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The Anatomy of *Zapad*-2017: Certain Features of Russian Military Planning***

All *Zapad* exercises which took place after the collapse of the former Soviet Union (in 1999, 2009, 2013 and 2017) attracted the attention of neighboring countries and led to different estimates and conclusions. Every exercise had something particular happening which could not be explained or understood in the West. Step by step, while analyzing *Zapad* exercises and changes in Russia and its armed forces, sufficient information was gathered allowing for the partial explanation of the behavior of Russian forces during different exercises, and the reasons why they acted in such a manner.

Contrary to NATO and a majority of Western countries, the Russian military plans and executes military activities differently. This could be explained by the czarist and Soviet military giving preference to Prussian General Staff (GS) traditions and philosophy. The General Staff, which advocated its own methods, allowed the national leadership to manage and use military instruments more effectively. The recent Russian military tends to keep those traditions alive, while believing that modern technological progress could reduce (if not eliminate) the weaknesses of the Prussian GS philosophy and increase its stronger aspects. The Russian military believes that detailed operation planning in advance, with synchronization of actions in its core and the ability of forces to implement plans and the leadership to control and command an entire operation can turn the military into an effective fighting and foreign policy tool.

Zapad exercises have shown that they are used to test the concept and planning of a potential Russian war with a strong opponent in the West (*Zapad* operation). The concept and plan are both backed up with adequate assumptions. An entire operation (war) is planned to be waged in three stages. The essence of the war (and plan) is a synchronization of military actions in time and space. Since 1999, all of this has been tested, in the earlier years in separate stages, and during *Zapad* 2017 tests were carried out in a more complex way and covered all three stages.

It is worth to note that at least two times (in 2009 and 2017), Russia used *Zapad* exercises not only to test its plans and troops, but as a deception and strategic communication message as well. It appears that in both cases, some success was achieved.

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Introduction

The Russian military tends to believe that the success of any military operation depends not only on the preparation of soldiers and units, but on how well an operation is prepared and planned as well. This is best illustrated by a historical case, where before launching an assault on the Izmail fortress, the famous Russian general A. Suvorov, so as to support his belief that “difficult training makes for an easy battle”, gave orders to build a mock fortress and to train as close to reality as possible.

Since then, the Russian military adopted numerous Prussian military traditions. The Russian czarist, Soviet and recent Russian Federation General Staff continues to devote great attention to implementing the principles of the Prussian General Staff, which emphasized military operations planning as essential. Whilst undergoing training in czarist, Soviet or more recently, the Russian General Staff Academy, Russian officers were taught that the success of any operation depends on how well all its steps are planned and synchronized in time and space, and how well troops are trained to perform all the actions foreseen for them in the plans. If we are to believe the recently-published memoirs of former Soviet generals, the Soviet Union’s plans to fight NATO were quite detailed and synchronized in time and space. The forces were only expected to implement those plans. General Staff officers were considered the elites of the command and control system with the right to not only advise commanders but also, if necessary, to guarantee the success of plans, to issue orders on behalf of commanders¹.

Traditions and experience remained important. This meant that the first Russian Federation defense plan of 2013–2015 signed by Russian President Putin in January 2013², and its update (2016–2020), signed in November 2015, were quite detailed, describing all the specific actions (not only military related) to be carried out by all the state agencies. In essence, they are more similar to what is known in NATO as a standing Defense Plan (SDP), only broader in their scope. According to different sources, the Plan for 2016–2020 contains a number of situational annexes and foresees involvement of more than fifty different institutions, ministries and companies. And one of those likely annexes is the one devoted to a war against a technologically-advanced opponent in the West.

¹ The Soviet General Staff: A command structure for military planning and operations, CIA, May, 1982, unclassified on May 4, 2010 (CIA-RDP83T00233R000100170002-4)

² TV news “Vesti”, 2013 01 29

Results arriving from an analysis of *Zapad* exercises from 1999 (especially (*Zapad-09* and *Zapad-13*) allows one to assume that these exercises were used to test Russia's ability to fight in a war with a similar or stronger opponent. In the study, the scenario for a potential war with the West is called a "Zapad operation". A majority of Cold War waging principles remained, but modifications had been made by taking into account the new realities. First – Russia no longer possesses the Soviet Union's military power. Second, the geopolitical situation is different – the West would not be fighting communists in an ideological confrontation, but a capitalistic national state in an ordinary war.

The General Staff Main Operational Directorate (Главное оперативное управление ГШ ВС РФ) was the main body compiling the "Zapad operation" concept and plan. The other directorates of the General Staff were involved in the creation of capabilities necessary to implement it³. The creation of "Zapad operation" concept and plan is related to Army General J. Balujevskij name as well. While heading the Main Operational Directorate, he supervised the development of a theoretical plan for the "Zapad operation". Later, when he became the first deputy of the Chief of General Staff (2001–2004), and the chief of General Staff (2004–2008), the plan already existed, but the capabilities to implement it were not yet present. The General Staff under his leadership became responsible for the creation of those capabilities/forces. Plans were made to introduce these reforms for the creation of such forces, with over a decade given as the time period for their implementation⁴. The first stage of the reforms that finished in 2015 created the bulk of the forces⁵ and this allowed the first Russian state defense plan to be signed.

While working on the study, it was mainly official Russian MOD and other agencies' information messages, unclassified Russian normative documents, teaching material and other analytical material such as conferences, interviews, briefings or video (mostly Russian) that were used. Some open and declassified Western analytical documents were also reviewed. All this allowed creating a "Zapad operation" description, and to later follow how it was tested during different *Zapad* exercises.

There is almost no doubt that in the event of a military conflict with the West, Russian allies would be involved, but only Russian actions were analyzed in the study. This was done deliberately. The Russian "Zapad operation" is a

³ The Soviet General Staff: A command structure for military planning and operations, CIA, May, 1982, unclassified on May 4, 2010 (CIA-RDP83T00233R000100170002-4).

⁴ D. Petraitis, "The Russian Military Reform 2005–2015", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2010–2011, vol. 9.

⁵ D. Petraitis, "The New Face of Russia's Military", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2014–2015, vol. 13.

war where the worst-case scenario, the massive nuclear war, is foreseen, but Russia does not plan/seek to escalate the confrontation to this level. So even though a Russian-Belorussian military group participates in *Zapad* exercises with specific tasks assigned to it, the main expectations are placed on purely Russian capabilities, or more precisely, just some of them. Even though active military action during *Zapads* took place in other Russian JSCs as well, I lacked sufficient evidences to prove that those forces were part of a “*Zapad* operation”. Forces from other JSCs should be taken only as a second echelon (supporting or reserve force), because, as it has been mentioned, widening of the conflict would endanger achieving success.

1. A *Zapad* Operation. Planning and Execution

Based on the available information, scenario analyses and actions performed during different *Zapad* exercises, one could state that a “*Zapad* operation” consists of three stages. The first stage is a sudden attack and a capture of bridgeheads, later entrenching and defending them. This might last from one to a few weeks. The second stage is safeguarding and extending achievements and trying to stabilize/terminate the conflict. This stage could last from one to three months. And the third stage is a massive (total) state defense all state assets involved and even moving onto a nuclear war if the defense fails. The entire length of a *Zapad* operation might be up to a year, the first two stages lasting from four to six months

After the first and second stages, time breaks are planned. During those periods, the intensity of actions is to be reduced. Those time breaks are aimed to achieve two tasks. At first, they are used to collect/reinforce forces to run a following stage. At second, they are used to persuade the opponent to move to a conflict solution by non-military means. The Russian military made the assumption that Western national political elites would consider the conflict as different compared to the Cold War times when the USSR was planning to destroy the entire Western social system. This conflict would be taken as a conflict with another capitalistic state fighting for its national interests. Given such a situation, it would be in the West’s interest not to escalate the situation to mass destruction and to negotiate. Western behavior after the Georgian war and Crimea partially convinced Russians that they are right in this assumption. It is also very important to end each stage in an increasing trend. This might become a form of psychological pressure demonstrating to the opponent that neglecting the opportunity to negotiate would lead to outcomes that would be in Russia’s favor.

After an analysis of different *Zapad* scenarios and activities performed by troops, I can state that the principles of detailed planning are kept and the exercises are designed to test the leadership's (HQs) ability to command and control the situation according to the plan and the abilities of troops/units to act accordingly or to react to and receive commands/inputs.

The checking of any detailed plan has its certain features. *The most important thing is to check the synchronization of actions* which depend on time and space parameters. The plan can be checked efficiently only when those parameters are minimally distorted, or put simply, are close to real time (period) and real space (distances). If they are compressed (distorted) into a short time and space exercise framework, it would not be possible to test synchronization. Only the ability of participants to perform the prescribed activities would be tested in this case.

So, testing a detailed plan during short time exercises is difficult (if at all possible). Also, this implies a huge number of participants, because all the troops involved/planned for all stages have to participate. Without any doubt, this would arouse the suspicion of neighboring countries. And again, only the ability of troops to perform a certain action would be tested. Short time exercises do not allow testing a more important thing – the ability of different units and HQs to act in a synchronized manner and present a timely reaction to the inputs received, and the political-military leadership to control and command the entire operation. This is possible only having the exercise run for almost as long as the operation itself.

Not a single Western country can allow itself such a “pleasure”. At first, after the Cold War, NATO and a majority of countries gave up updating their SDPs and relied more on so-called Contingency Operation Plans (COP). These are quite abstract and general. In case of danger, a COP is updated and transformed into a SDP. So, in the West, in order to have long-term exercises, an HQ must be established/appointed which can transform a COP into a SDP, then establish an adequate C2 and finally, summon the required troops to exercises. A majority of these elements are absent in peace time and have to be augmented, mobilized or established.

The situation is different in Russia. In 2014, the National Defense Management Center (NDMC) was established as a structural part of the General Staff. The General Staff/NDMC is responsible for implementation of the State Defense Plan. The NDMC, as a standing part of the GS, is able to perform as a training HQ and to test “*Zapad* operation”. C2 and its extension to C3 is being created right now under the recent military reforms. To conclude,

the structure and C3 framework already exist and there is no need to have anything additional created or mobilized to run a long-term exercise. There is another problem – the official announcement of a long-term exercise could reveal a real plan and draw attention. To avoid that long-term effect, the Russians apply their experience in secrecy and deception.

In order to run this kind of exercise and at the same time avoid drawing attention and reveal the plan, deception and secrecy (the famous *maskirovka*) are used. The clue here is to hide a long-term exercise within other military activities. In the case of *Zapad*, under the cover of officially-announced preparation for *Zapad* exercise (usually four to six months before the official dates), different “*Zapad* operation” stages/elements are tested. Because of other military activities conducted simultaneously, the exercise is masked as planned training or hidden among the other military activities being performed. This approach allows for “undercover” testing of “*Zapad* operation” activities lasting almost as long as planned or being initiated at a pre-planned time. *It allows testing the most important thing – the ability of units to act in a synchronized manner (in time and space) and HQs to control this synchronization.*

As mentioned, one of the most important preconditions allowing this to happen is an availability of overall C3 covering all command levels and territories. In Russia, the C3 is based on stationary (стационарные пункты управления) and mobile/field (полевые пункты управления) communication posts and facilitates the exchange of information and to send/receive commands/inputs from a tactical to a strategic level over distances of thousands of kilometers. Again, the General Staff (Main Communication Directorate) is responsible for the establishment of such C3⁶, and military signal and command units are responsible for running this network⁷.

Moreover, the method of spreading exercises over time allows using official exercises for demonstrative-propagandist purposes directed at internal and foreign audiences as well. Based on the highlights shown during different official *Zapads*, one could draw the conclusion that during *the officially announced Zapad (usually lasting up to a week), only a certain stage or element of a “Zapad operation” is shown. Russia could choose the stage which favors Russian interests, considering the particular security situation at the time.* This is how an official exercise is transformed into something similar to a Western Distinguished Visitors Day (DVD) event.

Also, as a result of the military reform, Russia switched from territorial to extra-territorial usage of troops. Today, all Russian forces must be able to

⁶ See Russian MOD homepage, General Staff section, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/structure>.

⁷ In the JSC level those are represented by Signal (territorial) brigades or other signal units.

fight in unknown locations when they are needed. This means different “*Zapad* operation” elements can be tested in locations outside the western parts of Russia, therefore some *Zapad* training could be done (and is done) in other Russian regions (central, eastern, etc.) as well⁸.

2. Analysis of *Zapad* Exercises

Let's return to the previous *Zapad* exercises. After the *Zapad-81* exercise and break-up of the Soviet Union, *Zapad* exercises were no longer conducted. It appeared to everybody at that time that Russia was willing to cooperate rather than to confront NATO. The first indications of a change appeared in 1999 when Russia began to behave strangely while initiating activities leading to a confrontation. The checking of a potential NATO response to those activities was performed as well. The 11th of June 1999 was the official end of the Kosovo war. Russia, with NATO, had to start a joint peace-keeping operation the next day (12th of June). Instead of this, a famous Russian paratrooper's jump into the Pristina airport happened. A battalion of paratroopers suddenly commenced a march of a few hundred kilometers, entered the airport and started preparing for defense and receiving reinforcements. Then NATO troops arrived, they were not allowed to enter the airfield and, based on videos from that time, nobody even tried to explain to them what was happening. The same video showed ordinary Russian paratroopers having no idea of what was happening. They simply kept carrying out orders. So, what was happening? After many years, the commanding officer of those paratroopers, Russian “SPECNAZ” major, Yunus-bek Bamatgireyevich Yevkurov confessed that after the arrival, paratroopers found the airport already being controlled by Russian “SPECNAZ” soldiers. According to their claims, “SPECNAZ” had been sitting clandestinely in the airport already since May. Yevkurov had an order to defend the airport without any idea why and for how long⁹. Paratroopers were only performing orders and implementing the plan. Seemingly, this was one of the first attempts of the Russian General Staff to check NATO's reaction to provocative Russian actions. NATO gave up, started a dialog and Russian soldiers remained in Pristina. Then the General Staff carried out their next check – *Zapad-99*¹⁰.

⁸ D. Petraitis, „The Russian Military Reform 2005–2015“, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2010–2011, vol. 9.

⁹ Documentary movie Генерал без биографии. Петр Ивашутин „ Russia.tv, https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/61426/...id/.../1569986/.

¹⁰ “Россия планирует брать Запад на испуг”, *Kommersant*, 10-07-99.

2.1. Zapad-99

Zapad-99 took place when Russian armed forces were in very poor shape and had almost no full flesh units in the fields. All *three stages of a “Zapad operation” (including the nuclear one) were planned by General Staff¹¹ and were played out mostly theoretically in HQs.* The exercise (plan) included new military structures (Joint Strategic Commands)¹² which did not exist at that time and were created only during the reform of 2008. Only a small amount of indicating troops (up to a company) representing military districts and fleets were in the field, but the total number of participants reached fifty thousand¹³. If we compare *Zapad-99* with today’s situation, there was one essential difference at that time. The potential attack targets, the Baltic States, were not NATO members. Back then, the Russian military had the idea to check (and to scare) NATO with a potential occupation of the Baltic States. An assumption was made that NATO would not risk starting a war (including nuclear) and wide-scale massive defense would not be needed. It would be enough only to capture the Baltics suddenly and threaten NATO with one or two nuclear strikes to force it to go the negotiation table.

After *Zapad-99*, strategic exercises were postponed for quite a long time. Right after *Zapad-99* it was announced that the next exercise would be in two years. According to Russian General Staff statements today, strategic level exercises are to be held in every military district every fourth year, so the next *Zapad* had to be held in 2001 or 2003. Neither one happened. And in 2007, it was the same. There was a simple explanation for such a pause, Russia had a plan which was checked, but forces were absent. The country was preparing for a wide-scale military reform to create such forces, so all the time and effort until the official declaration of the reform (October 15th 2008) was devoted for preparation and experimentation¹⁴. Besides, in 2003 it was almost certain that the Baltic States would be invited to join NATO but Russia still had no forces to run a *Zapad* type of operation. Those forces did not exist in 2007 either and even more at the end of 2008, as soon as the reform started, the situation became critical. According to military estimates, Russia faced a situation where it had almost no forces for state defense. Time was needed for their creation. To solve that problem, the *Zapad 2009* exercise was used as well.

¹¹ “Утечка из военной разведки”, *Завтра*, 6-07-99, <http://zavtra.ru/blogs/1999-07-0614>.

¹² “Запад—99”, *Правда*, 24 06 1999, <https://www.pravda.ru/news/world/24-06-1999/903671-0/>.

¹³ “Запад—99”, *Правда*, 24 06 1999, <https://www.pravda.ru/news/world/24-06-1999/903671-0/>.

¹⁴ D. Petraitis, “Reorganization of the Russian Armed Forces”, FNDU, Helsinki, 2012.

2.2. Zapad-09

Zapad-09 was the first exercise conducted after Russia started its military reform. As it was mentioned, old units were disbanded or reformed, soldiers were retired and the creation of new units commenced. At one point in the spring of 2009, Russia had only five new-type brigades available¹⁵, and the rest were under reformation or creation. Forces were so limited and weak that they would not have been able to withstand even the weakest offense on Russia. An approved State Defense Plan was absent also. The Russian political military leadership thought this weakness of their conventional forces could become a “window of opportunity” for the West (NATO) to attack Russia. Given this, alongside testing their new forces, it was also very important to gain time. Deterring the West from any temptation to consider military actions against a weak Russia was a way of winning some time. Even though the newly-formed forces were already sufficient for assembling the numbers announced for *Zapad-09*¹⁶, the *main accent in the official Zapad-09 exercise was simulation of a tactical nuclear weapons application*. Officially, *Zapad-09* emphasized the second stage of a “*Zapad* operation” – termination of a conflict with nuclear assets. I failed to find anything credible in open Russian sources stating Warsaw being a nuclear strike target. Only strategic communication specialists could explain how a simple simulation of a tactical nuclear strike in general became a famous nuclear attack on Warsaw in particular, but the strategic communication effect was achieved. The West concentrated on this message, debates and consultations started and Russia won the time it needed to strengthen its conventional forces.

Nevertheless, the “*Zapad* operation” in 2009 was tested according to all the above-mentioned principles: extension in time and geography. The test started much earlier, in July, then an exercise under the code name “*Autumn-09*” (“Осень-2009”) began. Besides the official *Zapad-09* exercise, it included exercises like “*Ladoga-09*” and “*Caucasus-09*” as well. At that time the Russian political-military leadership was not afraid to speak openly. The commander of Russian land forces General-Lieutenant S. Skokov even gave an extensive interview about “AUTUMN-09”¹⁷. It is worth pointing out that later,

¹⁵ Г. Миранович, А. Худолеи, А. Земляниченко, “Бригады набирают силу”, Красная Звезда, 17 02 2010.

¹⁶ Officially, around 12,500 troops, 700 tanks, IFVs, APCs and 250 artillery systems, 100 airframes. In the field, about the same...

¹⁷ “Активная фаза учений «Запад-2009» пройдет на полигоне в Беларуси”, Москва, РИА Новости, 29 09 2009, https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20090929/186789728.html.

in 2013 and 2017, nobody even mentioned anything similar to the AUTUMN exercises.

The first stage of the “*Zapad* operation”, a sudden assault and capture of territories, was tested episodically, in an open and hidden manner, mostly on the training grounds of *Zapad-09*. The imitation forces were represented by units up to a battalion in size. The third stage of the *Zapad* operation – massive defense – was not tested due to the absence of a new massive defense concept and its elements (a new mobilization system, for example). Among other problems not allowing expansion of the exercise was the absence of an actually working C3. The situation with C2 and C3 in the reformed armed forces was very bad. The president of Russia at that time, D. Medvedev, while talking to journalists confessed that up to 85 percent of the equipment in units was obsolete and not usable¹⁸.

2.3. *Zapad-13*

The official *Zapad-13* took place when the Russian armed forces were almost reformed, with a bulk of the new units already formed and army general S. Shoigu, famous for his organizational skills, appointed as defense minister. The appearance of the reformed forces allowed Russia to have its first State Defense Plan for 2013–2015 signed in the history of the “New Russia”¹⁹. The plan assigned conventional forces their own tasks and places. Tested in October 2012, the Russian nuclear triad²⁰ guaranteed strategic deterrence, so *Zapad-13* was concentrating on testing the “*Zapad* operation” and lasted much longer than officially declared. The already available sizable conventional component allowed terminating military conflicts mostly with conventional troops, so the number of participants in these exercises was greater than announced²¹.

Zapad-13 started in March (11th–15th) as a strategic training event for headquarters and military management structure (стратегическая командно-штабная тренировка с центральными органами военного управления и военными округами). During this stage, most probably under the officially-announced title of preparation for *Zapad*, the subsequent stages of the “*Zapad*

¹⁸ А. Гаварский, “Связь решает все”, Красная Звезда, 22 05 2010.

¹⁹ The first Russian State Defense Plan for 2013–2015 was signed by Putin on the 24th of January 2013

²⁰ Д. Андреев, “Триаду проверили на прочность”, Красная звезда, 22-10-2012.

²¹ Officially, around 13,000 troops, 350 tanks, IFVs, APCs, 50 artillery systems, and 50 airframes. After the exercise, in open sources – around 25,000 troops, 550 tanks, IFVs, APC, 100 airframes and 10 ships participated.

operation” were discussed, and time lines and tasks for the involved troops were given²².

As it has already been mentioned, most probably, during the official *Zapad-13* in September, emphasis was put on the second stage of the operation – expansion of success and conflict termination by conventional means. A majority of these stage activities took place during the officially-declared *Zapad* dates in the declared training grounds, while some occurred outside the set time period (for example, exercises of the Northern fleets on September 21st–25th or the Baltic fleet exercise²³). Conventional forces were already able to fulfill a majority of the tasks assigned to them, so the necessity to emphasize (and demonstrate) the nuclear component (especially tactical) during *Zapad-13* was minimal. Only the strategic deterrence element was exercised.

The first “*Zapad* operation” stage – a sudden attack and capture – was performed by Rapid Reaction Forces which were created on the basis of former air-borne troops. Part of the activities was demonstrated openly during the official *Zapad-13*, some were hidden under Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) exercise “Cooperation 2013” (“Взаимодействие-2013”)²⁴. Some first-stage elements were tested months before the official *Zapad-13*. However, in a majority of cases it was not done to full scale or capacity²⁵. One of the major problems not allowing an increase in the scale of the exercise remained. There was still an absence of an adequate C2 system. It was still being created²⁶ and only some forces (like the Rapid Reaction Forces) already used automated battle data systems (ABDS) or elements of those systems allowing them to have C2 and C3 established between units and different HQs.²⁷

The third stage – massive defense involving all state assets – was tested by involving other state institutions (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Emergencies, etc.) and trying to run a mobilization of reserve units (most probably, unsuccessfully²⁸).

²² РИА Новости http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130311/926661611.html#ixzz2aVgigbul.

²³ Around 2,500 troops, 30 ships, 50 IFVs APCs and 20 airframes participated.

²⁴ The exercise “Vzaimodeistvija-2013” was run in September 2013.

²⁵ For example, the joint Russian-Belorussian exercise on 22nd-24th April 2013, at the “Brestkij” training ground, involved units up to a battalion in size.

²⁶ D. Petraitis, “The New Face of Russia’s Military”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2014–2015, vol. 13.

²⁷ An example could be the Rapid Reaction Forces ABMS Andromeda D used in air-borne troops.

²⁸ After the exercise *Zapad-13* General Colonel V. Smirnov, the head of the mobilization unit in the MOD, was fired.

2.4. Zapad-17

Zapad-17 took place when the reform was almost complete, the State Defense Plan for 2016–2020 was renewed²⁹, an actually-functioning contract soldier system was established, ongoing re-armament was underway, etc. All this strengthened the entire strategic deterrence and allowed General Staff to test first and second “*Zapad* operation stages” on a much wider scale. It is worth mentioning that some tactical elements of the “*Zapad* operation” were tested in other strategic exercises which took place before *Zapad-17*. For example, during the strategic exercise *Vostok-14* the strategic movement of troops was tested³⁰. A new form of electronic warfare – an electronic strike and blockade of territory by EW means (радиоэлектронный удар и информационное блокирование местности)³¹, a massive air strike^{32,33}, troops informational warfare³⁴, organization of territorial defense³⁵, coordination with other forces³⁶ – all these elements were tested during *Centr-15* and *Caucasus-16* exercises.

The appearance of a modern and new C2 system in the troops was an especially important improvement which allowed raising “*Zapad* operations” testing to a higher level of quality. The improvement included not only developments in ABDS like “Andromeda-D” but also similar ABDSs and new communication equipment (for example, Antey³⁷) appearing in the troops. As a result, troops were able to establish and maintain reliable and safe communication among HQs a distance thousands of kilometers from one another³⁸. It is worth mentioning also that delivery of those ABDSs and new communication

²⁹ An updated Russian Defense Plan for 2016–2020 was signed in November 2015.

³⁰ “Военных с Запада России перебросили авиацией на Дальний Восток для участия в стратегическом командно-штабном учении”, Интерфакс-АВН, Москва 19-09-2014.

³¹ “Новые формы и способы ведения радиоэлектронной борьбы (РЭБ), будут применены в ходе учения «Центр-2015»”, Минобороны России, Москва, РИА Новости, 15-09-2015.

³² А. Пинчук, „Массированным ударом „ «Красная звезда». 01-10-2015.

³³ “ВС на учениях «Кавказ-2016» отработали авиаудар и борьбу с ракетами”, Москва, РИА Новости, 14 09 2016.

³⁴ На учениях «Кавказ-2016» впервые отработали «информационное противоборство», Москва, РИА Новости, 14 09 2016.

³⁵ Р. Голованов, “На «Кавказе» артиллерия и истребители разгромили противника”, Kompravda, 08 09, 2016 <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26579.4/3594518/>.

³⁶ “На учениях «Кавказ-2016» отработали взаимодействие российских силовиков”, Полигон Оупк (Крым), РИА Новости, 9 09 2016.

³⁷ “Русская армия начала эксплуатацию системы новейшей связи «Антей»”, Radioslovo, 23 05 2017, <http://radioslovo.ru/russkaya-armiya-nachala-ekspluatatsiyu-sistemy-novejshej-svyazi-antej/>.

³⁸ В. Сирьк, “Суперуниверсальный «Антей»: чем уникален радиоцентр для высшего руководства армии”, *Zvezda*, 20 05 2017, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/opk/content/201705200800-o5d9.htm>.

equipment to forces increased since 2016³⁹ 40 with main delivery going to signal and other units of the JSC “West” in 2017⁴¹ 42.

All this was enough to have new ABDS and communication systems in both stationary and mobile command posts. The last ones were created for each “*Zapad* operation” stage testing under the cover of officially-announced signal troops field camps⁴³ 44 45 46. At the end, every unit participating in the exercise was “plugged in” and became controlled and commanded all the time. During the exercise, the 1st tank Operational Command (OC) even had a new, experimental command post established⁴⁷.

But most importantly, the General Staff, through the National Defense Management Center, concentrated the entire C2 in its hands. At the same time, the NDMC already had huge computing capabilities allowing it to analyze, design and modify all the different battlefield situations simultaneously⁴⁸.

Again, *Zapad-17* was extended in time. It started in January as JSC “West” leadership operative-mobilization training (gathering) (оперативно-мобилизационные сборы). The event involved around two hundred commanders and staff officers.⁴⁹ According to open sources, new tactical elements (like tactical air lift)⁵⁰ were demonstrated, participants received time-lines for operation stages testing and were ordered to run more than two thousand different tactical training and exercises under the cover of preparation for the

³⁹ “Концерн «Созвездие» поставил Минобороны первые комплексы «Антей»”, Интерфакс-Авн, 15 05 2017.

⁴⁰ “Войска связи ЗВО в 2016 году получают 2,5 тысячи единиц новой техники”, Москва, РИА Новости, 02 01 2016, http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20160102/1353298275.html#ixzz3wFoID0IV.

⁴¹ “В войска Западного военного округа (ЗВО) поступили унифицированные командно-штабные машины (УКШМ) Р-149МА1” Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12130927@egNews.

⁴² И. Мугинов, “Войска связи ЗВО в 2016 году получают 2,5 тысячи единиц новой техники”, РИА Новости, 02 01 2016, http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20160102/1353298275.html#ixzz3wFoID0IV.

⁴³ М. Севастьянов, “Учения ВДВ на северо-западном направлении: длинные руки русского десанта”, РИА Новости, 07 07 2017.

⁴⁴ “В Западном военном округе проходят учения с соединениями связи”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа 31 07 2017, <http://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/west/news/more.htm?id=12135740@egNews>.

⁴⁵ “Более 500 связистов Балтийского флота вышли на учение”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 15 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁴⁶ На учении «Запад-2017» связисты ВДВ обеспечивают пункты управления связью на расстоянии до 2 тыс. Км, 16 09 2017 www.mil.ru.

⁴⁷ Н. Сурков, А. Рамм, Е. Дмитриев, “Арматами» будет управлять «штаб звездных войн”, Известия, 20 09 2017.

⁴⁸ D. Petraitis, “A New Face of Russian military”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2014–2015, vol. 13.

⁴⁹ С. Пятаков, “Комсостав ЗВО начал подготовку к учениям «Запад-2017»”, Москва, РИА Новости, 10 01 2017.

⁵⁰ “В ЗВО прошла тренировка по авианеперевоске войск на большие расстояния”, пресс-служба ЗВО, Москва, РИА Новости, 12 01 2017.

official *Zapad-17*⁵¹. After a few days, a very similar event took place at the strategic level. Here, commanders of all the JSCs, and chiefs of bodies were involved in an overall C3 (a head of NDMC, for example), commanders and chiefs of staffs of OCs also participated. Most probably they also received the same information regarding the exercise, were introduced to new JSC work elements, lessons learned in Syria, some strategic level activities to be tested during the exercise (like the activation and functioning of federal region civil defense HQ in a time of war), etc.

Before the official *Zapad-17* took place, forces exercised the first and second “*Zapad operation*” stages under the cover of planned exercises or activities devoted to prepare for it. A majority of the events happened over the 3rd–7th of July and 4th–19th of August. *The official Zapad-17 held on September 14th–20th emphasized the third (massive, state-wide defense) stage and was partially oriented to demonstrate to the West the Russian desire to fight to the end in the event of military conflict.*

Zapad-17 was essentially the same as previous exercises but was conducted to a much higher qualitative level. The new security situation required the exercise to be used for strategic messaging again, therefore, as soon as the first two aggressive stages had been exercised; it was in the interests of MOD to demonstrate a defensive stage. Emphasizing transparency and openness as their main motives, the MOD invited journalists and observers from other countries to observe part of the official *Zapad*.

2.4.1 *Zapad-17*. “*Zapad operation*” first stage

Let’s take a closer look at the *Zapad-17* events and try to understand what happened there. A number of indicators (facts) show that a great portion of declared-as-planned activities which happened in the beginning of July (3rd–7th) and almost for the entirety of August (4th–19th) could be taken as “*Zapad operation*” first and second stage testing. Those activities included not only ordinary units training in the field but also so-called special training (специальная подготовка), command post exercises (командно-штабные тренировки) and field camps (полевые сборы). During both periods, mobile command posts were activated and communication channels were established. Most probably for the first stage, overall C2 (and even C3) was based on the

⁵¹ “Военнослужащие ЗВО проведут более двух тысяч учений в ходе подготовки к стратегическому учению «Запад-2017», пресс-службе округа, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 17 01 2017.

Andromeda–D system. The second stage used Andromeda-D and next to it, signals units from JSC “West” (three signal brigades and some smaller signal units) established a C3 based on stationary and mobile command posts. Topic and time lines of many activities were obviously coordinated and matched activities to be done in any adequate stage. A majority of participating units were full-flesh units (battalion combat groups) and acted in a joint manner (were supported by aviation, EW, naval, etc.).

The first “Zapad operation” stage training was done under the cover of three officially-announced strategic level command Post Exercises CPXs. Those were: Rapid Reaction Forces CPX, JSC “West” joint military group CPX and JSC “West” air space defense HQs CPX. All CPXs started at about the same time. This is how the course of events was run. Rapid Reaction Force CPX started on the 3rd–4th July⁵². Units from the 98th air-borne division and the 31st air-borne brigade were alerted⁵³. They left permanent locations and started preparations to act: they activated mobile C2, initiated SOPs for troops and arms parachuting etc.⁵⁴ JSC “West” air space defense units as participants of their own CPX⁵⁵ were preparing to respond to opponent response (a missive air strike) by EW units training how to hide their own forces and air defense S400 systems preparing to engage targets^{56 57}. JSC “West” joint military group CPX trained forces how to avoid responding to strikes by maneuvering⁵⁸. *July 5th was the day when an assault started.* And it started according to the rules of a modern war by precise long range guided munition (PLRGM) strikes to critical opponents’ infrastructure first. This was done by two strategic bombers TU-95MS involved in a real combat mission in Syria and firing four air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) X-101 to weapon arsenals located more than a thousand kilometers away⁵⁹. Alongside bombers, a strategic “Smolensk” submarine in the Barrents Sea fired a cruise missile targeting a “sophisticated na-

⁵² М. Севастьянов. “Учения ВДВ на северо-западном направлении: длинные руки русского десанта” Полигон Струги Красные (Псковская область, РИА Новости, 07 07 2017.

⁵³ “Более 2 тыс. десантников перебросят в ходе учения к западным границам РФ”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 04 07 2017.

⁵⁴ “В Псковской области начинается активная фаза учений двух соединений ВДВ”, Москва, РИА Новости, 05 07 2017.

⁵⁵ “В ЗВО началось КШУ по управлению авиацией и войсками противовоздушной обороны”, Минобороны России, 03 07 2017.

⁵⁶ “Москва Крылатые ракеты и ударные беспилотники «противника» уничтожают авиация и расчёты ПВО в ходе учений на северо-западе РФ”, Интерфакс-АВН, 03 07 2017

⁵⁷ “Расчеты комплексов С-400 «Триумф» отразили удар условного противника”, РИА Новости, Москва, 06 07 2017.

⁵⁸ “Войска ЗВО в ходе учения нанесли массированный ракетно-авиационный удар по позициям условного противника”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 06 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁵⁹ “Российские Ту-95МС нанесли ракетный удар по ИГ в Сирии”, Москва, ТАСС, 05 07 2017.

val target” located 400 kilometers away⁶⁰. In reality, this “sophisticated target” might have been ships in a port.

The same day, Baltic Fleet ships left for the sea⁶¹. Vessels performed safe sea area establishment, air defense, ASW, mining and de-mining⁶², and naval infantry transport⁶³ training.

All places foreseen for capture were firstly hit by a massive air strike⁶⁴. The air strikes were imitated by JSC “West” aviation which exercised live air strikes in training grounds in the Kaliningrad, Pskov and Leningrad regions on the 5th of July^{65 66}. And right after it, Rapid Reaction Forces started an offense. They were represented by the 31st air-borne brigade and the 98th division which conducted an assault by parachuting troops, equipment and weapons in the “Saryje Strugi” and “Kislov” training grounds and capturing an airfield (Saryje Strugi). Also, they exercised infiltration of diversionary groups in the opponent’s rear and, as soon as bridgeheads were captured, entrenching took place⁶⁷.

The same happened in Kaliningrad. Baltic fleet aviation intensified activities in the Baltic Sea air space⁶⁸, provided low-altitude close air support (CAS)⁶⁹ for the 336th naval infantry brigade which in turn conducted a naval infantry landing in Chmeliovka⁷⁰. Sudden assault continued and was expanded. In Pskov, forces holding bridgeheads began receiving reinforcements. On the 6th and 7th July, troops from the 76th air-borne division were brought to the captured places by planes and helicopter which landed on the captured Saryje

⁶⁰ “Атомная подлодка «Смоленск» в Баренцевом море поразила учебную цель крылатой ракетой «Гранит» на дальности 400 км - Минобороны РФ”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 05 07 2017.

⁶¹ “На Балтике начались учения ВМС”, Аргументы Недели, 5 07 2017.

⁶² “Тральная группа Балтийского флота провела учение по поиску и обезвреживанию мин”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 06 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁶³ “На Балтийском флоте начинается активная фаза учения разнородных сил”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 05 07 2017.

⁶⁴ “Войска ЗВО в ходе учения нанесли массированный ракетно-авиационный удар по позициям условного противника”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 06 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁶⁵ “Авиация ЗВО отработала ракетно-бомбовый удар по войскам условного противника в Ленинградской области”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 06 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁶⁶ <http://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/west/news/more.htm?id=12132367@egNews>.

⁶⁷ “Под Псковом завершилась основная фаза учения соединений ВДВ”, Департамент информации и массовых коммуникаций Министерства обороны Российской Федерации, 06 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁶⁸ “Летчики Балтфлота провели полеты над морем и бомбометание по полигону в Калининградской области”, Интерфакс-АВН, 06 07 2017.

⁶⁹ “Летчики Балтфлота провели полеты над морем и бомбометание по полигону в Калининградской области”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 06 07 2017.

⁷⁰ “Около 600 военнослужащих и порядка 20 кораблей были задействованы в учении Балтфлота по высадке десанта в Калининградской области”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 07 07 2017.

Strugi airfield⁷¹. Simultaneously, additional reconnaissance and diversionary groups were parachuted behind opponent lines and started massive diversions and ambushes⁷². The remaining air-borne units exercised penetration and deep raids behind enemy lines in other training grounds in the Pskov region.

General Purpose Forces followed Rapid Reactions Forces and joined the offense. In the training grounds of Leningrad, Nizhniy-Novgorod and Moscow regions, reconnaissance troops from JSC “West” ground force units were running special exercises devoted to offense by small groups and city battle topics⁷³. Right after the recce exercises, the main ground forces moved in with moto-riflemen and tank units conducting exercises in the Moscow region. Topics remained the same – fighting in the cities, new types of fire support (tank carousel), marches, combat raids and river crossing, coordination actions with air frames and helicopters. More than 1,500 soldiers, 200 tanks, IFVs and APCs, Su-34 jets and Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters were involved⁷⁴. In Kaliningrad, the 11th Army Corp was also involved. The 79th separate motorized riflemen brigade was exercising offense, combat engineer recce and fighting in unknown territories with more than 1,500 soldiers and 200 pieces of weaponry involved⁷⁵.

Offending forces might have met resistance, so to help them, short-range missiles were used. Three missile brigades from JSC “West” armed with Iskander M and Tochka-U missiles started their own exercises⁷⁶. At the same time, the fourth missile brigade (448th) was conducting a live missile launch in the Kapustin Jar firing range next to Astrakhan⁷⁷. Simultaneously, to mislead and not allow opponent Air Force striking advancing troops, EW (Krasucha 2/4) and Air defense (S400) units exercised defense against a massive air strike.

Summing up all these activities, one feature does stand out – a sudden

⁷¹ М. Севастьянов, “Учения ВДВ на северо-западном направлении: длинные руки русского десанта”, Полигон Струги Красные (Псковская область), РИА Новости, 07 07 2017.

⁷² “Две с половиной тысячи десантников проводят учение в Псковской области”, Псковская обл. “Интерфакс-АВН”, 05 07 2017.

⁷³ “Войсковые разведчики ЗВО отработают захват и уничтожение штабов и органов военного управления условного противника”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 08 07 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁷⁴ “Российские военные под Нижним Новгородом учатся брать города с применением «танковой карусели»”, Москва. Интерфакс-АВН, 07 07 2017.

⁷⁵ “Армейский корпус Балтийского флота приступил к завершающему этапу боевой учебы, более 1,5 тыс. военных балтийцев из соединений и частей 11 армейского корпуса Балтийского флота отработывают навыки ведения боя”, Интерфакс, 08 07 2017.

⁷⁶ С расчетами «Искандер-М» и «Точка-У» ЗВО проведена тренировка по управлению ракетными ударами”, Интерфакс, 08 07 2017.

⁷⁷ “Курские ракетчики провели учебно-боевые пуски ракет «Точка» в Астраханской области”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 10 07 2017

attack was performed in every location. The offense was supported from the air, sea, and land; at long distances and close ranges; involving PGLRMs, EW and air defense. The number of participants and weaponry involved in the mentioned activities alone (see Table 1) rounded up to more than 14,000 soldiers, 1,000 pieces of different weaponry, 3,000 pieces of other military equipment, around 70 air frames and helicopters and 20 ships. All the activities were controlled and coordinated from the NDMC with the involvement of Andromeda-D⁷⁸ and other systems. It is worth mentioning that a number of other military exercises and activities took place at the same time in other Russian territories as well. Theoretically, they might be assigned to the first stage as well, but more information and data is needed before a more reliable statement can be made.

Table 1. *Zapad*, 2017 July, likely 1st stage “Sudden Attack/Capture”

Date 2017 JULY	JSC	Unit/Location	Size*	Action	Remarks
JULY 3-5	JCS RRF	Air-borne troops 98th D, 76th D 31st B Transport avia, Pskov	?	Offense, Alarmed, leaving garrisons to boarding sites, preparing for action, establishing C2	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, match- ing actions
JULY 5	JSC Nuclear	Northern Fleet Submarine Forces Barents Sea	+ -100S 1 SM	Offense, Nuclear Submarine “Smolensk” launching SLCM “Granit” against so- phisticated naval target (distance 400 km)	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, match- ing actions
JULY 5	JSC Nuclear	Start aviation OC Strat bombers Syria	?S 2 Ai	Offense, 2 Tu 95MSM bombers launching 4 ALCM X-101 to targets in Syria	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
JULY 5	JSC West	Three MsBs Moscow Leningrad/Kursk	+ -500 S 200 ME	Offense, Coordina- tion of missile strike, electronic launches	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
JULY 5	JSC West	X? ABC unit Leningrad	?	Offense/defense, Aerosol Camouflage of Iskander missiles	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	AAD units, District wide	+5000 S +2000 ME	Offense, Area AAD, AtoA fighting training, S 400 training,	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions

⁷⁸ “Учения ВДВ на северо-западном направлении: длинные руки русского десанта”, 07 07 2017, https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170707/1498098871.html.

JULY 6	JSC West	EW units from Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod, Kaliningrad, Kursk	+150S 20 ME	Offense, EW units measures to protect troops, SIGINT	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	448th MsB Astrakhan	+500 S 100 ME	Offense, Launch of Tochka U missile in Kopustin Jar shooting range	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 5-7	JCS RRF	Air-borne troops 98thD, 76thD 31st B Transport aviation Pskov	+2500 S 500 ME 40 Air and H	Offense, Alarmed, air transport, air assault, capture of bridgeheads, reinforcements by air and land, diversions in the rear	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC RRF	336th NIB. BF aviation Kaliningrad	+600S 15 ME	Offense, Capture of bridgehead on the coast. Naval landing	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	Baltic Fleet, Baltic Sea/ Kaliningrad	+ 1000S 20 SS	Offense/Defense Mine sweeping, protection of ships on-route, sea mining, transport of NI, fire support from the sea to amphibious landing	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	Baltic Fleet, Aviation unit Kaliningrad	? S 10 Ai and H	Offense, Massive air strike, Assistance to amphibious assault	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	6th Air OC, Aviation units Leningrad	? S 10? Ai and H	Offense, Massive air strike, Assistance to amphibious assault	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	X? OC X? MR Nizhniy Novgorod	+1300S 250 ME 10? Ai and H	Offense, Regimentals TG in offense, river crossing, battle in the cities, new tactics "tank carousel!"	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 6	JSC West	X? OC RECCE units Nizhniy Novgorod, Moscow, Leningrad	+1000 S 200 ME	Offense, Training on fighting in the cities, capture of objects, diversions of foe HQs and C2 nots	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
JULY 7	JSC West	11th Corp, X? Motorifle units Kaliningrad	+1500 S 200ME	Offense, Fighting in offense, marches, capture of objects	Officially not Zapad, synchronized, matching actions
TO-TAL			+14000S +3600ME +70Ai +20SS 1SM		

Legend: JSC – joint strategic command, OC – operational command, B- brigade, R- regiment, MD – moto-rifle division, TD – tank division, NIB – naval infantry brigade, CDB – coastal defense brigade, S – soldiers/sailors, ME – military equipment (Combat plus other), SH – surface ships: SS – surface ships; SM – submarines; SA – auxiliary ships A – air frames; Ai – aircrafts. H – Helicopters

2.4.2 Zapad-17. “Zapad operation” second stage

Exercising the second “Zapad operation” stage – safeguarding and extending achievements and stabilization/termination of the conflict – took place in August (probable dates 7th–23rd). During that period, a number of two-sided exercises or announced-as-planned military activities, at first glance unrelated to one another, took place in JSC “West”. Again, Rapid Reaction and General Purpose forces worked in a highly synchronized manner. JSC “West” signal units started a district level signal exercise on the 13th–14th August⁷⁹. Participants were the 1st JSC command/control brigade, the 132nd territorial signal brigade and the 9th signal brigade from the 20th operational command. Altogether, there were around 4,000 soldiers, 1,000 pieces of different equipment⁸⁰. They were joined by signal units from the Baltic Fleet^{81 82} and the 38th air-borne troops signal brigade⁸³. During the exercise, an actually-functioning C3 consisting of around fifty mobile command posts⁸⁴ and involving units from a company to strategic HQ level was created. *As a result, all different exercises participants became plugged in to one overall C3.*

This stage, like the first one, was again started by Rapid Reaction Forces. On the 8th–11th of August air-borne troops and naval infantry launched two-sided exercises in the Pskov and Kaliningrad regions. In Pskov, it was called a demonstrative two-sided regimental exercise. The exercise topic was a regiment in offense. Here, one battalion tactical group (BTG) was parachuted with combat vehicles and captured an airfield, the second BTG was delivered to the captured airfield by helicopters and the third one made a combat march on land while crossing a river and joining another two battalions⁸⁵. All the offending forces had fire support from their own artillery and bombers and helicopters coming from the Army aviation. The exercise involved the 76th and

⁷⁹ “В ЗВО проведены тактико-специальные учения одновременно с тремя соединениями связи”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 07 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁸⁰ “В Западном военном округе проходят учения с соединениями связи”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 31 07 2017.

⁸¹ “Более 500 связистов Балтийского флота вышли на учение”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 15 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁸² “Связисты Балтфлота испытают на учениях современные средства связи”, КАЛИНИНГРАД, РИА Новости, 15 08 2017.

⁸³ “ВДВ России в ходе пятидневных учений в СЗФО отработают весь спектр задач войск на период военного времени”, Интерфакс-АВН, 07 08 2017.

⁸⁴ “В Западном военном округе проходят учения с соединениями связи”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 31 07 2017.

⁸⁵ “ВДВ России в ходе пятидневных учений в СЗФО отработают весь спектр задач войск на период военного времени”, Интерфакс-АВН, 07 08 2017.

106th air-borne divisions, the 31st and 45th air-borne brigades and the 38th air-borne signal brigade. The participants of all those events were more than 2,500 soldiers, around 600 pieces of weaponry and few dozen jets and helicopters⁸⁶⁸⁷⁸⁸⁸⁹⁹⁰. At the same time, (9th August) the 336th naval infantry brigade and the 7th moto-rifleman regiment started a two-sided exercise in the Chmeliovka training ground (Kaliningrad). Here, around 500 marines, supported from the air⁹¹, tried to capture a bridgehead which was defended by motorized infantry⁹². In total, more than 2,000 soldiers, around 100 pieces of weaponry, 20 ships and 12 air frames were involved. Alongside this, the Baltic Fleet⁹³ and its aviation units⁹⁴⁹⁵ conducted, announced as separate, exercises on fire and close air support (CAS). Combat engineers⁹⁶ and EW⁹⁷ units were involved in this venture also.

A fight for captured areas continued. Now land forces employed additional air and coastal defense. The same day (9th August), in the Kaliningrad region, the local coastal defense brigade performed live firing from “Bal” and “Bastion” systems⁹⁸ and air defense S300 systems withstood a massive oppo-

⁸⁶ “Батальон ВДВ при поддержке авиации отбил у «боевиков» аэродром под Псковом”, Москва, ТАСС, 09 08 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4471921>.

⁸⁷ “ВДВ России в ходе пятидневных учений в СЗФО отрабатывают весь спектр задач войск на период военного времени”, Интерфакс-АВН, 07 08 2017.

⁸⁸ “Новое оборудование для прыжков с большой высоты испытали в ходе учений ВДВ под Псковом”, Псков, ТАСС, 09 08 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4472182>.

⁸⁹ “Десантники в ходе учений под Псковом ликвидировали лагерь условного НВФ, Струги Красные (Псковская область), Интерфакс-АВН, 10 08 2017, www.militarynews.ru.

⁹⁰ “В полковых учениях ВДВ в Псковской области задействовано около 40 самолетов и вертолетов - Минобороны РФ”, Псков. Интерфакс-АВН, 08 08 2017.

⁹¹ Масштабное учение морской пехоты Балтийского флота прошло в Калининградской области, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 10 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁹² “Морские пехотинцы Балтийского флота на учении в Калининградской области отрабатывают вопросы обороны побережья”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 16 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁹³ “Около 20 боевых кораблей и судов обеспечения Балтийского флота принимают участие в командно-штабной тренировке”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 15 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁹⁴ “Летчики Балтийского флота проводят практические ракетные стрельбы под Калининградом”, Калининград, ТАСС, 14 08 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4481305>.

⁹⁵ “Морская авиация БФ поддержала высадку морского десанта на учении в Калининградской области”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 17 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁹⁶ “Инженеры Балтийского флота провели тактико-специальное учение”, пресс-служба ЗВО по Балтийскому флоту, 10 08 2017, <https://yaostrov.ru/corps/ucheniya/item/52302-инженеры-балтийского-флота-провели-тактико-специальное-учение#ixzz4qSNyoQqt>.

⁹⁷ “Подразделение РЭБ Балтийского флота подавило систему связи условного противника в ходе учения”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 11 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

⁹⁸ С. Песоцкая, “«Бал» и «Бастион» уничтожили корабли «противника» на Балтике”, Российская газета, 09 08 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/08/09/reg-szfo/raketchiki-baltflota-unichtozhili-korabli-uslovnogo-protivnika.html>.

nents' air strike⁹⁹. Simultaneously, there was another two-sided exercise between the already-mentioned 336th naval infantry brigade and the 79th motorized infantry brigade (11th Army Cops, Kaliningrad). Here, everything was done in opposite – naval infantry defended an area and infantry tried to recapture it. Around 700 soldiers and 40 combat vehicles were involved here¹⁰⁰. On the 11th of August, motorized riflemen from the 11th Corps^{101 102} units received support from EW unit belonging to the 79th motorized infantry brigade. Around 100 soldiers and 20 pieces of equipment¹⁰³ had an exercise on blocking enemy communication¹⁰⁴ and protecting their own forces against air strikes. Defense of captured territories and entrenchment exercises continued everywhere with aviation¹⁰⁵, artillery¹⁰⁶, EW means were intensively used. The geography of these exercises was widened. The 20th OC from JSC “West” started a two-sided exercise between two newly formed divisions (3rd and 114th). Officially it was announced as a certification exercise and units from both divisions performed offense, defense, regrouping, receiving supplies after a battle^{107 108 109}, but this was exactly what they would be doing if involved in the second stage of a “Zapad operation”. The same activities (offense, defense, regrouping, etc.) were

⁹⁹ „Комплексы С-300 сбили «нарушителей» границы над Калининградом“, *Российская газета*, 11 08 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/08/11/reg-szfo/kompleksy-s-300-sbili-narushitelej-granicy-nad-kaliningradom.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Мотострелки Балтийского флота уничтожат морской десант условного противника в ходе учения, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 14 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁰¹ “В Калининградской области проходит тактическое учение мотострелкового соединения армейского корпуса”, пресс-службы ЗВО по Балтийскому флоту, 08 08, 2017: <https://yaostrov.ru/corps/ucheniya/item/52296-в-калининградской-области-проходит-тактическое-учение-мотострелкового-соединения-армейского-корпуса#ixzz4qSP6QSBu>.

¹⁰² “Полковое учение армейского корпуса началось в Калининградской области”, пресс-служба ЗВО по Балтийскому флоту, 14 08 2017, <https://yaostrov.ru/corps/ucheniya/item/52306-полковое-учение-армейского-корпуса-началось-в-калининградской-области#ixzz4qSNLnRzE>.

¹⁰³ “Под Калининградом начались учения мотострелков Балтфлота”, пресс-службы Балтийского флота, 08 08 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/08/08/reg-szfo/pod-kaliningradom-nachalis-takticheskoe-ucheniemotostrelkov-baltflota.html>.

¹⁰⁴ “Подразделение РЭБ Балтийского флота подавило систему связи условного противника в ходе учения”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 11 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁰⁵ “Авиаудары и высадка десанта на учениях морской пехоты Балтийского флота”, 19 08 2017, <https://ria.ru/video/20170819/1500688024.html>.

¹⁰⁶ “Артиллеристы БФ провели учебно-боевые стрельбы с использованием беспилотников”, пресс-служба ЗВО по Балтийскому флоту, 04 08 2017, <https://yaostrov.ru/corps/ucheniya/item/52293-артиллеристы-бф-провели-учебно-боевые-стрельбы-с-использованием-беспилотников#ixzz4qSPdgZbr>.

¹⁰⁷ “Более 2000 человек и 600 единиц техники поднято по тревоге в рамках двустороннего учения в Воронежской области”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 17 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁰⁸ “На учениях под Воронежем артиллеристы уничтожили базы «противника», Москва, РИА Новости, 20 08 2017.

¹⁰⁹ “Подразделение МТО на учении в Воронежской области обеспечит дозаправку топливом боевых машин в полевых условиях”. Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 15 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

seen in training fields located in the Moscow, Nizhniy-Novgorod and Smolensk regions¹¹⁰, where the 1st tank OC had own exercises. Again, artillery¹¹¹, aviation and EW means¹¹² were used intensively^{113 114}. In the Leningrad region, the 138th motorized infantry brigade belonging to the 6th OC from JSC “West” was also running similar training^{115 116 117}.

With the end of the stage approaching, pressure on the opponent had increased. JSC “Nuclear forces” joined the game by starting the so-called planned exercise. Eleven strategic missile regiments spread in the combat patrols exercising in Russia, withstanding opponents’ SOF attempts to destroy missiles¹¹⁸ and imitating missile launches¹¹⁹. Naval and air components of JSC “Nuclear Forces” were also involved – the submarine “Severodvinsk” did live firing with “Caliber” cruise missiles¹²⁰ and strategic bombers accompanied by jets flew a patrol mission in the Pacific¹²¹.

When summarizing all the mentioned activities, one can see that everywhere a wide scale offense was carried out with the tasks to defend captured areas, to extend success and in the final stages, to get nuclear forces involved to force the opponent to reconsider fighting and move on to the negotiation table. All unit actions on land received widespread air support, LRPGMs were

¹¹⁰ “В ЗВО по учебной тревоге подняли части Первой танковой армии”, С.-Петербург, РИА Новости, 15 08 2017, https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170815/1500382408.html.

¹¹¹ “Артиллеристы Таманской мотострелковой дивизии ЗВО отрабатывают ведение высокоточной стрельбы”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 29 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹² “Артиллеристы ЗВО впервые применяют новейшую модификацию «Мсты-С» на стрельбах под Нижним Новгородом”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 19 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹³ “Расчеты РЭБ Западного военного округа подавили систему связи условного противника в Тамбовской области”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 28 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹⁴ “Соединение РЭБ ЗВО поднято по тревоге на учение и совершает марш на знакомый полигон в Тамбовской области”, 17 08 2017, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12138061@egNews.

¹¹⁵ “Более 1000 военнослужащих ЗВО участвует в двухстороннем БТУ под Санкт-Петербургом”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 17 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹⁶ “Ударный батальон мотострелкового соединения ЗВО зажал «противника» в «огневом мешке», Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 03 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹⁷ “Тюльпаны» и «Пионы» уничтожили заглобленные командные пункты условного противника в Ленинградской области”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа. 29 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹⁸ “ПГРК «Тополь», «Тополь-М» и «Ярс» отрабатывают маневренные действия на маршрутах боевого патрулирования в четырёх регионах России”, Департамент информации и массовых коммуникаций Министерства обороны Российской Федерации. 15 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹¹⁹ “Ракетчики проведут условные пуски из «Тополя» в Тверской области”, Москва, ТАСС, 17 08 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4488075>.

¹²⁰ “Подлодка в Баренцевом море провела стрельбу крылатой ракетой «Калибр», Пресс-служба Северного флота, 18 08 2017, <https://iz.ru/634257/2017-08-18/podlodka-v-barentcevom-more-provela-strelbu-krylatoi-raketoi-kalibr>.

¹²¹ “Ракетносцы ВКС выполнили полеты над нейтральными водами в Тихом океане”, Москва, РИА Новости, 24 08 2017.

used and air space control and territorial air defense was implemented. More than 27,000 soldiers, around 4,200 combat and other equipment, 50 air frames and 20 ships might have been involved in all the activities mentioned above (see Table 2). And again, a number of other military exercises and activities, which might be assigned to the second stage, took place in different Russian locations, but to be confident about this, more information and data is needed.

Table 2. Zapad, 2017 August, likely the 2nd stage “Expend and Reinforcement of the Success”

Date	JSC	Unit/ Location	Size*	Action	Remarks
July 31 Aug?	JSC West	3 Signal Br Nizhniy Novgorod, S Petersburg Voronezh, Kaliningrad	+5000S 1000ME	Establish and maintaining overall C2	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 4	JSC West	11th Corp, 7th MR Kaliningrad	+500S 65ME	Defense against amphib- ian landing (EW, Artillery support)	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 8-11	JSC RRF JSC West	Transport Avia OC	?S 40	Offense to support RRF Air-borne troops EX	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 8-11	JSC RRF	76thD, 31stB, 45thB, 106thD Pskov	+2500S +600	Offense regiment exercise air assault, capture of airfield, reinforcement by air, raids in opponent rear	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 8	JSC West,	11th Corp, 79th MB Kaliningrad	+700S 40ME +4*	Offense BTG training with artillery and CAS	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 9	JSC West,	11th Corp, 25th CDB Kaliningrad,	+200*S +10*ME	Offense/Defense. En- gage approaching ships	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 9	JSC RRF,	336th NIB Kaliningrad	+ 500S 40ME	Offense Naval landing (battalion) Fire support from ships	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 10	JSC West	BF, Naval Engineer R, Kaliningrad	+150S 20ME	Offense Demining, mine clearing potential landing zones	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions
Aug 10-16	JSC West	11th Corp +NI 7th MR+ 336th NIB, Kaliningrad	+ 2000S 100ME 12 Ai, 20SS	Offense/Defense Two- sided exercise 336th NIB landing, 7th MR coast defense, artillery and CAS involved	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchro- nized, matching actions

Aug 11	JSC West	11th Corp EW units Kaliningrad	+~100S 20	Possibly part of a two-sided exercise from Aug 10. Jamming, SIGINT, EW protection of moving troops	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 11	JSC West	11th Corp AAD units Kaliningrad	?	Offense/Defense Two sided, S-300 - area defense from opponent aviation (simulated by BF aviation)	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 13	JSC West	11th Corp X? MR units Kaliningrad	?	Offense. Tank crew camp, Live tank shooting, engaging different targets, reacting to new inputs	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 14-18	JSC West,	BF Aviation Kaliningrad	+~500S 20ME	Offense. Tactical aviation training; Air to air combat, CAS to land troops	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 14-18	JSC West	20th OC 3rd and 144th MD Voronezh	+~2000S 600ME	Offense/Defense Two-sided exercise, Alarm, march, actions in unknown locations, Logistic support	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 15	JSC West,	BF, Signal units Kaliningrad	500S	Signal exercise, maintaining overall C2 (a part of JSC signal EX)	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 15	JSC West,	BF Baltic Sea	+~ 1000S 20 SS	Command training	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 15- ?	JSC West	1st tank OC (60th Sig B, 2nd MD, 4th TD, 228th A rB, 112 MsB, 53rd AADB, 20th ABC R Moscow, Smolensk Nizhniy Novgorod, Ivanov	+~5000S* 1000ME	Offense/Defense. Alarm, independent marches, establishing mobile C2, defense of areas	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 15-?	JSC Nuclear	Eleven (11) St MsR Patrolling Four regions of Russia	+~ 2000S 400ME	Offense/ Defense Strategic missile patrolling, imitation of ICBM (Topol) launch	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
Aug 16	JSC West	11th Corp +NI 7th MR 336th NIB, Kaliningrad	+~1500S 150ME	Offense/Defense. Potentially a continuation of the EX from Aug 10	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions

Aug 17	JSC West,	6th OC 138th MB Leningrad	+1000S 100ME	Offense/Defense. Two sided BTG EX, communication, artillery support, UAV, marches, live firing	
Aug 17	JSC West	EW unit 16th EW B Tambov	+ 500S 100ME	Offense/Defense. Jamming, protection of own forces from air,	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 17	JSC West	Aviation Kursk R.	10Ai	Offensive/Defensive Air to Air, CAS	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 17	JSC West	20th OC Artillery, RECCE units Different locations	?	As part of EX of 20th OC from Aug 14-18	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 18	JSC Nuclear	NF SSBN "Severodvinsk" Barents Sea	1	SLCM "Kaliber" shooting, Distance 600km.	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 19	JSC West	1st tank OC Artillery units Nizhniy Novgorod	+1000S, 300ME	As part of 1st tank OC EX from Aug 15.	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 23	JSC Nuclear	Strat aviation	2-6 Ai	Strategic patrol, Japan, Yellow and South-China Seas accompanied by jets, A 50 and refueling	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
Aug 23-25	JSC West	6 th Air OC Kursk Astrakhan	+100 15Ai	Alarm, Relocation of air- crafts to reserve airfields	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchron- ized, matching actions
TOTAL			+ 27000S +4200ME + 55Ai 20SS		

* All numbers come from OS or recalculated/best estimate

Legend: JSC – joint strategic command, OC – operational command, B – brigade, R– regiment, MD – motorifle division, TD – tank division, NIB – naval infantry brigade, CDB – coastal defense brigade, S – soldiers/sailors, ME – military equipment (Combat plus other), SH – surface ships: SS – surface ships; SM – submarines; SA – auxiliary ships A – air frames; Ai – aircrafts. H – Helicopters

2.4.3 Zapad-17. “Zapad operation” third stage

The third stage - a massive (total) state defense involving all state assets and moving to a nuclear war if deterrence fails - started on the 11th–12th of September. Again, like in the previous stages, a lot of activities were performed by Rapid Reaction and General Purpose units, Nuclear Forces and forces and assets belonging to other state institutions (Russian National Guard, Ministry of Emergencies, Border guards, etc.) were announced as planned and not connected to *Zapad*. But when a closer look is taken, they obviously fell under one type of activity and were coordinated and synchronized. They all fully matched the content of this stage – massive (total) defense in case of the failure to achieve tasks from previous “*Zapad operation*” stages. The officially-announced *Zapad-17* days matched the stage, and during those days special demonstrative activities were organized for journalists and military observers from abroad. *These demonstrations were oriented to emphasize and demonstrate the Russians’ desire to perform total defense with counterattack elements.*

Like in previous stages, overall C3 was available again. All participating Rapid Reaction and General Purpose forces established a C3I (C3+Information) and activated mobile command posts^{122 123}. Command Posts kept working in real time mode and used ABMSs (Andromeda-D, Poliot-K¹²⁴, etc.). All this allowed HQs located 1,000¹²⁵ or even 2,000¹²⁶ kilometers away from each other to synchronize actions. As a result, again, an overall C3I including everyone from a soldier to the highest HQ was in action¹²⁷.

The start of the stage was a very unusual and interesting one. *On the 12th of September* a test launch of a ground-based “Jars” *intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)* was done¹²⁸. Unlike short-range ballistic missiles, strategic bombers or submarines which are dual (nuclear and conventional) weapons

¹²² “Связисты Балтийского флота проводят учения в полевых условиях”, Пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 13 08 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹²³ “Сеть скрытых командных пунктов создана в рамках учений «Запад-2017»”, видео <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201709201215-4fls.htm>.

¹²⁴ “Подразделения ВДВ оборудовали скрытые полевые пункты управления в рамках ССУ «Запад-2017»”, 18 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹²⁵ “Военные связисты России и Белоруссии создали защищенную линию связи длиной около 1000 км для обеспечения учения «Запад-2017»”. 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹²⁶ “На учении «Запад-2017» связисты ВДВ обеспечивают пункты управления связью на расстоянии до 2 тыс. Км”, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹²⁷ “Учения «Запад-2017»: проверка «нервной системы» российской армии”, Москва, ТАСС, 19 09 2017.

¹²⁸ “Россия выполнила испытательный пуск межконтинентальной ракеты «Ярс» с разделяющейся головной частью”, Москва. Интерфакс-АВН, 20 09 2017.

carriers, ICBMs carry *only nuclear charges*. So, even though it was officially announced as a test launch, in essence, this launch was the start of the third stage – a massive, total and final defense, *when a country is ready to use nuclear weapons*. Whether this was by accident or not, but this particular launch was highly synchronized with another very strange event, which initiated a lot of subsequent activities. The activities would be considered very appropriate in the event of nuclear attacks. Numerous anonymous phone calls about bombs being planted in different places were made. Those calls in much smaller numbers continue even today at the time of the writing of this text. Russian officials hurried to deny the case being an exercise¹²⁹ or related in any way to *Zapad*¹³⁰, or identified those calls as being done by provocateurs from abroad¹³¹. Regardless of the cause, those calls allowed other Russian structures and institutions (Russian Guard, Ministry of Emergencies, FSB, etc.) to do what they would have done in the event of mass defense (nuclear war) – a mass evacuation. During the first wave of calls lasting from the 10th to the 12th of September and covering Russia from Kaliningrad¹³² to Omsk, a few dozen civil objects, ranging from administrative buildings to shopping centers, were evacuated with the number of people involved (evacuated) reaching 45,000¹³³. The exact number of servicemen from the Russian Guard, Ministry of Emergencies and other institutions involved in evacuating, searching, guarding and other activities was not announced, but the count would certainly go into the thousands. Knowing that *all those institutions are included in the C3I managed by NDMC* and can be (and most probably were) commanded and controlled from it, the third stage became very realistic from the beginning.

Let's reconstruct the scenario for this stage, based on what the forces were doing. The General Purpose forces were preparing for defense. The defense which most probably would be unavoidable given that first two stages failed to force the opponent to negotiate and NATO, beginning wide-scale conventional operations, to push Russian forces out from the occupied territories. In the beginning, in every location defense was prevailing. It started

¹²⁹ «Глава МЧС опроверг версию «учений» в связи с массовой эвакуацией людей в регионах РФ», Москва. INTERFAX.RU, 20 09 2017.

¹³⁰ «Глава МЧС: эвакуации в городах России из-за анонимных звонков не связаны с учениями», <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3416054>.

¹³¹ «Генерал ФСБ отметил сезонность анонимных звонков с угрозами взрывов», Москва, РИА Новости, 12 09 2017.

¹³² «В Калининграде проверяют анонимные сообщения о минировании зданий», Калининград, РИА Новости, 12 09 2017.

¹³³ <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/09/12/evakuatsiya-tysyach-lyudey-iz-torgovyh-tsentrov-shkol-vuzov-administratsiy-i-gostinits-po-vsey-rossii-chno-proishodit>.

*almost at the same time across a front almost 600 km long, as the Defense Ministry stated*¹³⁴. In Kaliningrad the 11th Corps forces started, again claimed-as-planned, an exercise devoted to conduct defense^{135 136}. They were seconded by aviation and air defense S300, S400 exercises^{137 138 139} and a naval special force unit exercise on how to conduct defense against underwater diversions¹⁴⁰. In the Leningrad region, at the Pechenga training ground around 1,500 motorized infantry soldiers supported by 300 IFVs and APCs kept entrenching and preparing for defense¹⁴¹. At the Pumanki training ground next to Murmansk 600 naval infantry soldiers and around 300 different pieces of equipment and armament, supported by artillery and aviation, kept preparing to repel a naval landing¹⁴². The 6th tank brigade from the 1st tank OC was boarding trains in the Moscow region to reinforce Russian-Belorussian troops in Belorussia¹⁴³, which were establishing defense in local training grounds¹⁴⁴. The Northern¹⁴⁵ and Baltic¹⁴⁶ fleets left ports, sailed to reserve operational areas¹⁴⁷ and initiated

¹³⁴ “Путин и Шойгу оценили итоги учений «Запад-2017» на Лужском полигоне”, Полигон Лужский (Ленинградская область), РИА Новости, 18 09 2017.

¹³⁵ “В Калининградской области проходит учение с подразделениями армейского корпуса Балтийского флота”, Отдел информационного обеспечения Балтийского региона (г. Калининград). 13 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹³⁶ “Сухопутные подразделения Балтийского флота отрабатывают действия в обороне в рамках учения «Запад-2017»”, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹³⁷ “В ходе учения «Запад-2017» военные проверили работу дежурных сил ПВО”, Москва. Интерфакс-АВН, 14 09 2017.

¹³⁸ “Силы ПВО Балтфлота на учениях «Запад-2017» уничтожили ракеты условного противника” Калининград, ТАСС, 15 09 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4563969>.

¹³⁹ “Подразделения противовоздушной обороны Балтийского флота отразили авиационный удар”, Отдел информационного обеспечения Балтийского региона (г. Калининград), 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁴⁰ “На Балтийском флоте в рамках ССУ «Запад-2017» бойцы отряда ПДСС задержали условных подводных диверсантов”, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁴¹ “В Заполярье завершилось тактическое учение с подразделениями армейского корпуса Северного флота”, Пресс-служба Северного флота, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁴² “Морпехи Северного флота на учениях отразили высадку десанта на Кольский полуостров”, Мурманск, ТАСС, 18 09 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4571107>.

¹⁴³ “Танковая бригада из Подмоскovie перебрасывается в Белоруссию на учения”, Москва. Интерфакс-АВН, 14 09 2017.

¹⁴⁴ “Подразделения ЗВО заняли оборонительные рубежи на белорусском военном полигоне Осиповичский в рамках ССУ «Запад-2017»”, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁴⁵ “В Баренцевом море начались учения Северного флота”, пресс-служба Северного флота, РИА Новости, 14 09 2017.

¹⁴⁶ “Корабли Балтийского флота вышли в море на учениях «Запад-2017”, пресс-служба Западного военного округа, 16 09 2017, <http://kgd.ru/news/society/item/66883-korabli-baltijskogo-flota-vyshli-v-more-na-ucheniayah-zapad-2017>.

¹⁴⁷ “Силы Беломорской военно-морской базы Северного флота развернуты в Баренцевом море”, Пресс-служба Северного флота, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

air defense and defense against surface ships training^{148 149 150}. The same was done by the 6th air OC from JSC “West” which carried out a speedy relocation of all air frames from the main airfields to reserve ones¹⁵¹. Special units were preparing for defense actions also. JSC “West” NBC units in Luga were exercising how to conceal movements of their own troops by aerosol smoke¹⁵², EW specialists exercised protection of their own troops against opponent air reconnaissance¹⁵³ and withstanding enemies’ cyber-attacks against their own C3¹⁵⁴.

To engage advancing troops at long distances and before first contact with defenders, new tactical elements (like helicopter ambushes)¹⁵⁵ were exercised and LRPGMs were applied. The last was done by missile brigades which struck opponent command and communication posts by “Iskander” and “Tochka-U” rockets^{156 157}. The same, just as a part of real combat operation, was done in the Mediterranean Sea where Russian submarines “Velikiy Novgorod” and “Kalino” launched “Caliber” attacks against real targets in Syria¹⁵⁸. Rapid Reaction Forces were involved in delay and restrain operations by performing combat raids behind the enemy¹⁵⁹ or parachuting and executing diversions behind enemy lines, selecting targets for PRPGM strikes and doing everything to

¹⁴⁸ “Корабельная ударная группа и истребительная авиация СФ отразили воздушные атаки условного противника в Баренцевом море”, Пресс-служба Северного флота, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁴⁹ “Корвет Балтфлота в ходе учения «Запад-2017» поразил крылатой ракетой корабль условного противника”, Балтийск. пресс-службе Балтфлота РФ, Интерфакс, 19 09 2017.

¹⁵⁰ “Корабли Балтфлота выполнили артиллерийские стрельбы на учениях «Запад-2017»”, отдела информационного обеспечения пресс-службы ЗВО по Балтийскому флоту, 17 09 2017, Балтийск (Калининградская область), РИА Новости, 17 09 2017.

¹⁵¹ “Авиация ЗВО передислоцируется на оперативные аэродромы в рамках проведения ССУ «Запад-2017»”, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵² “Специалисты РХБ защиты ЗВО скрыли передислокацию войск на учении «Запад-2017»”, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵³ “Военные специалисты РЭБ ЗВО на учении «Запад-2017» прикрыли развертывание войск союзников от беспилотников «противника»”, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵⁴ “Военные связисты ЗВО отразили кибератаки «противника» на учении «Запад-2017»”, 15 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵⁵ “Вертолеты ЗВО продемонстрировали тактику уничтожения высококомобильного «противника» из засад в ходе учения «Запад-2017»”, 17 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵⁶ “Ракетчики ЗВО в ходе ССУ «Запад-2017» уничтожили военную технику и командный пункт условного противника на полигоне в Ленинградской области”, 17 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁵⁷ RTR News, “Vesti”, 16 09 2017.

¹⁵⁸ “Подлодки «Великий Новгород» и «Колпино» нанесли удар «Калибрами» по объектам ИГ в Сирии”, Москва, ТАСС, 14 09 2017, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4561914>.

¹⁵⁹ “В ходе учения «Запад-2017» поднят по тревоге ряд подразделений ВДВ России”, Москва. Интерфакс-АВН, 14 09 2017.

restrain the advance of enemy troops¹⁶⁰. To recover and restore battle damage, logistic units exercised damaged vehicles evacuation from a battlefield; field repair¹⁶¹ and troop resupply activities¹⁶².

With the enemy stopped and tied-up in defensive battles^{163 164}, preparation for a counter-strike began¹⁶⁵. As soon as the situation allowed, an offense started on all fronts extending from Leningrad¹⁶⁶ to Kaliningrad¹⁶⁷ and Belorussia. A lot of attention went towards providing this counter-offense with credible air support^{168 169}. The second part of the official *Zapad-17* exercise witnessed active counter-offensive activities¹⁷⁰. In Russia, at the same time, a second wave of bombing calls happened. The calls remained declared as having nothing in common with the exercise, but as a result of this, the Russian Guard and other forces continued searching and safeguarding objects located mostly in Russian western and southern regions and performing *real evacuation* of people who happened to be in those objects. The numbers became impressive, more than 200,000 people were evacuated and more than 700 objects searched¹⁷¹. This suggests the assumption that Russia was simulating a situation then the West, while repelling successful Russian counter attacks, responded by multiple strikes deep into Russian territory.

¹⁶⁰ “Ульяновское соединение ВДВ проведет первое тактическое учение с применением боевых машин БМД-4М и БТР-МДМ «Ракушка», Департамент информации и массовых коммуникаций Министерства обороны Российской Федерации, 13 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁶¹ “Специалисты МТО проведут в ходе ССУ «Запад-2017» тренировки по обслуживанию и экстренному ремонту ВВТ”, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁶² “Бригада материально-технического обеспечения ЗВО в ходе учения «Запад-2017» развернула ремонтные мастерские”, 16 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁶³ “Мотострелки общевойсковой армии ЗВО уничтожили десант НВФ в ходе основного этапа учения «Запад-2017»”, 17 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁶⁴ “Лётчики Балтфлота уничтожили подлодку условного противника на учениях «Запад-2017», Минобороны РФ, 16 09 2017, <http://kgd.ru/news/society/item/66895-ljotchiki-baltflota-unichtozhili-podlodku-uslovnogo-protivnika-na-uchenyah-zapad-2017>.

¹⁶⁵ “Подразделения ВДВ готовятся к погрузке в самолеты ВТА для последующего применения в качестве парашютного тактического десанта”, 17 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁶⁶ “Су-25 на учениях «Запад-2017» уничтожили колонну «противника», департамент информации и массовых коммуникаций Минобороны России”, С.-Петербург, РИА Новости, 18 09 2017.

¹⁶⁷ “Су-24 выполнили практическое бомбометание на учениях «Запад-2017», пресс-служба Западного военного округа (ЗВО) по Балтийскому флоту”, Калининград, РИА Новости, 17 09 2017.

¹⁶⁸ “Российские Су-24М на учениях «Запад-2017» уничтожили объекты «противника», С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГ, РИА Новости, 18 09 2017.

¹⁶⁹ Экипажи ударных вертолетов ЗВО выполнили прикрытие наземной группировки войск с воздуха в рамках учения «Запад-2017», 17 09 2017, www.mil.ru.

¹⁷⁰ “Мотострелки Балтийского флота под Калининградом ликвидировали условных террористов в ходе маневров «Запад-2017», Полигон «Правдинский» (Калининградская область), Интерфакс-АВН, 18 09 2017.

¹⁷¹ А. Гальперин “Более 200 тысяч человек эвакуировали в РФ за неделю из-за звонков анонимов”, Москва, РИА Новости, 19 09 2017.

Russia responded with limited nuclear strikes. These were imitated by launching a “Iskander” missile, which can carry a nuclear charge, to maximum distance in the Kapustin Jar¹⁷² firing range; launching a mobile ICBM “Jars” in Plesetsk¹⁷³ and strategic bombers Tu22M3 which flew an announced-as-planned event again, next to the Baltic States and Norway¹⁷⁴. After a few days, the MOD announced the beginning of massive, planned checks of combat readiness in all JSCs. Now not dozens but hundreds of units left their permanent locations, moving to training grounds and engaging in different activities. Bombing calls kept coming. The National Guard and other forces, with NDMC supervising everything, continued to work. In total, since the first calls were made until the middle of October, more than 2,460 objects were searched in 170 Russian cities¹⁷⁵ and 1 percent of the entire population or 1.4 million people evacuated¹⁷⁶. This was exactly the situation which would occur if nukes were used.

On the 26th of October, the worst-case scenario of the third stage – a mass exchange of nuclear strikes – was played out in the NDMC. According to Russian legislature, only the President can authorize usage of nuclear weapons. On the 26th of October a Russian National Security Board meeting took place¹⁷⁷. It is quite probable that right after it, the entire Board moved to the NDMC premises and, now as its Supreme Commander (Nuclear) Cell, exercised a decision to use nukes. The same night, the Russian nuclear triad imitated a massive nuclear strike by simultaneously launching an ICMB in Plesetsk, ICBMs from three submarines in the Barents and Okhotsk seas and cruise missiles from strategic bombers. It was declared that all missiles hit targets located thousands of kilometers away^{178 179}. Also, it was announced that Putin,

¹⁷² “Комплекс «Искандер-М» на учениях запустил ракету на максимальную дальность”, Москва, РИА Новости 18 09 2017.

¹⁷³ “Испытательный пуск: ракета «Ярс» поразила цель на Камчатке”, 20 09 2017, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201709201139-d0to.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ “Бомбардировщики Ту-22М3 совершили плановые полеты над нейтральными водами Балтийского и Норвежского морей”, 21 09 2017, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201709210004-urtl.htm>.

¹⁷⁵ “В России эвакуировали уже более миллиона человек в связи с «минированиями», Москва, РИА Новости, 10 10 2017.

¹⁷⁶ А. Карапетян, “В РФ почти 1,4 миллиона человек эвакуировали с начала волны «минирования»”, Москва, РИА Новости 26 10 2017.

¹⁷⁷ RTR news “Vesti, 19:00”, 26 10 2017.

¹⁷⁸ “Минобороны провело тренировку по управлению Стратегическими ядерными силами”, Москва, РИА Новости, 26 10 2017.

¹⁷⁹ “В рамках учений РВСН с Плесецка запущена МБР «Тополь» - Минобороны РФ”, Москва, Интерфакс-АВН, 26 10 2017.

as the supreme commander, personally authorized the launches¹⁸⁰. This was the end of the “Zapad operation” test and Zapad exercise. The next day, in the MOD board meeting the defense minister S. Shoigu announced that the objectives of the Zapad exercise were achieved¹⁸¹. Russia not only checked all its procedures until the end, but, at the same time, sent a message to the West stating that it was ready “to cross the Rubicon” and to use massive nuclear strikes. Time will tell whether this will become an annual Russian response to the USA nuclear triad exercise “Global Thunder”¹⁸².

Summarizing everything that happened during this stage, we see that the prevailing offense, presented in the earlier stages, was substituted by *wide-scale defense mostly done by conventional forces and counter-offense as soon as the advancing forces had been stopped*. The defense was supported less from the air and PLRGMs, but *seldom were nuclear strikes exercised, and forces did show they were prepared to handle the enemy’s nuclear response*. A great variety of other state forces, agencies or institutions were involved in real activities for different reasons. The amount of forces participating in the third stage was difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, counting only the figures from the MOD, there were more than 27,000 soldiers, around 2,000 combat and other equipment, 130 air frames and 50 ships were involved in all the above-mentioned activities (see Table 3). We can only guess how many troops and equipment from other institutions were involved. The question of whether we should count the evacuated civilians as participants of the exercise remains open to discussion.

Table 3. *Zapad*, 2017 September, likely the 3rd “Massive Defense” stage

Date	JSC	Unit/ Location	Size	Action	Remarks
SEP 12	JSC Nuclear	Strategic missiles OC	? 1 ballistic missile	Defense/Offense Ballistic missile test	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
SEP 13-?	JSC West	Signal troops in Kaliningrad	+ - 400S + -30ME	Establish and maintaining overall C2	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions
SEP 13	JSC West	11 th Co, 79 th MBr or 7 th MR	+ -1000S/ + -100 ME + -4 Ai and H	Defense and counter attack	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , synchronized, matching actions

¹⁸⁰ “Путин на учениях в четверг запустил четыре баллистические ракеты”, Москва, РИА Новости, 26 10 2017.

¹⁸¹ А. Тихонов, “Факторы роста обороноспособности”, Красная звезда, 29 10 2017 <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/34943-factory-rosta-oboronosposobnosti>.

¹⁸² This year the annual US nuclear triad exercise Global Thunder 2018 started on the 30th of October.

SEP 13	JSC West	SOF units Tambov	?	Defense/Offense Landing in the rear, reconnaissance	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchronization and matching actions
SEP 14	JSC West	11 th Co Air defense	+100S +10Ai	Defense Air defense	Officially Zapad
SEP 14	JSC West JSC Nuclear	6 th Air OC Strat aviation OC	+?00S +20Ai	Defense/Offense Air counterattack	Officially Zapad
SEP 14	JSC Air space forces	Air defense Baltic fleet	+500S +50ME 7 SS	Air defense Aircraft, S300,S400,	Officially Zapad
SEP 14-20	JSC West	1 st Tank OC, 4 TH tdV 6 th TBr Belarus	+3000S +300 ME	Defense, Offense Reinforcement (Russian part), counterattack	Officially Zapad
SEP 14-20	JSC West	Russian- Belarusian unified military group Belarus	-+ 0000S +- 300ME +50 Ai, H	Defense/ Offense Defense and counter-attack	Officially Zapad
SEP 14-18	JSC North	Northern fleet	+5000S +300 ME +30A +20 SS 10SM/30 SA	Defense. Ships leaving bases.	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchronization and match of actions
SEP 14	JSC Rapid reaction	76 th , 106 th 98 th Airborne Div	?	Defense, Offense Counterattack/Reinforcement	Officially Zapad
SEP 14	JSC South	Black Sea fleet Syria	+100S 2 SM	Defense Launching CRM	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchronization
SEP 15	JSC West	OC Baltic fleet Naval SOF	+50S +- 2 SA	Defense Undersea diversion prevention	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC West	11 th Co, 79 th MBr or 7 th MR	+000S ? ?ME	Defense Ambushes / counter-attacks	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC West	6 th Air OC, OC Baltic Fleet Aviation Air defense, Fleet Aviation	+200S 20Ai	Air defense	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC West	ABC units Luga	+100S xME	Defense Camouflage	Officially Zapad

SEP 15	JSC West	EW units Luga	?	Defense EW Protection of Assets	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC West	Signal Units	?	Defense Cyber defense of Communication	Officially Zapad
SEP 16	JSC West Luga	6 th OC 25 th MBr, 138 th Mbr 2 nd MDv 448 th , 26 th MsBr	+1500S +300ME +30A	Defense Counterat- tack Iskander and Tochka U launching	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC West Luga	JSC Logistic Br	?00S +100ME	Defense Recovery of battle damage, field logistics	Officially Zapad
SEP 14-18	JSC North	Northern fleet	+5000S +300 ME +30A +20 SS 10SM/30 SA	Defense against sea and air assault in the sea, artillery and cruise missiles shooting	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchroni- zation and matching actions
SEP 15	JSC North Pechenga	Land forces	+1500S +300ME	Defense Against naval landing	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchroni- zation and matching actions
SEP 15	JSC Nuclear	OC strat aviation	? 1Ai	Defense/offense Strat aviation patrol Accident	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchroni- zation and match- ing actions
SEP 15-17	JSC West	OC Baltic Fleet 25th CDB Kaliningrad	?000S 20 SS	Defense against sea and air assault in the sea, ar- tillery shooting, "Bal", Bastion" systems	Officially Zapad
SEP 15	JSC Rapid reaction	108 th Air-borne Dv	+500S +10ME	Offense Raids in opponent's rear	Officially Zapad
SEP 15-18	JSC West Luga	1 st Tank OC, 2 nd MDv, 138 th and 25 MBr, other units	+1500S +300ME +10A and H	Defense Artillery engaging opponent's assault. Counter attack	Officially Zapad
SEP 16	JSC West	6 th Air OC Leningrad Kaliningrad	+100S +10A	Defense/Offense Two sided CAS and AAD activi- ties	Officially Zapad
SEP 16	JSC West Belarus	Logistic units from JSC West	?	Defense Recovery of battle damage, field logistics	Officially Zapad
SEP 16-18	JSC West Luga	Army aviation units	X?S? +10H	Defense/Offense Helicopter ambush, CAS	Officially Zapad

SEP 17-20	JSC West Belarus	1 st Tank Army, 4 th TDv and 6 th T Br.	+3500S +500ME ≥10A and H	Defense Defense and counter-attack after	Officially Zapad
SEP 17-20	JSC West Luga	JSC West Logistic troops	+?00S +30ME	Defense Logistic and maintenance/ water purification	Officially Zapad
SEP 18	JSC RRF	Naval infantry Br. Pumanki, Murmansk	+600S ?ME	Defense Coastal defense	Officially Zapad
SEP 19	JSC Rapid reaction	76 th air-borne Dv	+500S +10 ME 6A	Defense/Offense counter attack, capture of airfield	Officially Zapad
SEP 20	JSC West	OC Baltic fleet	+1000S +≥20 SS x H	Defense/Offense defense against sea and air assault/ support naval landing	Officially Zapad
SEP 14-20		Topography troops	+250S +30 ME	Defense/Offense Improvement of positioning, navigating and aiming	Officially Zapad
SEP 20	JSC Nuclear	Strategic missiles OC	? 1 ballistic missile	Defense/Offense Ballistic missile test	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchronization and matching actions
OCT 26	JSC Nuclear	Strategic missiles OC Strategic Aviation OC Submarine forces OC	4 ballistic and X? Cruise missiles	Defense, Massive NUCLEAR STRIKE	Officially not <i>Zapad</i> , obvious synchronization and matching actions
SEP 10 OCT 26	Russian National Guard other forces	?	?0000	Defense. Massive evacuation	Officially denied as being an exercise
TO-TAL			+ 27000S +2000ME + 130Ai 50SS		

* All numbers come from OS or recalculated/best estimate

Legend: JSC – joint strategic command, OC – operational command, B – brigade, R– regiment, MD – moto-rifle division, TD – tank division, NIB – naval infantry brigade, CDB – coastal defense brigade, S – soldiers/sailors, ME – military equipment (Combat plus other), SH – surface ships: SS – surface ships; SM – submarines; SA – auxiliary ships; A – air frames; Ai – aircrafts; H – helicopters

Conclusions

Russia tends to abide by the principle to have military activities planned in detail. This means that for every military activity, including a war with an opponent in the West, it has detailed plans, which are checked and updated from time to time. Quite probably, while preparing its plans on how to fight in the West, some assumptions were made. At first, the use of armed forces would bear results only if troops act quickly, effectively and are able to secure achievements. And second, large numbers of casualties and losses suffered by the enemy or the expectation of these losses while fighting diminishes its will to continue fighting and motivates one to start negotiations. In Kosovo, the *Zapad-99* and *Zapad-09* exercises most probably assured Russia that the West was not able to respond decisively, so there would be time to prepare for new actions (or total defense). The cases of Georgia 2008 and Crimea 2014 also reassured Russia that, if negotiations did start, the gains achieved by military means could most probably be safeguarded.

Russia considers that the principles of detailed planning could be successfully used in recent wars. There were two in weak points of detailed planning, which became obvious in the past. At first, there was an enormous number of situations that could appear in a campaign and which required too much work to be done by officers. As a result, a lot of potential situations were left without due attention. Second, it took a long time to collect, receive and analyze information and to pass new directives on to troops. As a result, the reaction to any change was slow and/or any unforeseen changes usually led to the collapse of the operation. The Russian military assumes that recent technologies allow solving both problems. Computers and huge NDMC computing capabilities allow designing as many situations as one might need and to redesign them quickly if required. Technological progress in surveillance, communication and other fields allows establishing an overall C3 and C3I and employing modern ABMS. This makes it possible to not only update/correct/change plans quickly, but to pass directives immediately on to units in the field as well. In this case, having detailed plans and pre-planned potential changes available allows the country's forces to act faster, more effectively and achieving the desired results without hesitation. Troops on the battle field have to concentrate only on how to quickly implement the pre-planned steps or the received directives and are free to improvise at the tactical level. Then the opponent is forced to waste time while continuously re-planning and coordinating plans with other HQs to respond to the quick moves of your troops.

Based on the analysis of all the *Zapad* exercises starting from 1999, one might state that a war with an opponent in the West or “*Zapad* operation” consists of three stages. To achieve success, the first two stages would be enough, but in a case of failure, all three would be required. Since 1999, Russia kept checking its plan, at first mostly theoretically, and only separate stages were exercised and later, since 2013 (after the end of the first stage of military reform and the appointment of S. Shoigu as the minister), practically and on a wider scale. Exercises following *Zapad-13*, such as *Vostok-14*, *Centr-15* and *Caucasus-16* were used to check separate elements from different stages. *Zapad-17* checked them incorporated into one entire action.

Even though the Russian political military leadership stated it was satisfied with the *Zapad-17* exercise, based on the information available, some planned actions failed and the set objectives were not achieved. Success was obvious in establishing an overall C3, but a lot still has to be done to transform it into a fully fledged C3I. Evident progress was made in EW, logistics and maintenance, rearmament and PLRGMs, navigation and testing of new arms. Contrarily, it was announced that *Zapad-17* would test a mobilization (reserve) system, territorial defense¹⁸³, effectiveness of civil defense and involvement of federal institutions¹⁸⁴, but after the exercise there were not so many success stories regarding these trials.

It appears as if Russia undertakes strategic exercises not only as a tool to check plans and forces, but also as a strategic communication instrument that can have an impact on the existing security situation. Whether by accident or not, but the decision to emphasize one or another element during different official exercises was obvious. For example, *Zapad-09* emphasized a tactical nuclear strike which could be taken as a strategic deception (deterrence) message; with the openness and transparency it exhibited in *Zapad-17*, showing its readiness for mass defense and the use of nuclear weapons, Russia sent a clear message not to push it “into a corner”.

And to conclude, the change in the military and other areas from 1999 demonstrates that Russia is not only declaring that it is in a league of its own, but is also trying to back such declarations up with action. In the military sphere, Russia maintains and develops a different (compared to the West and

¹⁸³ Even though the commander of the 11th Reserve Command Col. Jurij Shtondenko (Юрий Штонденко), was appointed, active participation of reservists in *Zapad-17* exercises was hardly presented in open sources.

¹⁸⁴ Russian President Decree No. 345 from 29 07 2017 authorizes the National Guard (Rusguard) to be involved actively in all military activities. Despite this, there are almost no messages in open sources about Rusguard participation in *Zapad-17*.

NATO) understanding about the way to plan and run operations and activities. This understanding is based on the philosophy of the Prussian General Staff. Since WW II, the West (NATO) has rejected this philosophy and it has almost been forgotten. Russia, on the other hand, exploits this aspect, therefore quite often its behavior is misinterpreted in the West and prognoses based on Western forecasting principles fail.

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