

RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES NEAR THE ESTONIAN BORDER

A military attack against Estonia is unlikely in 2023 because Russia's military capabilities are engaged in Ukraine. However, in the mid-to-long term, Russia's belligerence and foreign policy ambitions have significantly increased the security risks for Estonia.

Mobilisation and large-scale exercises planned by Russia could further strain the security situation in the Baltic Sea region in 2023.

From the Baltic states' perspective, Russia still has enough military capability to exert credible military pressure in our region. The capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces in the immediate vicinity of the Estonian border can be quantitatively reconstituted in up to four years.

The only existential threat to the security of our region, including Estonia's sovereignty, stems from Russia. A military attack against Estonia is unlikely in 2023, as the Russian Armed Forces units based near the Estonian border are engaged in hostilities in Ukraine. At the same time, Russia's foreign policy ambitions driven by the Kremlin's belligerence and imperialism have significantly increased the security threat. If Russia were diplomatically or militarily successful in Ukraine, it would increase the risk of the Kremlin's political and military pressure on the Baltic states in the mid-2020s.

If Russia were diplomatically or militarily successful in Ukraine, it would increase the risk of the Kremlin's political and military pressure on the Baltic states in the mid-2020s.

From the first day of the war, the 76th Guards Air Assault Division and elements of the 6th Army of the Russian Armed Forces, which are responsible for covering the Estonian operational direction, have been involved in battles in Ukraine and suffered heavy losses. The mobilisation launched in September 2022 has also affected Pskov and Leningrad oblasts, with reservists mobilised in both regions and sent to combat units in Ukraine to compensate for losses. The training areas and training centres in both oblasts have also been used to train new reservist units. Although Russia's mobilisation reserves have enough equipment to form new units, finding competent personnel for the units' headquarters may be unrealistic. Many Russian Armed Forces instructors have been transferred away from the training centres to join combat units in Ukraine, which has led to a declined level of training and reduced cohesion of the mobilised units.

Due to heavy losses, the Russian Armed Forces face a significant shortage of junior and senior officers. The shortage of junior officers has been compensated for by accelerating the graduation process in military schools, which has a negative impact on the officers' qualifications. However, there are no quick fixes to make up for the shortage of senior officers.

The Russian Armed Forces plan to carry out the Zapad 2023 manoeuvres this year. The term “manoeuvre” is Russian military jargon typically used to describe a large-scale strategic exercise, that takes place in more than one strategic direction. In Russia, the Armed Forces' annual training cycle culminates with a joint strategic exercise, which rotates from year to year between the four military districts (e.g., Kavkaz 2020, Zapad 2021, and Vostok 2022), but these do not always qualify as manoeuvres in terms of scale. Zapad 2023 is not a regular part of the rotation of strategic exercises, which should have seen Tsentr 2023 taking place instead. A departure from the expected training cycle with a large-scale joint strategic exercise in the western strategic direction at the same time as the military action in Ukraine can be seen as a deterrent and threat to the West and as an incitement to patriotism among the Russian population.

From Estonia's point of view, it is important to demonstrate NATO's military readiness to dissuade Russia's temptation to test the Alliance's security guarantees.

Russia considers the Baltic states to be the most vulnerable part of NATO, which would make them a focus of military pressure in the event of a NATO-Russia conflict. Therefore, Russia is highly likely to give priority to reconstituting its military capabilities, weakened in the war in Ukraine, in the immediate vicinity of the Estonian border. The quantitative reconstitution of these units' capabilities will take up to four years. From the Baltic states' perspective, Russia still has enough strength to exert credible military pressure in our region.

From Estonia's point of view, it is important to demonstrate NATO's military readiness to dissuade Russia's temptation to test the Alliance's security guarantees. The probability of a military conflict between NATO and Russia would increase if Russia were to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine. Therefore, Ukraine's victory in the war against Russia would also improve regional security.



Russian Armed Forces destroy critical infrastructure and use terror tactics against the civilian population.

Source: Roman Pilipey / EPA