



Estonian Analysis of Russian Threat

OE Watch Commentary: Before the instances of Russian military involvement in Georgia or Ukraine, Estonia fell victim to a Russian-sponsored cyber-attack in April 2007. This attack not only exploited existing tensions between ethnic Russians and Estonians by spreading false information about the status of a Soviet-era statue, but also damaged Estonia’s digital infrastructure. The response from Estonia and NATO was to establish the Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. As described in the accompanying excerpt from the Estonian news source *ERR.ee*, this response was discussed in a recent interview with the outgoing Commander of the Defense Forces in Estonia, General Riho Terras, who commented that “Estonia has never been as safe as it is today.”

According to General Terras, while NATO and the West remain peaceful, “Russia considers itself to be in war.” He goes on to describe Kremlin behavior as resembling “a bigheaded bully in a park in the dark who is not really equal with his opponent and who, for that reason, wants to frighten [his opponent].” General Terras asserts that instead of confronting NATO directly, which is impossible for Russia as it does not have the same strength, Putin resorts to “some action below the fog line which can certainly not be called war yet.”

General Terras states that the Western response to these threats from Russia is “to ensure that Putin also believes in NATO.” Following the aggressive actions Russia has taken in recent years, Terras is increasingly confident that Estonia is safe from a military attack from Russia because Putin “believes in [NATO] today much more than he believed in it five years ago.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**

“[Sildam] What do you think, does Russian President Vladimir Putin believes in NATO?”

[Terras] I think that he believes in it today much more than he believed in it five years ago.”



Russian population of Estonia by county, 1 January 2010.

Source: Abarmot [Public domain], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russians_in_Estonia_2010.png.

Source: Thomas Sildam, “Kindral Terras: nüüd usub Putin NATO-sse rohkem kui viie aasta eest (General Terras: Putin now believes in NATO more than five years ago),” *ERR.ee*, 23 October 2018. <https://www.err.ee/871523/kindral-terras-nuud-usub-putin-nato-sse-rohkem-kui-viie-aasta-eest>

[Sildam] Is Estonia a frontline state?

[Terras] No, definitely not. Estonia has never been as safe as it is today, throughout all those harsh storms of the world.

[Sildam] In response to a question whether Russia intends to attack Estonia, you have said: “I do not know that. But I believe in NATO. And our main task is to ensure that Putin also believes in NATO.” What do you think, does Russian President Vladimir Putin believes in NATO?

[Terras] I think that he believes in it today much more than he believed in it five years ago.

[Sildam] As the commander of the defense forces you have said that “you cannot steamroll our state within a few hours.” How long will it take?

[Terras] The last time, the fight lasted for 50 years but we regained our independence.

[Sildam] How likely do you think it is that Estonia will come under a military attack?

[Terras] The probability exists but I cannot calculate the percentage. The most important thing is to do everything to minimize this probability.

[Sildam] You once compared Putin’s Russia with a bigheaded bully in a park in the dark who is not really equal with his opponent and who, for that reason, wants to frighten [his opponent], resort to cheap shots. Why the park in the dark? Russia is acting openly and in broad daylight.

[Terras] That depends. At the time of the annexation of the Crimea and the attack against Eastern Ukraine, (Russia) tried to employ methods of the dark park, while denying all its activities. It has continued on the cyber front, in Syria, etc.

[Sildam] Yet, their muddy footprints are all over the place.

[Terras] They are. Just like muddy footprints in the dark park become visible when the daylight comes.

[Sildam] Is NATO, and broadly speaking the democratic world, in war?

[Terras] It is sad that Russia considers itself to be in war. The democratic world has perhaps not yet realized this. There is some action below fog line which can certainly not be called war yet. So – no, we are not in war.