reporting on military activity that fell below the threshold set in the Vienna Document on 20 February, when “on the basis of information from the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and as a sign of goodwill” they described a series of exercises in 2013 in which the Russian armed forces and foreign forces participated. On 13 March, again based on information from the Ministry of Defense and “as a sign of goodwill,” the Russians offered a lengthy account of the expanded meeting of the Collegium of the Ministry of Defense that had occurred on 27 February. The Russians went over the top, however, on 15 May, when “as a sign of good will,” they reported on “the day-to-day activities of the Russian armed forces,” to include a joint naval exercise with the Norwegians and reorganization of the Airborne Forces, as well as an accounting – by military district – of the participation of the armed forces in parades commemorating Victory Day that May. By the Russians’ reckoning, “More than 38,000 military personnel, around 850 pieces of military equipment and 68 planes and helicopters were involved in the parades.”

5 “Five Thousand Tanks and Armored Combat Vehicles Have Been Concentrated at the Ranges of the Far East and Siberia During the Course of Exercises,” Interfaks-AVN Online, 15 July 2013. Open Source Center translation.

6 FSC Journal 730, 17 July 2013, Annex 7.

7 Per Annex I to the Vienna Document, the area of application for CSBMs includes “Europe,” so the portion of Russia east of the Urals is outside this area.

8 Anatoliy Antonov is now the Russian Ambassador to the United States.

9 FSC Journal 730, 17 July 2013, Annex 7.

10 Ibid.

11 Aleksandr Golts, “Some Military Dreams Never Come True,” *The Moscow Times Online* in English 23 July 2013, Open Source Center.

12 “U.S. military officials agree to attend Russia’s West-2013 exercises—Shoigu,” Interfax in English, 12 August 2013, Open Source Center.

13 “General Staff: The Number of Servicemen Involved in Zapad 2013 Exercise Could Increase,” RIA Novosti Online in Russian 25 July 2013, Open Source Center Translation.

14 NATO Secretary General Rasmussen discussed with Foreign Minister Lavrov transparency of ZAPAD 2013 and STEADFAST JAZZ on the margins of the UN General Assembly meeting on 24 September 2013. At a meeting of the FSC on 11 December 2013, responding to a briefing by the Polish representative on STEADFAST JAZZ, the Russian delegation took issue with the scenario—a defense against a threat from the East. “Is it really appropriate today to talk seriously about any threat of attack on NATO countries in this region? Such scenarios are not only absurd, but also send the wrong signal to the public, generating a search for an enemy in the tradition of the Cold War” (FSC Journal 746, 11 December 2014, Annex 1).

15 On 18 September, just prior to the start of the exercise, the Belarusians informed delegations about the notifications Minsk and Moscow had sent to OSCE participating States on the OSCE network on 8 August. Belarus, “acting in a spirit of goodwill and guided by the principles of openness and transparency,” also invited the neighboring states Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine to send observers to the exercise (FSC Journal 733, 18 September 2013, Annex 2) (according to a Polish analysis, 60 observers attended the exercise—Anna Maria Dyer, “The Russia-Belarusian ‘West 2013’ Military Exercise: An Alliance against External Enemies?” *PISM Bulletin* no. 102 (555), 27 September 2013). At the FSC meeting on 30 October, Russia and Belarus delivered detailed presentations on Zapad 2013. The Russians discussed the exercise in the larger context of unannounced snap inspections of their forces. They highlighted the voluntary transparency measures they had offered—“there has been nothing like this to date in our experience of cooperation with NATO” (FSC Journal 738, 30 October 2013). Consistent with other Russian statements on exercises and transparency, the Russian delegation explained that such exercises would continue, Russia would meet its arms control obligations, and “transparency measures will be improved and decided upon on the basis of practical usefulness” (FSC Journal 738, 30 October 2013). The Belarusian statement echoed the Russians’ points, although focusing specifically on the phase of the exercise that had taken place in Belarus. In particular, the Belarusians explained that military attachés from 22 countries, as well as observers from neighboring states (34 total personnel) had attended the exercises.

16 “Russia Adheres to Vienna Document in Snap Drill—Defence Ministry,” Interfax 26 Feb 2014. Open Source Center translation.

17 On 12 March, Antonov discussed two VD 2011 inspections that had been carried out during the “active phase” of the exercise, one by a Latvia-Germany team in the Pskov region 1-3 March and the other by a Swiss-Finnish team in the Moscow region 2-3 March. He emphasized that “despite the complex military-political situation around Ukraine and the growing activity of NATO countries near the Russian borders, today there is no problem with the organization of the work of inspection groups in Russia” (MOD Release 12 March 2014, see end note xv).

18 “Kommentariy Anatoliya Antonova v svyazi s zayavleniem i.o. ministra oborony Ukrainy o provedenii Vooruzhenymi Silami RF voennykh ucheniy u vsotchnykh granits Ukrainy” [Commentary of Anatoly Antonov in connection with the declaration the Minister of Defense of Ukraine on the conduct by the Armed Forces of the RF of military exercises along the eastern borders of Ukraine,” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 12 March 2014, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id+11908757](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id+11908757), accessed 12 March 2014.

19 “Nachal’nik Glavnogo upravleniya mezhdunarodnogo voennogo sotrudnichestva Minoborony Rossii prokommentiroval zayavleniya ukrainskikh vlasey o nevypolnenii Rossiiskoy Federatsiey obyazatel’st po Dogovoru no otkrytomy nebu” [The Chief of the Directorate of International Military Cooperation

commented on the Declaration of Ukrainian Authorities on the Nonfulfillment by the Russian Federation of Obligations under the Open Skies Treaty], Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 14 March 2014, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id+11909340](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id+11909340), accessed 15 March 2014.

20 “Kommentariy zamestitelya Ministra Oborony Anatoliya Antonova otnositel’no zaprosa Ukrainy o provedenii nablyudatel’nogo poleta nad territoriyey Rossii” [Commentary of Deputy Minister of Defense Anatoly Antonov regarding the request of Ukraine to conduct an observation flight over the territory of Russia], Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 17 March 2014, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id+11909525](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id+11909525), accessed 20 March 2014.

21 “Ukrainiskaya inspeksionnaya gruppa provedet monitoring pogranichnikh payonov v Belgorodskoy i Kurskoy oblastiakh” [A Ukrainian Inspection Team will Carry Out Monitoring of Border Regions in the Belgorod and Kursk Regions], Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 19 March 2014, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id+11909952](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id+11909952), accessed 20 March 2014.

22 The Russian news agency Itar Tass reported on 31 March that a battalion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division had ended an exercise in the Samara region (Itar Tass 3-31-2014). Defense Minister Shoygu told U.S. Secretary of Defense Hagel as early as 20 March that Russian troops the U.S. was seeing were massing for exercises (American Forces Press Service 3-27-2014).

23 Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Press Release, 31 March 2014.

24 Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Press Release, 9 April 2014.

25 “Minoborony Rossii priglasilo zarubezhnykh voennykh spetsialistov oznakomit’sya s istinnym polozheniem del v naselennykh punktoakh Rstovskoy oblasti, nodbergshikhshya obstrelu s territorii Ukrainy” [The Ministry of Defense of Russia invited foreign military specialists to become familiar with the true state of affairs in populated areas of the Rostov region that have fallen under fire from the territory of Ukraine], Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 17 July 2014, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id+11969374](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id+11969374), accessed 17 July 2014.

26 “Right of Reply to Russian Federation on the Situation in Ukraine, As Delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer to the Permanent Council,” 15 July 2014, [http://osce.usmission.gov/jul\\_15\\_14\\_ror\\_rf.html](http://osce.usmission.gov/jul_15_14_ror_rf.html), accessed 15 July 2014.

27 FSC Journal 767, 23 July 2014, Annex 1.

28 The Russians generally conduct a major exercise in each of the four military districts (West, South, Central, East, which are also operational-strategic commands) on a four-year cycle. The ZAPAD (West) exercises in 2013 and 2017 provide bookends for this study.

29 “Press Point by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the Meeting of the NATO-Russia Council,” 13 July 2017, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_146220.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_146220.htm), accessed 13 July 2017.

30 “RF i Belorussiya mogut priglasit’ nablyudateley NATO na ucheniya ‘Zapad-2017’” [RF and Belarus Could Invite NATO Observers to Exercise West-2017]. TASS, 13 July 2017, [tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4411871](http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4411871), accessed 13 July 2017. “Robin Emmott, “Russia Tells NATO to Stop ‘Demonising’ Planned War Games,” Reuters, 13 July 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-idUSKBN19Y1WC](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-idUSKBN19Y1WC), accessed 13 July 2017.

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