

ALL QUIET ON THE EASTERN FRONT

(from the original title by E.M. Remarque. "Vom Westen nichts neues")

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Date: 16 July 2017

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In the last few months I have repeatedly warned about Putin's shifting approach to Russia's involvement in Eastern Ukraine. In spite of these frequent premonitory alerts, there has been very little coverage within the established Dutch Media and scant debate amongst the elite political circles across the Netherlands. Both groups seemed more internally interested and focused on the make-up of the next coalition government and externally on the perceived mistakes committed by the new POTUS; Trump, rather than acknowledging and responding to the very real threat of Putin's increased foreign policy activity. Over time, the vast majority of Dutch society has become more accustomed to news "soundbites" and there has been a marked increase in cynicism about what constitutes "real" or "fake" news. As a result, had a news item presaged an imminent invasion in Eastern Ukraine some experts would have ridiculed the report as a classic example of "fake" news.

On the way to Novorossija



Ammunition depot Balakliya in Eastern Ukraine Kharkiv region

From right under the noses of politicians and the media they've completely missed increased Kremlin activity. The Kremlin reorganised, strengthened and attracted forces to the Donbass region and the border area with Russia to "correct" the existing borders.

Putin had accurately calculated that Russia's advance would be unchecked by the West and counted upon the lack of a "joined up" response by NATO and the EU at large. This assessment and understanding additionally strengthened Putin's resolve to take a firmer rein upon Ukrainian territory. Putin shows no signs of stopping and for the purposes of clarity for our green table experts, the recent efforts of the Russian Napoleon are set out in the points below.

- Although parts of the three armed forces have been moving in a westerly direction since 2016, the current repositions are likely to be exacerbated by the "fake" news tsunami surrounding POTUS, emboldening Russia and giving them greater prominence

- After the end of the large-scale military exercise KAVKAZ 2016 and related exercises on a smaller scale, it has become clear to Russian followers that Russia is looking for an opening to capture land East of Ukraine without nullifying agreements entered into in the MINSK II treaty. (1)

- The Soviet model in which a "backbone" status of specialist rods and units have been reintroduced as a starting point, these can be strengthened quickly and silently for efficient mobilization, a typical Kremlin strategy

- Different from other large-scale exercises in recent years, assumed KAVKAZ II units are part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs section. As in previous decades – and common in the Soviet era – soldiers were paid their fees in markets within specially deployed static administrative centres and military hospitals which been instructed to set up mobile field hospitals during exercises. This signals that Russian units are prepared for an impending large-scale operation.

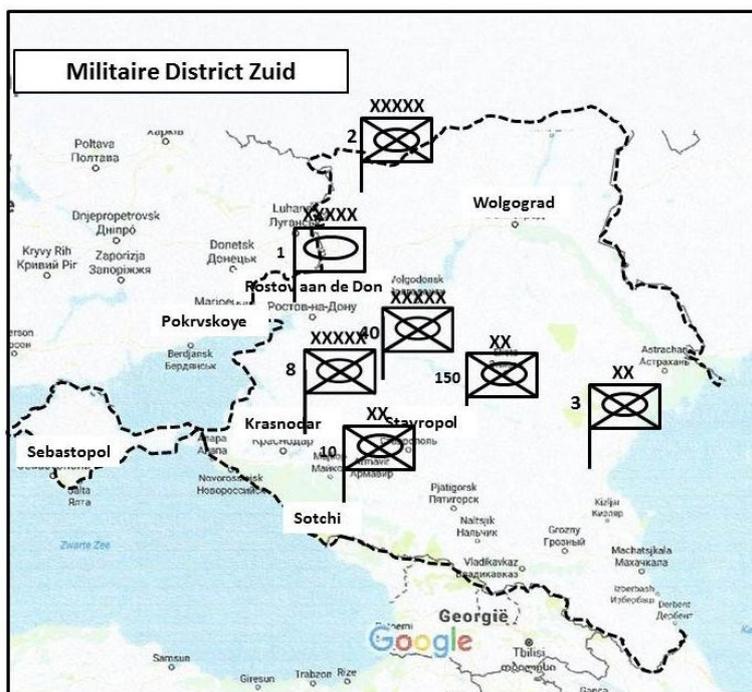
- Civil administration centres have been ordered to move forwards to develop their operational lines. In the Southern Military District, (Ukraine) and also within Belarus similar to the deployment in Syria. If deemed appropriate this will be applicable to the Baltic states and observers have noted an increased concentration of these units.

- In the past, the Russian Federation utilised 25 divisions and fifteen brigades on the ground, these units are still increasing in strength making the current combat power levels around 60% to 70% of capacity. These units are looking to increase their personnel with an extra 10,000 men. A clear indication that the Russian forces are preparing for a possible deployment of military units.

– Russian military action in the Donbass region has increased with 336 attacks recorded between 12th and 20th March, 2017 where nine Ukrainian soldiers were killed and 35 wounded. Russia also perpetrated successfully an attack on a Ukrainian mobilization complex annex ammunition depot in Balaklya in Kharkiv. (2) most likely by the use of armed drones.

– It is generally believed that all activities will converge with a planned exercise ZAPD likely to take place in September 2017

Drilling in the Border Area with Ukraine



Disposition formations in the Southern Military District. Note: the marketing is a recent addition to the existing Order of Battle of the Military District!

As a result of the activity outlined previously, the Military District South contains three armed units: 1st Guards Tank Army, the 40th Army and the 8th Army headquartered in Rostov, Don. Sub units of this Army can be deployed quickly in the Caucasus for rapid response.

These armed units can also be deployed at short notice to carry out operations in Ukraine, Syria, Belarus and the Baltic States. Russia has further increased its armed presence and opened four new divisions, all located in close proximity to the Ukrainian border:

150th Motorized Armoured Police Division in the Rostov area, (50 kilometres from Ukraine border)

10th Army Division, 3rd Motorized Infantry Division in the Region Voronezh (45 kilometres

from the border with Ukraine)

144th Motorized Armoured Infantry Division in Smolensk (255km from the border with Ukraine)

This forms part of the rapid response unit, in order to be able to supplement the already developed combat force at the border of Ukraine. Three motorized infantry brigades have been moved from the Kazakhstan's border and from the Wolgabækken to Bryansk and the Voronesh region which is less than fifty kilometres from the border with Ukraine. The headquarters of the 20th Army have also been moved westward. The repositioning of such a major combat force in the border area with Ukraine have not been made with defensive considerations but are instead strategically placed for maximum offensive capabilities.

Measures in Other Traditional and Modern Dimensions

On 8th March, 2017 the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the Black Sea Fleet will be equipped with additional ships capable of rapidly moving large troops to the south coast of Ukraine (Mariupol and Odessa), Caucasus (Abkhazia) and/or Russian bases in Syria. On 24th March, 2017 observers in the port of Pokrovskoye noted the loading of some of these ships. At the same time the Kremlin sent special air and land units to the bases in Belarus, which during a Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine, would act to protect the north flank of those incoming units.



Locations of the positions from where the Southern Military District is reinforced

In addition to this, the Kremlin also increased its fourth-dimensional efforts against Ukrainian websites and the internet connections of high-level authorities and institutions.

By the end of 2016 the number of violations of websites and addresses of Ukrainian public institutions and high-level authorities such as the Ministries of Defense and Finance, grew significantly. The Ukrainian government identified 6,500 attempts. A small proportion turned out to be successful and even managed to render large parts of the southern provinces of Ukraine without power.

It Happens Right Under our Noses

Russian military intervention and the movement of its armed forces clearly demonstrates that the Kremlin is on its way to continue its “Novorossija” adventure and expects to successfully complete its geopolitical ambitions. Russia’s foreign policy plans within this area have been inadvertently supported by the role played by the Liberal parts of Western-based media that often appears to push news narratives which the Trump administration feels forced to defend itself from. Liberal news media outlets media have become so fixated with undermining Trump that the aggressive military signals emanating from Eastern Ukraine are wilfully ignored.

To date NATO’s response to force the Kremlin to rethink their geopolitical ambitions have been symbolic rather than strategically led with specific operational objectives. In part, this has been due to an insufficient combat force leading to deployment on a piecemeal basis emboldening Putin to deliver against his military objectives. One hopes by the end of the year The West will not ruefully reflect on the past 12 months and state:

“It happened right under our noses, we underestimated and ignored both the military power and signposts and as a result almost 50% of the Ukrainian territory has been ceded to the Russian Federation “.



(1) Source: Steven Blanks. Senior Analyst at the American Foreign Policy Council (a US non-profit think tank operating from Washington DC and focusing since 1982 on giving advice to the US government in the field of foreign affairs).

(2) Balaklya was Europe's largest ammunition complex from which all eastern-stationed Ukrainian units of ammunition and spare parts were provided. Source: Ayraam Smuleyovich, Preside