



# The Russo-Ukraine War: the implications for the security of Finland and Latvia

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**The full-scale Russo-Ukraine war launched on 24 February 2022 will dramatically change global and European security in the long term. This study aims to analyse how it will affect the security of Latvia and Finland because Russia's aggressive foreign policy is one of the significant threats to these countries. The authors of this study represent Russian studies in Latvia and Finland and therefore aim to look together as Russia's neighbours at the future of Russia in an increasingly tense global security context. Russia pursues irredentist policies; therefore, Russia's neo-imperial ambitions put Finland and Latvia at risk because they both have been a part of the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union occupied Latvia. Based on the analysis of Russia's future scenarios as a result of the Russo-Ukraine war, the study summarises the ideas of the possible development trajectories of Russia and answers the research question: what actions Finland and Latvia should take to mitigate national security risks posed by Russia in the future?**

## Introduction

The starting point of the study was the identification and analysis of 13 sets of future scenarios concerning the political, economic, and military development of Russia and its relations with the West and other international actors as formulated by Western, Russian, and Ukrainian scientists, experts and institutions:

1. Allan, D. (2023) Imagining Russia's future after Putin Possible outcomes of a defeat in Ukraine. Briefing paper. Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House (Scenario set 4).
2. Belousov, D. R. (2022) Тетрадь 13. Что дальше? Контуры сценариев долгосрочного прогноза [Notebook 13. What's next? Outlines of long-term forecast scenarios]. Center of Macroeconomic Analysis and Short-term Forecasting.
3. Caprile, A. (2023) Russia, quo vadis? [Ten issues to watch in 2023]. European Parliamentary Research Service (Scenario set 5).
4. Charap, S. & Priebe, M. (2023) Avoiding a Long War: U.S. Policy and the Trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict. RAND Corporation.
5. Damen, M. (2023). EU-Ukraine 2035: Strategic foresight analysis on the future of the EU and Ukraine. European Parliamentary Research Service (Scenario set 6).
6. Fesenko, V. (2022) Сценарии ближайшего политического будущего России [Scenarios for the immediate political future of Russia]. Українська правда (Scenario set 3).
7. Futures Platform (2023) Global Impacts of the War in Ukraine: Key Disruptions and Long-Lasting Change (Scenario set 7).

8. Hedlund, S. (2022) Scenarios for Russia's strategic Kaliningrad exclave. Geopolitical Intelligence Services (Scenario set 2).

9. Kowal, P. (2023). Could Russia disintegrate? Geopolitical Intelligence Services (Scenario set 8).

10. Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation (2023). Прогноз социально-экономического развития российской федерации на 2024 год и на плановый период 2025 и 2026 годов [Forecast of socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for 2024 and for the planning period of 2025 and 2026].

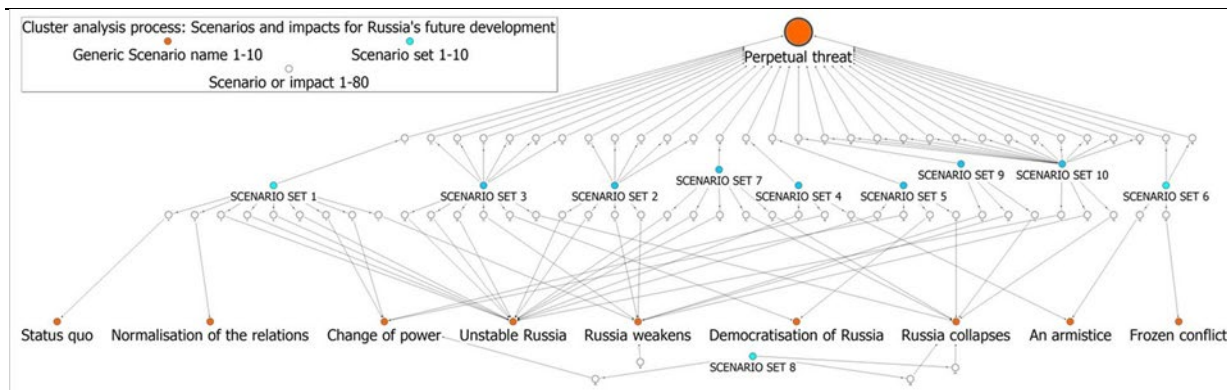
11. Rowley, C. (2022) Sota Ukrainassa: Neljä skenaariota vuoteen 2030 [War in Ukraine: Four scenarios until 2030]. Sitra (Scenario set 9).

12. Schulmann, E. (2023) Сход-развал: три сценария для России. Разговор на канале @yashin\_russia [Wheel alignment: three scenarios for Russia. Conversation on the channel @yashin\_russia] (Scenario set 1).

13. Stucki, M. (2023) Four scenarios on how the war in Ukraine may play out. Futures Platform (Scenario set 10).

The authors of this strategic review have structured the ideas expressed in the sets of Russia's future scenarios along four themes: regime stability, economic development, foreign policy and military implications. The interplay of Russia's future development trajectories in all these four themes will determine the national security risks for Finland and Latvia in the next 10 to 15 years. By aggregating the foresights of several sources, the authors identified the dominant trends of the future scenarios in each dimension of the analysis and assessed their impact on the national security of Latvia and Finland.

Cluster analysis was used to conduct the overall assessment of Russia's future development within ten of the selected scenario sets describing its implications for European security. The cluster analysis did not include three scenario sets concerning US policy and Russian economic development because they could not be directly attributed to European security; nevertheless, they were used to explain Russia's future development trajectories. In every scenario set included in the cluster analysis, the authors selected every possible future event as a separate unit of analysis. The authors identified 80 possible future events described in this paper as scenarios or impacts within ten scenario sets. They further analysed and clustered them qualitatively by ten generic scenarios to summarise the ideas based on the dominant common factor and identified drivers (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Identification of the generic scenarios within analysed scenario sets. Each scenario set contains a different number of scenarios and impacts. They have similarities, but original scenarios were all named differently. Clustering was used to give the scenarios and impacts title that more accurately describe their common characteristics.

Each of the 80 scenarios or impacts were hand-coded as one of the ten generic scenarios. The frequency of mentions of generic scenarios was quantified as a percentage of the total number of scenarios or impacts (Figure 2):

1. Russia maintains its position as a perpetual threat (40%)
  - The level of threat to Western countries is significant, serious or critical.
2. Unstable Russia (21.25%)
  - Defeat in Ukraine leads to dissolution of the Russian Federation, civil war or war of all against all, new regime leads half-heartedly and contradictorily.
3. Russia may collapse (12.5%)
  - Spontaneous and major political crisis or slow erosion, chaos.
4. Russia is weakening (11.25%)
  - In terms of military power, state power, economy, dependence on China, collapse of Belarus.
5. Russia experiences a change of power, but remains authoritarian/totalitarian (6.25%)
  - Inter-elite tensions, regime replaces new leader, internal coup.
6. An armistice with Ukraine (2.5%)
  - The Russian military in Ukraine suffers a series of major defeats, Ukraine regains all its territory and joins the EU and NATO, while a new cooperative Russian regime signs a peace agreement.
7. Democratisation of Russia (2.5%)
  - The gradual democratisation of Russia is only possible through genuine regime change.
8. Frozen conflict (1.25%)
  - The parties would negotiate compromises leading to Ukrainian neutrality and a stagnant EU accession process.
9. Normalisation of relations with the West (1.25%).
10. Status quo (1.25%) until the next Russian presidential election in 2030.

The distribution of generic scenarios indicates that Russia will remain a long-term threat, which poses long-term security concerns

to neighbouring countries. The scenarios that would ease tensions with Russia and decrease the likelihood of aggression from Russia for neighbours, such as Russia's democratisation or normalisation of the relations with the West, were most seldom mentioned. Further, the authors explain in detail why Latvia and Finland should prepare for the scenario: "Russia maintains its position as a perpetual threat." In the final step of the analysis, the authors address the question of what actions Finland and Latvia should take to mitigate the national security risks posed by Russia in the future. The analysis is based on research on the national security of Finland and Latvia and is structured around four consecutive levels of threats posed by Russia.

### Russia's future development trajectories

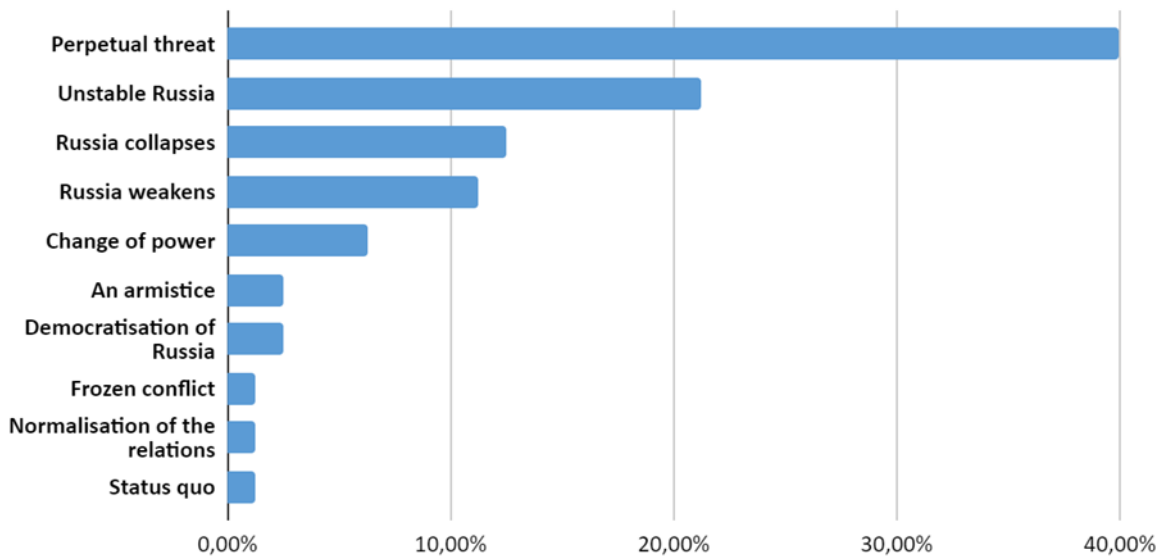
This section summarises the main thoughts in the analysed Russia's future scenario sets to formulate the aggregate idea concerning possible developments in each dimension of analysis.

#### *Regime stability*

The type of political regime in Russia is one of the critical factors determining the likelihood of Russia carrying out aggression against neighbouring countries. Increasing authoritarianism suppresses the objections to warmongering policies, whereas democratisation opens up possibilities for the pacifist opposition to limit the geopolitical ambitions of the elite in power. The analysed scenario sets are dominantly sceptical concerning the prospects for democratisation in Russia. Regarding regime stability, three development paths stand out in the analysed scenario sets: Putin remains in power; elites overthrow Putin, or he dies; chaos in the absence of the inter-elite consensus about the new leader (Caprile, 2023; Damen, 2023; Fesenko, 2022; Schulmann, 2023).

Schulmann (2023) and Fesenko (2022) consider Putin to remain in power as the most likely scenario, which is confirmed by reality, since almost two years of full-scale war with Ukraine have not affected Putin's position, except for Prigozhin's attempted coup, which he quickly dealt with. Nevertheless, in the longer term, Russia's failures in the war and the economic downturn (Caprile, 2023) may lead to the growing insecurity and limitations of Russia's elites - the collective bureaucracy and the wealthy (Schulmann, 2023) and the general distrust of Putin (Fesenko, 2022), which may lead to the elites attempting to overthrow the dictator or he may eventually die of natural causes. Russia's governance may become chaotic if the elites fail to reach a consensus on the next leader. It may even lead to the disintegration of the Russian Federation to a greater or lesser extent (Futures Platform, 2023; Kowal, 2023).

## RUSSIA'S FUTURE IN 10-15 YEARS



Data: 10 scenario sets; 80 scenarios and identified factors

Figure 2. Generic scenarios of Russia's 10–15 -year future.

Analysts believe that the fall or death of Putin could open a window of opportunity to normalise Russia's relations with the West, as he is the main protagonist in the war with Ukraine (Damen, 2023; Fesenko, 2022; Rowley, 2022; Schulmann, 2023). In the short term, this would contribute to the end of active hostilities. In the long term, however, the security risks posed by Russia will remain, because Russia is likely to be authoritarian. Allan (2023) formulated two possible post-Putin political development scenarios - further consolidation of the authoritarian regime and a milder version of authoritarianism with an increased role for other governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Fesenko (2023) distinguishes three possibilities of who will come to power after Putin. One is the so-called "siloviki" or "men of the structures of power", who continue to use strong-arm tactics in domestic politics and in relations with neighbouring countries. The second is the "technocrats", who will focus on stabilising internal processes in Russia, which will require gradual liberalisation and normalisation of relations with the West, while dealing with the dissatisfaction of the war supporters. The third is the hybrid scenario with "siloviki" and "technocrats", which will combine increasing the effectiveness of governance with the use of force in foreign policy. The "siloviki" scenario is consistent with the consolidation of authoritarianism, while the "technocrats" scenario is a lighter version of authoritarianism, as described by Allan (2023).

Based on the analysis of Russia's further development scenario sets, the authors conclude that in the short-term, but possibly longer, Putin's regime will continue in Russia. The end of Putin's regime may come as a result of the elite overthrow of the dictator or his death, but the bottom-up democratic revolution is improbable. Post-Putin Russia may develop as an increasingly authoritarian, liberalised authoritarianism, or it can immerse into chaos in the absence of an inter-elite consensus, which may cause the disintegration of the Russian Federation (Figure 3).

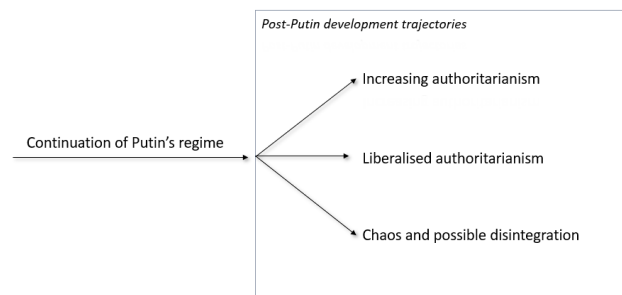


Figure 3. Post-Putin development trajectories of Russia's political regime.

All three development trajectories sustain national security risks for Latvia and Finland because there are limited internal constraints to aggressive foreign policy in an authoritarian regime. Liberalised authoritarianism is the most favourable version for neighbouring countries, but it eventually may develop as a consolidated authoritarianism. Destabilised and disintegrated Russia will be weakened, but it will pose other threats to neighbouring countries, such as refugee flow, arms trade, and ecological disasters, among others.

### Economic development

Russia's economy is another aspect determining if it will pose significant national security risks for Finland and Latvia. A strong economy is a precondition for building military potential in quantity and quality. The quality of life of a society is also dependent on economic development, which affects the support for the political regime. As a result of the military aggression against Ukraine, Russia is under the sanctions of the West, which have hampered Russia's economic development, but have not led to economic collapse. Two perspectives on the future of Russia's economy formulated by Russian institutions provide a somewhat optimistic view.

Belousov (2022) from the Russian Center of Macroeconomic Analysis and Short-term Forecasting evaluates the "institutional



inertia” scenario as the most likely with a 47% probability level. In this scenario, macroeconomic and financial stability prevails over development, leading to stagnation and Russia’s gradual backwardness in technologies, the standard of living, and national security, which eventually may lead to overall destabilisation.

“The struggle for growth” scenario requires balanced cooperation between authorities and businesses to compensate for the lack of technology development by borrowing and entering new markets, preventing dependency on China. The expert names it as the desired scenario for Russia and evaluates its possibility at the 40% level. Finally, suppose Russia’s conflict with geopolitical adversaries expands. In that case, it may lead to an “autarky” scenario where Russia does as much as possible on its own, leading to a decline in technological development, production quality, and the population’s standard of living. The expert evaluates it as the least likely scenario with a 13% probability level.

The “Forecast of socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for 2024 and the planning period of 2025 and 2026” by The Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation (2023) foresees two scenarios: basic and conservative. “Basic scenario” considers trends such as a higher level of world oil prices compared to the level projected at the beginning of 2023, weakening of the ruble against foreign currencies, maintaining low unemployment and growing real incomes of population, accelerated growth of investment activity, rapid growth of output in the manufacturing industry, mainly due to the branches of the machine-building complex. This scenario estimates 2.2.% GDP growth in 2026. “The conservative scenario” assumes a more pronounced slowdown in global economic growth, increased sanctions pressure on the Russian economy, including through secondary sanctions, lower prices for oil and other raw materials, and other negative factors. This scenario estimates 1.5.% GDP growth in 2026.

Blant (2023) believes these forecasts of the Russian government could turn out to be too optimistic because they do not consider the impact of the Russo-Ukraine war, which resulted not only in sanctions but also affected the structure of the economy, the level of public spending and the labour market. He highlights factors such as the disparity between an increase in public expenditure and production of consumer goods and services, the difficulties in importing the necessary goods and services, lack of labour, equipment, and components for domestic production, inflation, the need to spend resources in the occupied territories, and others.

For this study, the authors assume that Russia will have sufficient resources to renew its military power, even in an economic downturn. Without public resistance, the Russian government will redistribute the budget in favour of defence spending at the expense of health, education, and other social spheres. For example, 29.4% of Russia’s 2024 total budget, or 10.78 trillion roubles, will be allocated to national defence (Korsunskaya & Marrow, 2023). From the perspective of economic development, even the “liberalised authoritarianism” scenario at the political level means national security risks for Finland and Latvia because the normalisation of the relations with the West will allow Russia to improve its economy as described in the Belousov’s “the struggle for growth” scenario, which will provide more resources for Russia’s military rebuilding while not excluding the consolidation of authoritarian regime and attempts for geopolitical expansion in the future.

### *Foreign policy*

Russia’s future foreign policy trajectories largely depend on the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war and its effects on regime stability. The political development in Russia will also affect Lukashenka’s regime stability in Belarus, another essential regional security factor, as it borders Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. Russia’s place and role in the international arena simultaneously determine and depend on the extent to which it will

receive condemnation from the international community for its war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Without proper ethical evaluation and legal consequences at the international level, Russia will have more opportunities to carry out military aggression against neighbouring countries in the future. Russia may sustain its economy and rebuild its armed forces and military potential by forming alliances with other authoritarian and anti-Western countries.

Damen’s (2023) set of scenarios distinguishes four possibilities for Russia’s relations with the West. The “Fair Stability” scenario assumes that Russia’s defeat in the war and Ukraine’s recovery of all its territory could lead to regime change in Russia and Belarus and normalisation of relations with the West. The “Cold War II” scenario, resulting from the frozen front, will lead to the continuation of Putin’s regime, a new Iron Curtain between Russia and the West, and further integration with Belarus.

The “Frozen Conflict” scenario is also based on the stuck front combined with declining Western support for Ukraine and increasing disunity in the West, which will prevent Russia from the collapse of Putin’s regime while opening up some opportunities for cooperation with the West. Belarus will be aligned with Russia, but with options to pursue an independent policy. The “Devastated Europe” scenario will occur if Russia’s defeat in the war with Ukraine escalates into a NATO-Russia conflict, including the use of nuclear weapons, which will eventually lead to the collapse of Putin’s regime and the disintegration of the Russian Federation, as well as civil war in Belarus.

Allan (2023) sees two poles of Russian foreign policy in the midst of the Russo-Ukrainian war - authoritarian retrenchment and hardline isolationism. Authoritarian retrenchment in foreign policy will be possible in the case of limited authoritarianism at home, which will reduce Russia’s geopolitical ambitions and open up possibilities for a slight normalisation of relations with the West, while continuing to pursue its interests in other regions - countries of the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, East Asia and the Global South. However, the restoration of relations with the West does not rule out potential tensions. If Russia remains strongly anti-Western in its ideology, there will be hardline isolationism, which will encourage the building of alliances with other authoritarian countries to reduce the global role of the West.

In Damen’s (2023) four scenarios, the role of China (and Turkey) is mainly as a balancing factor in Russian-Ukrainian relations. However, Russia’s increasing dependence on China (Schulmann 2023) is a separate development path in the assessment of Russia’s future foreign policy. Allan (2023) notes that Russia will be a “junior partner” in an increasingly close relationship with China. Charap & Priebe (2023) argue that Russia’s complete subordination to China is not in the interests of the US because it will “give China advantages in its competition with the United States”. The decline of the US global role affects the Baltic states, for whom the strategic partnership with the US is one of the essential elements of national security. The gloomiest future perspective involving China is Stucki’s (2023) scenario “Russia wins in Ukraine and continues expansion while China attacks Taiwan”, according to which the re-elected D. Trump stops NATO support for the Baltic States, which opens the opportunity for Russia to occupy the Baltic States together with Belarus, while China may invade Taiwan as the West focuses on Europe.

Three general paths of development stand out, summarising the ideas about Russian foreign policy trends in the scenarios analysed: normalisation with the West, the new Iron Curtain, and Russia as a junior partner with China. Normalisation with the West is the option that will reduce immediate tensions with Russia, but it will entail long-term risks because renewed relations with the West will allow Russia to promote and strengthen its influence, as it did before and during the gradual escalation of Russia’s relations with



the West. The new Iron Curtain will mean maximum severing of ties with Russia and permanently high tensions. Russia's increasing dependence on China will shift the focus to the establishment of a new global balance of power between the US and China; nevertheless, Russia will be able to play the role of a regional player, posing security risks for Finland and Latvia.

### *Military implications*

Of particular importance for this strategic review are those subjects that directly affect the security of Latvia and Finland - the role of Kaliningrad, Belarus-Russia relations, NATO-Russia relations, nuclear weapons and Russia's internal stability. All these aspects are linked to different futures for Russia's military power and capabilities, depending on the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Hedlund's (2022) scenarios focus on Kaliningrad, which plays an important role in the security of the Baltic Sea region. He proposes three scenarios: Russia loses its buffer zone in Europe, Russia survives and third - is a perpetual threat. The first scenario results from Russia's defeat in Ukraine, leading to a change of regime and geopolitical orientation in Belarus. In this case, Russia's Kaliningrad military outpost would be surrounded by hostile forces, its western borders would be pushed back, creating a significant communications gap, and Kaliningrad would eventually lose its military importance in the Baltic Sea.

The second scenario foresees a Russian victory in the war with Ukraine, allowing the Russian regime to salvage its image, lift sanctions, resume cooperation with former European partners, maintain a strategic partnership with Belarus, and foster closer ties that will strengthen both countries' military forces and pose a significant military threat to neighbouring countries in the Baltic Sea region. The third scenario is the middle between the first two - Russia loses in Ukraine while Belarus remains in its sphere of influence. Maintaining Belarus's alignment with Russia would strengthen the military bond between the two autocratic regimes, which will pose a permanent threat in the region.

In the Hedlund's (2022) perspective "an alternative scenario would occur if the Western resolve to stand by Ukraine erodes over time and Kyiv is forced to accept a settlement. A deal between the European Union and Russia could end hostilities and cause a withdrawal of Russian forces from much of Ukraine. The price for that would be allowing the Kremlin to retain control over the Crimean Peninsula and Donbas (at least), plus most likely also the coastline up to, and possibly even beyond, Crimea. Such an outcome would allow the Russian regime to save face, thus removing the threat of regime change via a coup. It would also be associated with a gradual lifting of sanctions to allow Russia to resume cooperation with its former European partners. And it would be associated with Belarus remaining within the Russian camp, fostering even deeper bonds between the two militarised autocracies."

NATO-Russia relations are discussed in Rowley (2022) scenarios. He sees tensions between NATO and Russia escalating in the mid-2020s, with Russia expanding its cyber influence and potentially sabotaging critical European targets. Following the 2024 US presidential election, Russia plans to test the US commitment to European defence. In this scenario, the military threat from Russia is high and applies to all European countries, including Finland and Latvia. In the escalation scenario, Russia, undermined by the war in Ukraine, will fight primarily in the Baltic Sea, the Arctic and in airspace. In the Baltic Sea, Russia will suffer defeats, and Ukraine will successfully expel Russian troops, causing Putin a significant loss of prestige. It should be noted, however, that according to US military intelligence, Moscow's future military rebuilding efforts will take five to ten years, depending on the impact of sanctions and its ability to regain technology (Saballa 2023). In this scenario, Russian escalation would therefore take place with understrength military equipment and troops.

The Futures Platform scenario (2023) on Russia's "defeat in Ukraine" begins with the total dissolution of the Russian Federation, including the disintegration of the armed forces. In this scenario, Russia is forced out of Ukraine by 2024 and the Moscow regime disintegrates due to elite conflict. In 2025, Russia's growing weakness leads republics such as Tatarstan and Chechnya to declare independence.

Russia's heavy losses in Ukraine will lead to the formation of elite power factions within Russia. These factions, supported by different federal republics, will form interest groups and clash violently. In the scenario called "Russian Civil War 2.0" (Futures Platform 2023), the conflict escalates into a civil war, with Putin's forces controlling eastern and southern Russia. A civil war scenario is a foreign-fuelled war characterised by different political ideologies and border regions occupied by neighbouring countries. This is the scenario the Russian leadership fears most: the loss of the internal balance of the state and the seizure of Russian territory. However, Russian foresight has taken this development into account and created a number of measures to prevent it (See for example Подберёзкин, А. И. 2021).

From a military perspective, the Russian Civil War scenario (Futures Platform 2023) sees the Russian military destroyed in Ukraine by 2024, leading to fury among senior officers, soldiers and the economic elite. Military units no longer follow orders from Moscow, and oligarchs bribe generals. In 2026 there are clashes between bribed units in Moscow and the armed forces divide into factions funded by oligarchs. In 2027, the country descends into civil war, with foreign powers supporting factions and Russian refugees. In fact, studies have suggested that the West may be supporting Russian groups and representatives who are supposedly in favour of a more democratic Russia.

The debate on Russia's use of nuclear weapons has been ongoing since the start of the war in Ukraine. According to the Futures Platform (2023), the scenario for the use of nuclear weapons is described as follows: Russia's use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine leads to NATO involvement. As NATO and Russian air forces clash along the borders in Ukraine, the Baltics, Kaliningrad and Finland, the Russian military is quickly outgunned by strong NATO air superiority. Russia's loss to NATO will lead to Putin's removal and peace negotiations. Russia is forced to return territory to Ukraine and Georgia, while China, Turkey, Japan and Kazakhstan seek territorial gains. Russia's new regime will turn heavily to the West, desperately needing financial aid to support its population and hoping for at least some help in maintaining the integrity of its borders against its increasingly aggressive eastern and southern neighbours. Russia's dependence on Western aid ultimately undermines its stability, as Western powers support local independence movements (Futures Platform 2023).

The military aspects of Russia's future trajectories are closely linked to the outcome of the Russo-Ukraine full-scale war. Russia will attempt to rebuild its weakened military capabilities if it is capable of keeping occupied territories and preserving regime stability. Russia's increasing militarisation will lead to an arms race and long-term tensions with the West. Nuclear weapons still have their role as an instrument of deterrence; however, in a situation of Russia's increasing unpredictability, the risks of their use are also growing. Nevertheless, this would lead to a direct response from militarily superior NATO.

Russia's defeat in the war might lead to conflict among elites, internal chaos, and even disintegration in Russia, which may open up revision of territories by global and regional powers bordering Russia. On the contrary, the likelihood of democratisation and geopolitical orientation to the West is higher in Belarus because it is a smaller state with relatively high dissatisfaction with the regime, as demonstrated by mass protests during the 2020 presidential elections and Belarussian opposition being active abroad. The



internal political dynamic in Belarus is essential for the security of Latvia and Finland since Belarus's geopolitical orientation determines if Kaliningrad is a security concern for NATO members in the Baltic Sea region or if it is an Achilles' heel for Russia.

### *A summary of Russia's future development trajectories*

It is difficult to foresee Russia's future development, but all the scenarios considered foresee a long-term threat to Finland's and Latvia's security. A democratised Russia could be one of the more favourable options according to Doyle's (2005) democratic peace theory, which claims that "peace among liberal states rests on three interrelated pillars": "republican representation, an ideological commitment to basic human rights, and transnational interdependence". On the other hand, Snyder (2000) argues that democratic transitions can lead to war; therefore, the instability caused by regime change could also pose security risks for neighbouring countries. In any case, none of the scenarios analysed foresees prospects for democratisation in Russia.

The removal of Putin and limited liberalisation could be a precondition for normalising relations with the West and easing immediate tensions. In the longer term, however, such a scenario allows for a gradual recovery of Russia's economy, which it will use to rebuild its military potential, while probably returning to the consolidation of an authoritarian regime. For neighbouring countries, this means the need to develop and strengthen their defence capabilities despite the short-term improvement in Russian-Western relations.

A disintegrated Russia is another possibility associated with increasing instability, predicted by several of the scenarios discussed; however, the authors tend to agree with Gusev's (2023) arguments that "Russia is extremely unlikely to disintegrate along its regional borders for geographical, sociological, economic, and political-administrative reasons".

An increasingly totalitarian Russia is a plausible possibility, which in the long-term will mean severing ties with Russia and creating a new Iron Curtain. For neighbouring countries, this will mean the need to be constantly prepared to deter an aggressor from attacking and to be ready to defend themselves if deterrence fails. This conclusion follows from all the scenarios considered. Further in the text, the authors consider what measures Latvia and Finland should take to effectively protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity against potential Russian military aggression.

### **Strengthening the security of Finland and Latvia**

This section summarises a set of activities Latvia and Finland already are taking or should take to contribute to the achievement of four consecutive goals: Russia is unwilling or incapable to attack; Russia is being deterred from attack; both countries are capable of countering Russia's hybrid attack; both countries are capable of countering Russia's conventional military attack (Figure 4). The listed activities are not exhaustive, but in the authors' opinion, they are some of the most critical measures that Finland and Latvia must implement quickly and effectively, considering that in the perspective of the next 10–15 years, Russia will remain a threat to European security.

### *Strengthening democratic values and national identities of Finland and Latvia*

As totalitarian tendencies grow in Russia, Finland's and Latvia's borders with Russia are also a symbolic border between democracy and authoritarianism. It is essential to explain to the population, especially to the youth, the advantages of democratic governance principles compared to authoritarianism to reduce Russia's opportunities to influence the public opinion of both countries. It

is necessary to explain and remind the public what risks a potential Russian attack poses based on the current experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the historical experience of Latvia and Finland as Russia aims to destroy the statehood of countries it attacks. Preserving one's national identity and protecting democratic values should be the primary motivator that strengthens the will to defend one's country. One of the critical tools for achieving these goals is civic education, which should be implemented in schools and the wider society, reaching also the elderly target groups. A society that is resilient to Russia's attacks on democratic values and democratic institutions reduces the internal vulnerabilities that Russia can exploit for hybrid attacks, and it can generally contribute to the deterrence of Russia from any aggression because it will face resistance at a societal level.

### *Support for Russian and Belarussian democratic opposition in exile*

Democratic Russia and Belarus would be the most favourable scenario for Latvia's and Finland's security. However, it is the most unlikely development path due to consolidated authoritarianism, which suppresses civil society and limits support for democracy from abroad. Many in opposition to Lukashenka's and Putin's regimes, avoiding mobilisation or in search of better living conditions, have left Belarus and Russia. It is estimated that "between 200,000 and 500,000 people" have left Belarus since 2020 (Worsch, 2023), and more than 800,000 have left Russia since February 24, 2022 (Re:Russia, 2023). Support for Russian and Belarussian democratic opposition in exile is one of the ways how the Western countries, including Finland and Latvia, may contribute to the democratisation of Russia and Belarus and consequently to Russia's unwillingness to attack its neighbours.

On the other hand, the mass emigration of Russian and Belarussian citizens raises security concerns for host countries. With the increased influx of citizens from Russia and Belarus, the representatives of their power structures may infiltrate European countries to carry out subversive activities. Another problem is that the democratic opposition in exile cannot achieve regime change, which is evident in the case of Belarus because, for almost three years, it has not affected the stability of Lukashenka's regime. Despite these concerns, Finland and Latvia should have a long-term commitment to support the democratic opposition of Belarus and Russia. Still, these activities should be balanced with immediate assessments of security risks and steps taken to mitigate them.

### *Limiting diplomatic ties with Russia while it is under authoritarian rule*

Hundreds of Russian diplomats were expelled from Western countries amid the full-scale Russo-Ukraine war (Gramer & Yang, 2022). Some Russian diplomatic missions also have been closed in Latvia and Finland (in Latvia: Liepāja and Daugavpils; in Finland: Turku and Lappeenranta). Visa policy has been tightened, and borders totally or partially closed (Finland-Russia eastern border). Russia's presence in the various international communities also is uncertain. For example, Russia's participation in the OSCE has been controversial. Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council continues without Russia after its withdrawal (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2023a). Both diplomacy and cooperation have undergone a substantial transformation, and to a certain extent, links and contacts with Russia have disintegrated. In the future, it is pretty evident that repairing the diplomatic



Solutions	Russia is unwilling or incapable of attack	Russia is being deterred from the attack	Countering Russia's hybrid attack	Countering Russia's conventional military attack
Strengthening democratic values and national identities of Latvia and Finland		X	X	
Support for Russian and Belarus democratic opposition in exile	X			
Limiting diplomatic ties with Russia while it is under authoritarian rule	X		X	
Decreasing energy dependency from Russia	X		X	
Economic sanctions against Russia	X			
Information environment protection at physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions	X	X	X	X
Countering Russia's intelligence activities	X	X	X	X
Strengthening the solidarity of NATO allies and regional cooperation		X	X	X
Development of comprehensive national defence system		X	X	X
Development of defence industry and military technology production		X	X	X
Increasing defence capabilities		X	X	X
Strengthening the border with Russia			X	X
Accelerate legislative changes			X	X

**Figure 4.** Activities to strengthen the security of Finland and Latvia.

relationship between Russia and certain European countries will be a challenging undertaking.

On the one hand, limiting diplomatic ties makes relations between countries more tense. Still, on the other hand, this approach decreases Russia's opportunities to realize its interests in Western countries. By reducing Russian diplomatic missions, the Western countries, including Latvia and Finland put pressure on Russia, as well as limit Russia's ability to use its diplomatic missions as a tool for various influence operations. Limiting Russia's ability to get in-depth insights into the socio-political context of Finland and Latvia makes it more challenging to plan and implement an attack. Therefore, it is one of the methods to resist Russia's hybrid attack, in which it may use both military and non-military methods. Latvia and Finland may gradually and cautiously restore diplomatic relations with Russia if Russia's political regime changes and improves the overall European-Russian diplomatic context.

### *Decreasing energy dependency from Russia*

Energy dependency on Russia is one of the levers it uses to implement its political interests in neighbouring countries. Russia has used the energy lever in different ways. Still, in the context of the Russo-Ukraine war, its narrative was salient in a 2022 viral video (without clear authorship) whose purpose was to convey that Europe would freeze without Russia's gas (The Insider, 2022). Thus, reducing energy dependence on Russia is one of the essential steps to limit its opportunities to achieve political and military goals by threatening to disrupt energy supplies. Niemi (2023) cites an article in the Financial Times, according to which the EU has reduced

its dependence on Russian energy since the start of the Russo-Ukraine war, but around 10% of the region's gas supplies still come from Russia.

Countries like Austria and Hungary are heavily dependent on Russian gas supplies. A draft law allows EU member states to partially or fully restrict access to infrastructure by Russian and Belarussian gas operators to protect their security interests, as reported by Niemi (2023). Historically, Finland and Latvia have had a relatively high energy dependence on Russia (Vadén et al., 2023: 2), therefore both states have taken steps to reduce their dependency from Russia (Andžāns, 2022, 2023; Tynkkynen, 2022). Reducing the supply of energy resources to Europe decreases Russia's income and, thus, the growth of its military potential and the use of energy as a lever in hybrid attacks.

### *Economic sanctions against Russia*

Sanctions against Russia are one of the tools that should slow the development of Russia's military capabilities, limiting its access to advanced technologies and financial resources. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland notes that (2023b) sanctions against Russia are effective, but circumventing them through third countries is a challenge for EU border countries - including Finland and Latvia. The EU has stopped exporting electronic components and essential military goods to Russia, while exports from the EU to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and from the CIS to Russia have increased. More attention should be paid to preventing exports of dual-use and military goods, and measures have been taken. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2023b) reports that "sanctions enforcement is hampered by the extent and complexity



of sanctions, but also by the numerous attempts to circumvent sanctions.”

The report further explains that individual sanctions are challenging to implement because of ownership concealment through complex corporate structures and offshore. Still, sectoral sanctions involve concealing the origin of products, using supply chains, devaluing products, or changing customs codes, and parties registered in third countries may have agreements with the Russian authorities (The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2023b). However, despite the difficulties of implementing sanctions, Finland and Latvia must support their establishment at the European level because they decrease Russia's ability to attack. Both countries also must do their homework to limit the opportunities for their country's entrepreneurs to circumvent the sanctions (Eng.LSM, 2023; The Moscow Times, 2024).

### *Information environment protection at physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions*

An information environment, including cyberspace as a subdomain, is one of the significant components of contemporary warfare. It consists of the physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions, meaning that information environment protection and cybersecurity strategies must define the solutions for protecting each. A secure information space is critical in all four levels of security strengthening in Latvia and Finland. At the physical level, the countries should implement measures to safeguard their information and communication technologies infrastructure, which is essential for notifying citizens in crises, including in the event of a military attack.

Latvia and Finland must limit Russia's ability to convey its narratives at the virtual or data level. It primarily concerns Latvia, where the presence of the Kremlin's controlled media in the information environment has been one of the significant long-term problems. As a result of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, Latvia's National Electronic Mass Media Council banned the transmission of all television programs registered in Russia (NEPLP, 2022a) and access to more than 100 Russian websites (NEPLP, 2022b). It was a significant step in reducing Russia's influence in the information environment. Both countries have experienced an increase in cyberattacks at the virtual or data level amid the Russo-Ukrainian war (Bryant, 2023; Eng.LSM & Kincis, 2023), which is a significant security concern.

The cognitive dimension of the information environment is related to knowledge, views and attitudes of society which are formed in the long term under the influence of various factors. Therefore, reducing Russia's influence in the information environment requires not only limiting access to its media content but also strategic communication efforts from Latvia and Finland to promote narratives strengthening the democratic values and national identities of both countries. An essential task within the cognitive dimension is to increase information-related literacy in societies, such as cyber security skills, media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy, which is a significant barrier to malign foreign influence. It is also essential to identify, systematize, and explain to the public the worldview promoted by Russia.

### *Countering Russia's intelligence activities*

The information environment is also a field for Russia's intelligence activities. Finnish Security and Intelligence Service emphasises that “Russia's principal objective in its intelligence operations is to undermine the unity of NATO and the European Union, as well as reduce support for Ukraine” (Supo, 2023). As tensions between NATO and Russia have risen, the prominence of Latvia and Finland as intelligence targets has changed substantially in recent years. It is critical for the Kremlin to collect and update the

intelligence needed for the planning and execution of potential military actions in Latvia and Finland. Latvian state security service (2022) has listed Russian intelligence targets that require special protection, which may be applied also to Finland:

- the presence of allied forces in the territories of Latvia [and Finland]
- critical infrastructure objects and other strategically important assets
- capacity of intelligence and security services and emergency services
- the situation and mood of the population, particularly their attitude towards Russia
- the potential for provoking internal unrest
- the implemented measures for the improvement of national security and possible deficiencies thereof foreign and security policy
- internal politics and socio-economic situation.

The recruitment of individuals for various Russia's intelligence tasks in Latvia, Finland, and from abroad will continue, as the need for information in Russia is high. Therefore, it is crucial to raise the population's awareness in Finland and Latvia about the operations of Russia's intelligence services and their recruitment strategies and tactics. Countering Russia's intelligence activities is also critical in all levels of security strengthening of Finland and Latvia.

### **Strengthening the solidarity of NATO allies and regional cooperation**

Finland and Latvia are small countries, therefore the principle of collective defence is critically important for their security, as it would be extremely difficult for them alone to resist Russia's military superiority. NATO unity is vital for the security of both countries, so diplomatic efforts should be invested in strengthening the solidarity of allies. One of the topics is the regional diversity in the perception of Russia being a threat to neighbouring countries.

For example, in 2015, after Russia illegally annexed Crimea and started a hybrid influence in south-eastern Ukraine, 70% of Poles considered Russia a threat, whereas only 38% of respondents in Germany agreed (Simmons, Stoke & Poushter, 2015). Thus Finland and Latvia should continue and increase their efforts to explain Russia to the decision makers and general public in NATO countries without the experience of occupation and war with Russia. For the security of both countries, it is also essential to strengthen regional cooperation between those NATO members that have a higher risk of being the target of Russian aggression, such as the countries of the Baltic Sea region (Lucas, Sendak, Collén, Kallberg & Viksnins, 2023). Strengthening relations with allies is essential to deterring Russia, as well as to resist its hybrid attacks and possible military attacks (See Puistola and Voinoff, 2023).

### **Development of comprehensive national defence system**

Comprehensive national defence, which has been working effectively in Finland for decades and has been implemented in Latvia for the last few years, is one of the solutions to strengthen the self-defence capabilities of both countries. Comprehensive national defence is based on the principles of whole-of-society involvement and a whole-of-government approach, which allows for preparing all functions essential to society in case of various crises, including military attacks. Comprehensive national defence increases society's resilience and prepares it for resistance to military aggression in four dimensions: military, civilian, informational, and





psychological (Berzina, 2019). Acquisition of basic military skills by as large part of society as possible and the development of an effective civilian defence are some of the tasks of primary importance for Latvia's developing comprehensive national defence system in the light of a potential Russian military attack. Since Finland became a member of NATO, comprehensive national defence in both countries complements the principles of collective defence. Like the collective defence, comprehensive national defence is a solution to deterring Russia and resisting its hybrid and military attacks.

### *Development of defence industry and military technology production*

Since Russia is and will be ready to carry out full-scale conventional warfare, Western countries must be able to produce technologically advanced military equipment as quickly and in as large quantities as possible. Russia's neighbouring countries will be the first target of Russia's attack. Therefore, they must also be self-sufficient in providing military equipment. The development of the defence industry and defence research and innovation is another priority area to deter Russian aggression and counter its hybrid and military attacks.

### *Increasing defence capabilities*

The military capabilities of Latvia and Finland and their allies should deter Russia from an attack and provide a possibility for a symmetrical response if the deterrence fails. In a situation where Russia is carrying out military aggression against neighbouring countries and its army has gained experience in large-scale conventional warfare, the mere symbolic presence of NATO forces in countries bordering Russia is not enough to deter Russia from attacking. On the contrary, a significantly lower military potential may encourage Russia to attack one of the NATO members to test NATO's declared readiness to "defend every inch of NATO territory" (U.S. Department of Defence, 2022). Thus, one of the essential steps to deter Russia and counter aggression is to increase the military potential with the support of allies and by enhancing the defence capabilities of both countries.

### *Strengthening the border with Russia*

From the perspective of hybrid and conventional threats, strengthening the border with Russia is one of the primary tasks in improving the security of Latvia and Finland. A strong border is necessary both to prevent the flow of illegal immigrants, which Belarus and Russia use as an element of a hybrid attack. The Finnish Border Guard informs (Raja, 2023) that the construction of a barrier fence between 2023–2026 on the Finnish-Russia eastern border to enhance border control is ongoing. The fence will be accompanied by a road and a technical surveillance system. While the fence alone is not a solution to all threats, it is part of a comprehensive approach to border control. The fence will provide the Border Guard with more time to respond to disruptions and will help manage and guide movement at the border. Border construction is one of the top political topics in Latvia as well, and it is planned that Latvia will build the infrastructure of the border in 2025 (LSM, 2023). Strong border is an essential prerequisite for countering Russia's hybrid and conventional military attack.

### *Accelerate legislative change*

The effective reaction to hybrid and conventional military threats also requires the ability to amend the legislation (Sanz-Caballero, 2023). Using appropriate and flexible legal provisions is essential but also legally complicated regarding foresight. The legislative process is notoriously slow in democratic countries, and therefore, the opponent can often exploit weaknesses and legislative loopholes. The legislative process needs to be more flexible, faster, and

efficient to respond to future hybrid attacks and potential conventional military attacks. Peacetime legislation must also be swiftly implemented to protect Latvia, Finland, and Europe against emerging threats to security.

### **Conclusions**

This study examined, compared, and systematised 13 publications formulating various Russia's future scenarios. The ideas expressed in these studies were structured along ten generic scenarios. The cluster analysis of ten scenario sets suggests that the most likely future perspective is that Russia will remain a perpetual threat to Europe and also to Finland and Latvia. This is determined by the foresight that Russia will become increasingly totalitarian, have the economic resources to renew its military potential, and have tense relations with the West. Neighbours of Russia, Latvia, and Finland must also consider that a possible normalisation of relations between Russia and the West poses a long-term threat to them. Improved relations with the West will allow Russia to renew its economy, strengthen its military potential, conduct its influence operations, and pursue its irredentist and neo-imperial ambitions.

Russia's future foreign policy will depend on the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war and its impact on regime stability. Most of the scenarios foresee that Putin's regime will likely persist; it may end either through an elite overthrow or his death, but a bottom-up democratic revolution is improbable. As Russia will become increasingly authoritarian, it suggests that it may engage in military aggression against neighbouring countries and form alliances with other authoritarian states to reduce the influence of the West. The US global role is a significant factor for the Baltic states' security, as their strategic partnership with the US is crucial. As one of the scenarios envisions in case of the decline of the US global role, Russia may occupy the Baltic states, while China focuses on Taiwan.

Both Latvia and Finland need to secure against threats posed by Russia. This paper summarised some of the ideas how to strengthen the security of both countries. The analysis was based on four consecutive levels of the escalation of conflict with Russia and attempts to give answers to the question - what Finland and Latvia should do: 1) to make Russia unwilling or incapable to attack; 2) to deter Russia from the attack; 3) to counter Russia's hybrid attack; 4) to counter Russia's conventional military attack.

The security of Latvia and Finland amid increasing threats from Russia will result from a complex of diverse measures. Strengthening the democratic values and national identities of Finland and Latvia, supporting Russian and Belarus democratic opposition in exile, limiting Russia's capabilities to conduct influence operations on their territories, decreasing energy dependency, and imposing and enforcing economic sanctions are some of the steps necessary for making Russia unwilling or incapable to conduct any attack against its neighbouring countries.

Hybrid attack most likely will be implemented by creating chaos and exploiting public discontent, social stratification and the consequences of disasters to weaken the target country and minimise the impact of military force, therefore information environment protection is of crucial importance.

To counter hybrid and other types of attack, citizens must always be informed in good time by a reliable authority. It is a question of maintaining the unity and confidence of society against attempts to influence it. In the fight against information influence, it is important that the authority that refutes the information and provides the correct information be familiar to all citizens and information must come from only one respectable organisation. The process of convincing citizens to share truthful information should begin even before a massive campaign of false information by an opponent. Development of national and EU legislation is also necessary



to prepare against various threats, as future warfare will occur below the threshold of war and with covert actions and current peacetime laws are not applicable in exceptional circumstances.

Collective defence and comprehensive national defence, development of defence industry and military technology production, increasing defence capabilities and strengthening the border with Russia are necessary for countering Russia's conventional military and hybrid attacks. All the measures described in the paper may significantly strengthen and maintain the military potential of Latvia and Finland and serve as an effective deterrent. Both Latvia and Finland already have done a considerable amount to secure the state and society, but foresight of threats is still of primary importance.

### For More Information

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