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Abstract:

This paper addresses the current security environment along the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) eastern frontier. Specifically, it underlines the Suwalki Corridor as the most vulnerable aspect of this geography. It aims to provide a holistic analysis of the Suwalki region by utilizing a historical and contemporary framework. This analysis provides an overview of crucial regional military events through the lens of historical military operations from 1812 – 1945, as well as an outline of the current regional geopolitical trends. A comprehensive and consolidated picture of the regional security framework is provided through the in-depth assessment of United States, Polish, NATO and European Union (EU) strategic policy documents. Conclusively, it demonstrates the West's current multilateral, bilateral and unilateral actions in the region, assesses existing challenges and provides recommendations for developing a comprehensive, stable and secure regional security environment through existing multilateral structures. This work determines that a secure regional geopolitical environment can only be attained through increased and complementary multilateral action.

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit der aktuellen Sicherheitslage entlang der Ostgrenze der Mitgliedsstaaten des Nordatlantikvertrags (NATO). Besonders wird der Suwalki-Korridor als der am stärksten gefährdete Bereich dieser Region hervorgehoben. Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit ist eine Analyse der Suwalki-Region unter Berücksichtigung historischer und gegenwärtiger Hintergründe. Diese Analyse bietet einen Überblick über wichtige regionale militärische Ereignisse aus der Perspektive historischer Militäreinsätze von 1812 bis 1945, sowie einen Überblick aktueller geopolitischer Entwicklungen. Anhand von Strategiepapieren der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika (USA), Polen, der NATO und der Europäischen Union (EU) wird eine umfassende und ausführliche Darstellung der regionalen Sicherheitslage aufgezeigt.

Abschließend werden die gegenwärtigen multilateralen, bilateralen und unilateralen Handlungsweisen des Westens in der Region beschrieben und die aktuellen Herausforderungen bewertet. Des Weiteren bietet die Arbeit Empfehlungen für die Entwicklung eines umfassenden, stabilen und sicheren regionalen Sicherheitsumfelds durch bestehende multilaterale Strukturen. Dieses Paper zeigt, dass ein sicheres, regionales als auch geopolitisches Umfeld nur durch verstärkte und komplementäre, multilaterale Maßnahmen erreicht werden kann.

Table of Contents:

Introduction	p. 4
Methods	p. 6
A Historical Analysis	p. 6
Napoleon	p. 7
World War I	p. 11
The Polish – Soviet War	p. 14
World War II	p. 17
A Contemporary Analysis	p. 21
Theory	p. 22
The Russian Federation	p. 23
The Republic of Poland	p. 25
The United States of America	p. 29
North Atlantic Treaty Organization & European Union	p. 35
Current Capability Development & Way Ahead	p. 40
Conclusion	p. 42
Annexes	p. 46
Bibliography	p. 53

Introduction:

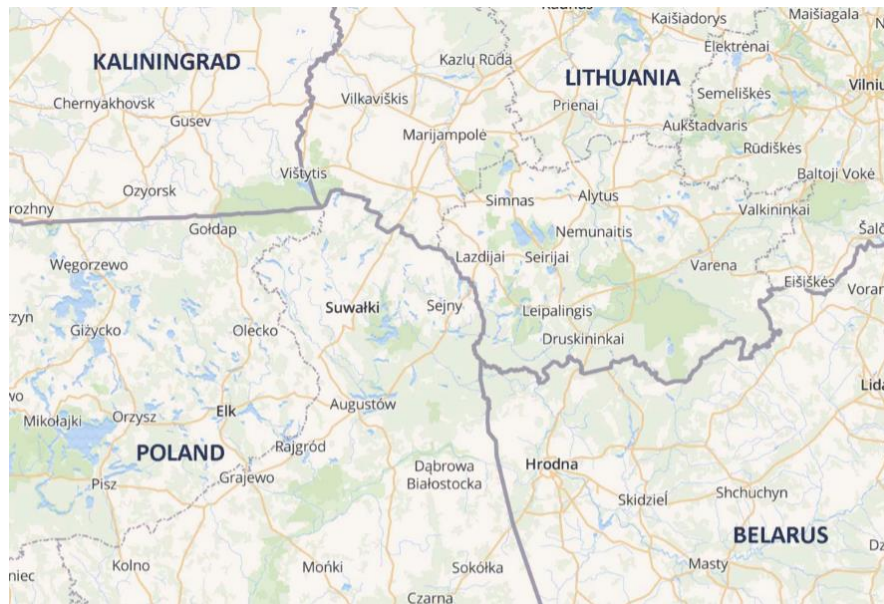


Image: The Suwalki Corridor

Source: Google Maps

Europe remains the epicenter of a global geopolitical clash. This realization manifested itself in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The borders of Cold War Europe have shifted eastward as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria have all joined the longstanding NATO alliance. Each of these countries lies along a new front – a blurry, seemingly undefined border with the Russian Federation. Each one of these young countries have experienced their own version of Soviet or Russian Tsarist aggression in the past 100 years, heightening political and military tensions further. The Suwalki Corridor remains a focal point of this emerging geopolitical game along NATO's Eastern Flank. Today, the Suwalki Corridor remains as one of the most important geographical features in contemporary European security. The 97km long corridor, linking Poland to Lithuania and flanked by Belarus and Russian Kaliningrad, continues to be one of Europe's most vital and precarious pieces of strategic terrain. Securing this corridor is of utmost importance as the West seeks to secure Europe's Eastern Flank and, certainly, Europe as a whole.

Like the Fulda Gap, NATO, with the help of other regional actors, plays an ever-increasing role in ensuring that the Suwalki Corridor is never closed by would-be adversaries. To strategic planners, it is apparent that this corridor will be heavily contested in the event of armed aggression – whether this aggression comes from a hybrid threat (below the threshold of armed conflict) or from conventional military action. Additionally, it is evident that there is a deficiency of holistic analyses of the Suwalki region. It is also clear that there is a

conceptual gap in Western literature surrounding the corridor. This work attempts to close this conceptual gap and advocate that the security of Suwalki is an issue that permeates the entirety of the European security apparatus. In the event of armed conflict, it is evident that the Baltic states, both NATO and EU members, would be denied contiguous territorial access to the rest of the European Union and other NATO member states. The strategic effects, both economically and militarily, of such an event would be devastating to both the Alliance as well as the European Union. Today, the Suwalki Corridor remains on the forefront of NATO planners' minds. It is the single focal point of US, Polish and NATO operations in the broader region. It is the West's job now to ensure that the proper preparation is conducted in order to deter aggression and enhance military capabilities in the region. The failure to do so would result in a catastrophic strategic miscalculation.

The deteriorating relationship between the West and the Russian Federation should be solved along diplomatic lines – although this solution seems increasingly unlikely. It is clear that the West and the Russian Federation, especially in Suwalki, are entering into a defensive and deterrent posture in the region. This analysis seeks to assess the Suwalki corridor in both an historical and contemporary framework. The essential questions are: what has the West done to ensure that the Suwalki Corridor is secured? And additionally: what more needs to be done to maintain regional security? These questions cannot be answered unless a comprehensive assessment is conducted. Primarily, a historical analysis will lay the framework for past military operations in the region. This work highlights a few important military engagements that occurred in the Suwalki region. It is clear through this analysis that, historically, Suwalki has remained an important geostrategic area. Furthermore, the second part of this work assesses the defense mechanisms and policies that all the key regional players have enacted to ensure regional stability. It becomes clear that there are three major pillars of security in the region – unilateral (Polish actions), bilateral (Polish – US), and multilateral (NATO and the EU). A subsequent assessment on the benefits and shortfalls of each of these pillars helps to pave a way for further regional security developments. Conclusively, this paper offers insight into the strong strides the West has made in providing security in the region, but offers words of caution and optimism as the West moves forward in providing comprehensive regional security mechanisms. It argues that the only way to provide comprehensive regional security is through unified multilateral action under the leadership of NATO. Through this fundamental understanding of the Suwalki region, this work is able to provide some additional and prescriptive roadmaps.

Methods:

The central academic pillars of this work are political science and history. Utilizing these two disciplines I am able to provide a complete assessment of the region. Data was obtained through in-depth contemporary and historical analysis and interpretation. The historical analysis consists of an examination of both primary and secondary sources, including various studies and scholarly articles. The examination of cartographic resources and topographic features plays a significant role in the historical analysis. The contemporary analysis will rely heavily on an investigation of strategic doctrine and open source media, newspaper commentaries and, specifically, the collection of data on force deployment in an attempt to discern intentions. The contemporary analysis will be rooted in defensive realism as a theoretical framework and I utilize the deductive application of theory, which will be elaborated on shortly. The general methods of the project will adopt an interpretative group of methods that focus on a comprehensive and prescriptive output. Furthermore, this paper will take a purely qualitative approach utilizing a number of contemporary news media, historical documents, archival research, cartographic resources and secondary sources. It is also relevant to focus on the assumptions of my research problem – it is evident that regional security policy is not as clearly defined as commonly understood. This relates to the apparent deficit in relevant literature surrounding regional security. In summary, the project will purely be a qualitative, analytical research and policy endeavor that evolves from a descriptive project to generate a prescriptive output with the hopes of providing a complete assessment of the Suwalki Corridor for policy makers and a general audience.

A Historical Analysis:

This portion seeks to provide a holistic historical narrative for the Suwalki region. Its aims are to consolidate and generate a comprehensive analysis of modern military campaigns that have crossed through the Suwalki Corridor. Historically, Suwalki has played a uniquely important role in European history. In 1812, Napoleon's armies crossed through Suwalki in route to Russia and subsequently resulted in Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Borodino on September 7th, 1812. Logically, Napoleon recognized the importance of Suwalki as the only avenue of approach to capture Moscow. During the First World War (WWI), Suwalki became a focal point of conflict on the Eastern Front. German and Russian armies clashed along the Suwalki Corridor in what is now modern-day Poland and Russia. The First and Second Battles of the Masurian Lakes and the Battle of Tannenberg each offer exclusive case

studies into regional military conflict. The lessons learned from these battles provide a unique insight into the minds of military leaders and soldiers alike. They serve as a historical template for modern day military operations. The Polish-Soviet War, a perhaps understudied conflict, remains as both a pivotal event in the containment of the spread of Bolshevism and as a cornerstone of the modern Polish state. However, across the levels of war (strategic, operational, tactical) it is the foremost case study in providing detailed evidence of modern military operations in the region – specifically the challenges of operating in this austere area. Of course, the Second World War (WWII), and perhaps the most studied case study of this work, cannot be neglected. The *Wehrmacht*'s Army Group Center passed through Suwalki on its offensive into the Baltic and Belarussian regions. Operation Barbarossa provides the most detailed insight into modern mechanized operations into Suwalki. Consequently, the Soviet counter-offensive, Operation Bagration, also provides this detail. Perhaps most important when assessing these largescale, modern, mechanized military campaigns is the scale of strategic planning involved. The assessment of WWII regional operations will not only skim the intricacies of mechanized warfare but also the broader strategic vision of German planners – specifically in regards to geographic features. These four case studies will seek to provide a comprehensive historical overview and analysis of the region. It attempts to set the stage and lay the framework for the prescriptive portion of this work.

Napoleon:

Napoleon invades Russia in 1812, his decision to do so remains as one of history's great blunders. However, the broader systemic issues of Napoleon's continental system, which was blockaded by the British Empire, effected all facets of life under Napoleon's rule. In fact, it is evident that the system facilitated, "universal public resentment of his Continental System, which deprived the masses of all the spices, condiments, tea, coffee, cocoa and other colonial products to which they had become accustomed" (Smith, 2004, p. 10). As the British implemented their blockade of Napoleon's entire empire, Napoleon retaliated in kind. After the 1806 British decrees that placed a blockade on France and prevented neutral countries to trade with France, Napoleon instituted the Milan Decrees of 1807 that banned the import of British colonial goods – such as sugar and coffee – and banned all continental trade with the British Empire (Smith, 2004). Through 1810, this trade war and Napoleon's policies towards a continental common market all proved disastrous. At the time, Russia also implemented Napoleon's ban on British goods. In 1810, due to instability in Russia, Tsar Alexander was

forced to allow British goods into the Russian market – this was an embarrassment to Napoleon and his policies against the British (Smith, 2004). Napoleon was forced to act or let himself and his economic system be undermined by British and Russian interests. The stage was set for Napoleon's invasion of Russia.

Logistics drives any successful military campaign. This was no less the case in 1811 when Napoleon begins his preparations for his long march into Russia:

'I have decided on a great expedition. I shall need horses and transport on a large scale. The men I shall get easily enough; but the difficulty is to prepare transport facilities. I shall need an immense amount of transport because I shall be starting from the Niemen I intend to operate over large distances and in different directions ... do not let the question of expense check you.' – Napoleon Bonaparte (1811)

Napoleon's plans for his invasion of Russia begin at the edge of his empire – west of the river Niemen (Neman or Memel) in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Napoleon's armies stage themselves in 1812 and immediately the challenge of feeding an army of this size becomes apparent. Feeding an army in garrison is difficult enough, but the challenges of feeding an army on the move provide immense logistical challenges. This initial preparation or invasion is captured aptly by Digby Smith, "In the spring of 1812 the *Grande Armée* began to form up within the borders of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. The government there was, of course, called upon by Napoleon to provide massive amounts of food and fodder and the troops were billeted upon the townspeople" (Smith, 2004, p. 16). It begins to highlight the logistical challenges that Napoleon faces even prior to his movement out of the Suwalki region and across the Niemen – the initial preparation required for this invasion foreshadows the logistical blunder that is to come and highlights modern logistical challenges.

Napoleon's logisticians planned the prepositioning of supplies along the attack route through Suwalki. They prepositioned supplies and material along key port cities in the Baltic Sea. Supplies would subsequently be delivered to the advancing army via multimodal transportation assets – boat, river barges and then distributed by horse and carriage. Once Napoleon's army broke through Russian lines (through Suwalki and across the Niemen) and moved towards Vilnius (a key objective for Napoleon), there the army would be resupplied. However, the River Neris, which runs from Kaunas to Vilnius, suffered from the severe drought of 1812 making it impassable for resupply vessels. (Smith, 2004). Although Vilnius does not lay directly within the Suwalki Corridor, this logistical challenge still sheds light on conflict in the Suwalki Region. As aptly noted, "Napoleon had never faced a provisioning problem he could not solve. But this was different. As one historian comments, an army large

enough to *conquer* Russia is too large to *feed* in Russia” (Gombert et al, 2014, p. 46). In the event of regional military conflict, NATO forces will have to penetrate through Suwalki to liberate the NATO and EU member of Lithuania – logistical challenges on the other side of the contact line, directly enable an advancing force – as the case for Napoleon in 1812. Another major logistical setback for Napoleon was that the weight of his wagons were significantly heavier than that of Lithuanian and Russian wagons (Smith, 2004). At first glance, although this seems like an irrelevant issue under a contemporary lens, it is surely not the case. In 1812, this issue became devastating to Napoleon’s advancing army. This issue highlights the fundamental issue of military mobility in the region as well as the fundamentals of logistical planning in this region – both topics will be covered later.

Strategically, Napoleon’s plan was to cross into Russia and strike two of Russia’s armies – the 1st Western Army (Barclay) and the 2nd Western Army (Bagration) (see annex I). This would prevent them from linking up into a larger force. The 1st Army consisted of almost 120,000 men and 558 guns while the 2nd Army consisted of 45,000 men and 217 guns (Smith, 2004, p. 13). As Napoleon continued his preparations for battle, his over 600,000 strong armies consumed all the resources in its path – not to mention its horses. The general conscript army had orders to forage as their form of subsistence. This caused untold damage to the areas in which Napoleon’s armies were encamped. This directive, and form of subsistence, proves to be devastating for their long march into the austere environments of Suwalki. Fundamentally, it has an impact on how armies feed themselves, this is an obvious addition to the logistical challenges of fighting, or staging, in Suwalki. As Napoleon’s army prepared for its advance it became apparent that its men had already exhausted its resources that it had brought with them – coupled with the lack of access to prepositioned resources. His army had already caused untold damage to itself and the citizens of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw.

On the 23rd of June Napoleon’s armies step off to cross the Niemen already suffering from dehydration and desertion. For Napoleon’s northern advance, Suwalki is not the initial place of contact between Napoleonic and Tsarist forces, the crossing of the Niemen still provides insight into conflict through the Suwalki corridor – as the Niemen is the next major geographical obstacle once the Suwalki Corridor is traversed – meaning it is relevant to mention the northern crossing of the Niemen. Napoleon’s armies conducted a river crossing south of Kaunas, this maneuver was successfully, however, Barclay knew that he was outnumbered by Napoleonic forces. As Napoleon’s forces crossed the Niemen, Barclay withdrew and surrendered Kaunas and Vilnius uncontested. This tactic was used to spread out

Napoleon's forces so they could not attack Tsarist positions with full force. Due to Napoleon's armies' physical state (because of logistical failures), this tactic proved to be successful – "So the vast horde poured into Lithuania in extreme confusion, dying, shaking itself to pieces as it went, and the Russian armies fell back before them in very good order. Kowno was abandoned to the invaders without resistance, as was Wilna, which the Emperor entered on 28 June. Lithuania had fallen" (Smith, 2004, p. 22). This aptly describes the state of Napoleon's army as it crosses the Niemen. It foreshadows the devastation that is to come but also sheds light on the logistical challenges of fighting in the region. On the 29th of June, it began to rain. These intense rainstorms lasted until July 4th (Smith, 2004). This anomalous but intense rain destroyed the road systems. As previously mentioned, the weight of the French carriages bogged down on these roads – making it impossible to traverse. The terrain was degraded to the point that 10,000 of Napoleon's horses died (Smith, 2004, p. 22). This event caused untold damage to Napoleon's advance. The already hungry and dehydrated army could not move their supplies forward. The weather and terrain proved to be an insurmountable challenge for Napoleon – the legacy of this is still relevant today.

In the south, Napoleon's brother Jerome Bonaparte experienced military operations directly in the Suwalki Corridor. The Pinsk Marshes and the city of Grodno can be described as the extreme right flank of any military advance through the region (see annex I). During the invasion, Jerome was directed to destroy Bagration's 2nd Army (Smith, 2004). As previously stated, Napoleon's core objective was to prevent the 1st and 2nd Western Armies from joining up into a larger force. As Napoleon's western armies rapidly crossed the Niemen and captured Vilnius, Jerome was forced to increase the pace of his offensive to ensure that Bagration was unable to withdraw his forces. Due to the slow pace of Jerome's army, it was unable to reach Grodno before the 28th of June and unable to decisively engage Bagration's troops. Bagration was able to withdraw along with the 1st Western Army. This event solidifies the subsequent defeat of Napoleon who continues his campaign into Russia without initially defeating the 1st and 2nd Western Armies.

What can be learned from Napoleon's initial invasion through Suwalki? It is clear that logistics and weather play a key factor in his campaign. Geographic features also play an important part in his advance. These factors remain timeless. Although militaries no longer rely on horses to move equipment and material, they rely equally on fallible machinery. It is clear that military mobility in 1812, as in 2019, plays a unique role in the speed and lethality of an advancing army. Furthermore, the austerity of the region, coupled with its adverse weather conditions, remind modern military planners of the limits of the human body.

Finally, the failure to initially destroy the Tsarist army at first contact solidifies Napoleon's defeat. This principle plays a crucial role throughout regional military conflict. Napoleon's advance through Suwalki and across the Niemen provide both a strategic and tactical insight into what would be regional conflict.

World War I:

WWI also offers exceptional insight into conflict along the Suwalki Corridor. In the northern portion of the Eastern Front, the Germans, along East Prussia, clashed with Russian troops. At the time, East Prussia still existed as the northeastern part of what is now Poland, western Lithuania and what is presently Russian Kaliningrad. East Prussia no longer exists as a state, but its legacy still influences regional geopolitics. The formation of Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave along the Baltic Sea, is born in the wake of WWII and the resettling of ethnic Germans from Königsberg. Kaliningrad, along the Suwalki Corridor, and the Masurian region of modern Poland, are the focal point of this research as well as WWI regional conflict. The opening battle of the Eastern Front is dubbed the Battle of Tannenberg (see annex II). It was fought from the 26th to the 30th August 1914 and resulted in a decisive German victory. Tannenberg, fought near modern day Olsztyn, lies in the heart of Poland's famous lake district. Interestingly, and a testament to its current strategic location, NATO has formed a modern division HQ in the region – demonstrating the relevance of the western portion of Masuria in securing the Suwalki Corridor. At the Battle of Tannenberg the single German VIII army met two Russian armies. The result was the total defeat of one Russian army and the subsequent defeat of the second Russian army at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes (Stone, 1998).

As both armies mobilized for war it became apparent that the Russian armies would be both larger in manpower and equipment than the single German army in East Prussia, as Germany concentrated on the Western Front and its Schlieffen Plan. There was a general sentiment of unreadiness within the Russian ranks and a general lack of understanding of this new industrialized nature of conflict. It was clear though that the "Russian invasion of East Prussia was bound to be slow, moving at a pace of a marching man and a plodding horse" (Stone, 1998, p. 51). Although it was clear that the Russian army was not large enough in scale to conquer East Prussia, the war orders were given regardless. It became clear that the areas of East Prussia favored the defender – "It had lakes, forests, small hills and defiles, which gave excellent cover for defenders and severe obstacles for attackers. The railway-

links on the Russian side were poor, on the German side sufficient for a flexible defense” (Stone, 1998, p. 54). It was clear, and generally understood, that although Russian numbers outmatched German numbers, the German army was significantly better equipped, better trained, better led and in favorable terrain. The German army also benefited from its smaller size – it allowed for better command and control (Stone, 1998). In the end, this led to a miraculous victory for Ludendorff and an embarrassing defeat for Zhilinski and the Russian military. It is clear that “The Germans won because they were the defenders, on whom sense was almost imposed by the lay-out of the land and the railways, and the nature of the task....it was common sense, discipline, decentralization that won Tannenberg (Stone, 1998, p. 67).

When dissecting the battle itself, it provides intrinsic insight into regional conflict. Firstly, the Germans never over-extended their lines because of geographic and logistical considerations. Napoleon and later Hitler failed based on this principle of overextension. Secondly, military mobility played a crucial role. It is clear that the Germans were able to outmaneuver two Russian armies because of their railway systems – these systems were better developed and better implemented in the German’s military doctrine. However, it is also important to note that throughout mobilization and the engagements itself, horses still remained highly effective “horses, in the muddy conditions of the eastern front, were often more useful than lorries and, for that matter, tanks” (Stone, 1998, p. 50). This also highlights the overall importance of rail lines in the region. It is clear that military mobility remains one of the key principles of warfare. As all military leaders will know, overreliance on rail lines without the proper integration of the technology into broader tactics can be detrimental “though these could be given lavish armament and supply, there was not much to make them mobile once they got beyond railheads” (Stone, 1998, p. 51). This is exactly what German planners were able to do – they clearly understood the benefits and limitations of rail. They were able to utilize rail, yet not over extend their troops past railheads or their supply chain. Finally, it is also clear that this region favors the defense. This seems obvious, but it is worth stating considering the current state of the region geopolitically. Each of these elements is applicable in today’s current environment.

The First Battle of the Masurian Lakes is conducted between the 7th and 14th of September 1914 in the immediate wake of Tannenberg. As Russian forces made a significant military error in splitting their armies to attack German forces in East Prussia, the Germans exploited this maneuver by rapidly moving their forces by railroad. It became clear that at the Battle of Tannenberg the Russian II Army would be decisively defeated and would retreat

across the border. At the end of Tannenberg it was evident that the separated Russian I Army was left extended and vulnerable between Koenigsberg and Angerapp (Stone, 1998). Ludendorff wanted to launch an immediate offensive to devastate the Russian II Army. Enabled by German reinforcements, the battle began on the 8th of September. Ludendorff concentrated his entire VIII Army on destroying the Russian I Army (Stone, 1998). Although the battle ended in a German tactical success by pushing the Russian I Army out of German territory, it did not achieve its prime objective of destroying or capturing the I Army. In the end, the battle ended in what can be described as a stalemate because of the heavy casualties inflicted on German forces. For the sake of this work there are some lessons learned from this battle. It is clear that the Battle of the Masurian Lakes “formed an accurate model of operations to come in the east...cavalry turned out to be almost as ineffective as Russian cavalry had been before: it could be held up even by retreating troops. The frontal attacks of German corps to the north were, almost uniformly, a failure” (Stone, 1998, p. 68). This battle again proves the difficulty of maneuvering in the terrain of the former East Prussia. Although horses are no longer used in battle, this battle is emblematic of the difficulties of large maneuvering armies in this terrain. Furthermore, it is clear that the terrain again favored the defender. The Germans achieved tactical success because they were on the defense, never overextended and the Russians conducted frontal assaults. This battle set a pattern for regional battles to come.

The Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes occurs from 7th to the 22nd of February 1915. It offers insight into warfare directly in the Suwalki corridor – specifically in the dense woodlands surrounding Augustow, Poland (see annex III). In early 1915, the Central Powers planned a combined offensive on the Eastern Front – the Austrians attacking the Russians from the South and the Germans attacking the Russians from the North. Ludendorff conducted another one of his famous pincer movements against Russian positions forcing the Russians to withdraw and shifting the momentum to German forces. During the Russian retreat, the Germans captured a multitude of Russian forces – over 56,000 (Stone, 1998, p. 118). The event was described as a tactical success but “barren of strategic consequence” (Stone, 1998, p. 118). The event can be considered as a German victory but did not directly enable a full invasion of Russia due to an over extension of lines. However, from a tactical level, there are takeaways. As Russia troops began to withdraw from their positions “German troops had already penetrated the forests of Augustow in its rear, and controlled the roads” (Stone, 1998, p. 118) (see annex III). Augustow lays directly in the heart of the Suwalki Corridor. This natural terrain feature plays a decisive role in the outcome of this battle, as it

does as well in the Polish-Soviet War. Controlling the road systems in these dense forests determines the outcome of military engagements – this is as true in 1915 as it is today. Furthermore, on a more strategic level, this battle changed the strategic outlook of Russian Grand Duke Nicholas who aptly noted that the Russians were at a disadvantage because of German rail mobility, stating that any further incursion into German territory “where we should simply be exposed to the East Prussian railway-network” would be disastrous (Stone, 1998, p. 119). It is clear that enhanced military mobility in the region (due to geographical restrictions) and the capture of critical infrastructure allowed for a successful German outcome.

WWI on the Eastern Front aptly demonstrates the growing importance of rail networks in the region and transportation infrastructure in general. The German’s ability to capitalize on their more advance railway infrastructure in the Battle of Tannenberg and the Second Battle of Masurian Lakes highlights the strategic importance of regional transportation infrastructure and networks. It also equally highlights the importance of favoring the defense. The terrain of Suwalki (and the broader East Prussian region) limits the ability of maneuvering forces to gain an advantage over defenders. Both of these aspects are as relevant today as they were in 1914 – 1917. Finally, the German’s conservative way of fighting, without over extending their lines or “chasing” Russian forces, allowed Germany a significant operational success. Military mobility and regional infrastructure will be highlighted as this work moves to a more prescriptive nature.

The Polish-Soviet War:

In the aftermath of WWI, like many other nations, Poland gains its independence in 1918. In an attempt to consolidate power on its borderlands, and to quell the spread of the Bolshevik Revolution, Poland is launched into military conflict with the Red Army. Between 1919 and 1921, the Polish-Soviet War offers exceptional insight into military conflict in the Suwalki region. It is firstly important to talk about the early days of the war when the first independent leader of Poland, Marshall Pilsudski, attempts to reclaim the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At the end of WWI, there is a vacuum of power, specifically in Lithuania – a state that was historically part of the Polish-Lithuanian crown. Pilsudski himself was born to an ethnic Polish family in Lithuania and was educated in Vilnius. He planned to fill this vacuum in power as Russia was caught in a civil war and the Germans withdrew as a defeated army. The obvious route from Poland’s reduced borders to

Lithuania was through the Suwalki Corridor – east of the East Prussian border and west of the Pinsk Marshes. These regions were described as austere with limited military objectives: “Warfare in the Borders had a quality all of its own. The immensity of the theatre of operations, the impossibility of garrisoning it efficiently, turned the attention of armies to specific, limited objectives – rivers, railways and small towns. Rivers formed the only lines of natural defense...Railways formed the only network of reliable communications, the only means of supplying the armies” (Davies, 1983, p. 35). This provides insight into the distinctiveness of fighting in this region – and this was evident to Polish armies at the onset on the Polish-Soviet War. It is perhaps the best operational and tactical information than from any other source. As the other case studies demonstrate, the importance of railways must be underscored for communications and logistics reasons. Perhaps equally as important is the difficulty this area proves to military planners. Defining clear objectives in such an austere environment is problematic – conflicts and military movements are defined by objectives. An additional passage provides an accurate assessment of the difficulty of this region to military planners: “Isolated townships often formed the only military targets, in the absence of industrial centres or power installations...the only measure of success where armies were like pebbles cast on an ocean” (Davies, 1983, p. 36). Pilsudski himself described fighting in the region as ‘the strategy of the wolf and the blackcock’ as armies jumped from one town to another across vast stretches, always along lines of communication (Davies, 1983, p. 36). Norman Davies provides the greatest insight into fighting in the Suwalki Region, “The line was too thin to be held for long. The flank was always exposed. The attack was easy; to retreat was always possible. Offensives, once successfully launched, would keep rolling by their own inertia for hundreds of miles. When the historian writes of ‘a general offensive’ or ‘an advance on a wide front’, he is rationalizing a thousand individual engagements. Border warfare was essentially local and fragmentary, spasmodic and infinitely confused” (Davies, 1983, p. 36). This is the best description for fighting on the Polish frontier – today, Suwalki is not much different (see annex IV). It lacks infrastructure and townships are still spread out over vast distances. As Pilsudski successfully crosses Suwalki he is able to capture Vilnius in April 1919.

As the war continues into 1920, the Soviets conduct what is known as the Belarussian counter-offensive against the Poles – recapturing Vilnius and Grodno and subsequently Lomza and Bialystok (in the Suwalki region). Interestingly, Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky took command of Soviet forces at Smolensk prior to the Soviet counter-offensive. Tukhachevsky was actually captured in February 1915 and taken prisoner at

Lomza by the Germans at the Second Battle of Masurian Lakes – meaning that he knew the Suwalki region well (Davies, 1983). As Polish forces assaulted into Ukraine, Soviet forces took their opportunity at their own offensive in the north. Tukhachevsky began his counter-offensive into the Suwalki region on July 4th, 1920. Interestingly, after Soviet forces capture Vilnius, Polish lines begin to reform along the Niemen – a geographic feature that is a commonality in all military operations through Suwalki. After the Poles fall back on the Niemen, Grodno becomes their extreme right flank – again acknowledging the importance of the city of Grodno in securing the Suwalki corridor. As Grodno fell, the next defensive line was the Narew and the Bug rivers then subsequently Bialystok and Lomza. Fighting continues south westward to Warsaw with the Soviets capturing Ostroleka and key railway lines between Gdansk and Warsaw and culminating in the Battle of Warsaw (Davies, 1983). The takeaway from this counteroffensive is the path in which Soviet forces advanced – again, we are reminded of the geostrategic importance of the Niemen and the small towns in Suwalki that enable forces to ‘leapfrog’ forward. Additionally, the importance of Grodno is highlighted – a city that now lies within Belarus. The Soviet advance on Warsaw is ultimately a failure and the Red Army is pushed back to the northeast – again through the Suwalki region.

Polish military success between 12 – 18 August began to push the Soviets back through their avenue of approach – towards the Prussian frontier (Davies, 1983). It was determined that “the eastward retreat of the Soviet armies contending with the northerly thrust of the Polish strike-force combined to cause a rapid movement of operations in a north-easterly direction. By August it was evident that the final round of the battle would take place in the quadrilateral bounded by Myszyniec – Wyszkow – Bialystok – Grajewo” (Davis, 1983, p. 205). These towns are in the heart the northeastern Polish region. Tukhachevsky’s headquarters fell back to Lomza and subsequently again to Grodno – headquarters elements being placed in Grodno is a historical commonality, even Tsarist commanders kept headquarters in Grodno during Napoleon’s invasion. The culmination of the Battle of Warsaw and the retreat of Soviet forces sets the stage for the final decisive battle – the Battle of the Niemen.

After Polish success at the Battle of Warsaw, Tukhachevsky’s army dug in along the Niemen river (Davies, 1983). Both armies refitted for a large engagement in the early Fall. Pilsudski planned on conducting a frontal attack through Suwalki and subsequently hoped to outflank Soviet forces. Pilsudski’s armies were staged at Bialystok, the Suwalki Lakeland and Lomza and fighting began at the end of September (Davies, 1983) (see annex V). Polish

armies achieved success in their initial contact with Soviet forces. Polish forces had regained what was previously lost to the Bolsheviks and “held the vital lateral railway network of the borders” and were able to effectively minimize Soviet forces’ effectiveness (Davies, 1983, p. 233). Pilsudski was able to mimic Tukhachevsky’s approach from Suwalki to Warsaw as well as hold key infrastructure that ended the Soviet’s ambitions for invading Europe. As Pilsudski recognized that he had regained his initial objectives, especially the capture of Vilnius, he was willing to negotiate a settlement with Soviet forces.

There are a multitude of key takeaways from the Polish-Soviet War. It is clear that the Niemen remains a core military objective. The route in which both Polish and Soviet armies took demonstrates the importance of key cities in the Suwalki Corridor – for command and control purposes as well as for strategic planning purposes. The war clearly demonstrates the vastness of the region – it is still an area of sporadic townships spread over an immense space. Finally, it is clear that railways still provide the best form of communication and means to resupply armies. This is a commonality from the First World War and a relevant theme to contemporary discussions. The Polish-Soviet War offers us insight into the overall infrastructure of the region, the importance of key residential areas as well as highlights the ‘leapfrog’ nature of regional conflict. The war is the last of its kind. German and Soviet armies pass through the region again in 1941 – 1945. The nature of conflict has changed significantly since 1921 and allows us to assess mechanized military action in the Suwalki Corridor.

World War II:

German Operation Barbarossa commenced on the 22nd of June 1941 as Hitler’s armies invaded the Soviet Union, nullifying the previously recognized Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols. This section will focus on the main body of the *Wehrmacht* invasion of the Soviet Union – Army Group Center. The planning phase of the offensive offers the most relevant understanding into the northeastern part of Poland. Our point of departure will be a passage from the German Army High Command’s final amendment to Directive No. 21 dated January 31st 1941:

Army Group Center, under the command of General Field Marshal von Bock, will attack north of the Pripiat Marshes. By introducing powerful panzer formations into combat, it will carry out a penetration from the Warsaw and Suwalki region in the direction of Smolensk and then turn the panzer forces to the north and, in cooperation with Army Group North (General

Field Marshal von Leeb), attacking from East Prussia in the general direction toward Leningrad, will destroy Soviet forces located in the Baltic region. (Glantz, 2010, p. 19). This directive is the foundation for *Wehrmacht* operations in the Suwalki region. Army Group Center's follow on mission was to destroy Russian forces in the northern part of Russia and Army Group Center was supposed to be the main effort against Soviet Forces by utilizing the Fourth and Ninth Armies, the Third Panzer Group and the Second Air fleet to "advance precipitously eastward along the flanks of the Belostok salient (see annex VI) (Glantz, 2010, p. 20). This direction of advance is a commonality among all of our previous case studies. The Belostok salient is an important geographic area that is incorporated into planning. After penetrating Soviet lines in the Suwalki to Grodno region, the aim of Army Group Center was to attack Minsk and finally to Moscow. This route is relevant in this research because it highlights the importance of passing through Suwalki as the only route to Moscow. Because of the Pinsk Marshes, the most direct route to and from Moscow is through this corridor. Again, the Pinsk Marshes serve as a defining limitation to any advance through the region – this is aptly portrayed in the German invasion plan: "the mass of German offensive power was located north of the Pripiat' Marshes, the almost-impassible swampy region that divided the theater into distinct northern and southern halves" (Glantz, 2010, p. 20). From the standpoint of the Suwalki Corridor, these marshes are its extreme right limit of advance and in this case separated Army Group Center and South.

Even Soviet defensive plans understood the strategic importance of the Suwalki Corridor: "Marshal of the Soviet Union Boris Mikhailovich Shaposhnikov designated the region north of the Pripiat' River and its adjacent marshes as the most likely axis of any future German military aggression" although Stalin strongly disagreed (Glantz, 2010, p. 21). Soviet War plan DP-41 offers insight into the USSR's strategic and defense planning process. Although these plans were in place, with the help of military leaders, Stalin always had the final say. Soviet forces were stationed forward along the Molotov-Ribbentrop line, but unprepared for war – war was not even expected. Per doctrine, Soviet forces were supposed to form three lines of defense, or echelons, to prevent any overwhelming action to take place – this plan was never implemented. On the eve of war, "Soviet war planners concentrated the forces of the Red Army's first strategic echelon too far forward and in areas vulnerable to quick envelopment, such as the Belostok salient" (Glantz, 2010, p. 23). This error becomes quickly apparent as German forces storm the border and, in fact, envelope Soviet forces in the area (see annex V). As previously mentioned, Stalin did not believe that the main German body would invade north of the Pinsk Marshes but yet south of them with their key strategic

objective being Ukraine and its fertile land. Soviet forces were concentrated south of the marshlands and “As a result, the offensive by the bulk of the *Wehrmacht*’s panzer and motorized forces further to the north left the Red Army totally off balance and conditioned to disastrous defeat” (Glantz, 2010, p.23). On the 22nd of June 1941, Army Group Center crossed the Molotov-Ribbentrop line with clear orders. Decisively, German forces sped into Soviet border forces, crossing Suwalki along the Belostok Salient with orders to destroy the Red Army in Minsk. Within a month, the first line of the USSR’s defense was destroyed and the *Wehrmacht* had made it to Minsk, storming through Bialystok, Grodno and Vilnius.

The speed at which the Germans moved at the onset of the offensive leaves little information for tactical level fighting in the Suwalki region. The *Wehrmacht*, during the Summer, was able to cross through this terrain, north of Pinsk, essentially unhindered. What is useful from Operation Barbarossa is the effectiveness of which mechanized forces can be within this border region – in the event of no adverse weather and complete surprise. This operation also validates the strategic importance of the Suwalki Corridor as the most likely avenue of approach between Moscow and Europe. The Belostok Salient remains as a key geostrategic area that must be considered in strategic planning. Additionally, the German’s failure to deal a decisive defeat to all echelons of Soviet strategic forces (non-front-line troops) provides commentary on the over extension of lines – it is the same problem that Napoleon faced when he failed to destroy the bulk of the Tsarist army. However, German success in 1941 was magnanimous, though, after Germany’s successful campaigns in Russia, the Soviet counter-offensive “Bagration” also offers insight into warfare in the Suwalki region.

Operation Bagration begins on the 23rd of June 1944 in the wake of German defeat at Stalingrad. Although Bagration was designed to operate along multiple fronts, the main effort of the counteroffensive was along the Belarussian front. This decision was taken by Soviet planners because it achieved a multitude of core objectives for the Soviet Union – the capture of Minsk, Vilnius, Warsaw and East Prussia (Harrison, 2016). This means that imperative to this plan was the capture and crossing of the Suwalki region. For Soviet forces, this meant capturing the German stronghold of East Prussia. Today, this remains a legacy of the war. Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave, lies along the Suwalki Corridor. The Red Army’s Belarussian Offensive plan was predicated on multiple strategic priorities. The main transportation infrastructure of the region runs west through Belarus, through Poland and then to Germany (Harrison, 2016). Meaning that regional infrastructure and strategic location facilitates a direct invasion route to Berlin. Richard Harrison offers a description of the area

of operations: “The theater’s surface presents a broad and slightly hilly plain, broken by many rivers, lakes and canals, and covered to a significant degree with woods” (Harrison, 2016, p. 23). This aptly describes the Suwalki region – Soviet forces defined the terrain in the development of their plan describing “broad and swampy expanses” along the Pripyat River. Furthermore, the strategic importance of dense woodlands is highlighted in Bagration’s operational plans: “along the course of the Neman River and its tributaries, in the Grodno area (the Grodno and Augustow forests), and in the Bialystok area (the Bialystok forest). With the exception of individual sectors, the woods themselves do not represent serious barriers for the movement of troops, while they make easier their concealment from the enemy in the air, and provide more than enough fuel and construction materials” (Harrison, 2016, p. 234). This passage is undoubtedly relevant as it is clear in Soviet planning that these dense wooded areas that litter the Suwalki landscape are also seen as an advantage to movement through the Suwalki region.

There is a clear and concerted effort to include the terrain of Suwalki into operational planning. Importantly, Soviet planners incorporated major rivers into their planning – the Pripyat, the Bug and the Niemen all lie in the heart of Suwalki. The Pripyat, which forms the marshlands, was also chosen as a natural division line between the Soviet northern and southern lines of advance (Harrison, 2016). Reminiscent of WWI, Soviet planners also recognized the importance of these rivers and lake areas as integral locations for the Germans to mount a defense: “On the whole, the rivers, and in many places swampy flood plains, made it easier for the enemy to create a defense and hindered the advance of our attacking troops, and various crossing materials were required for overcoming them. A large number of lakes are located predominantly in the northern and western part of the area. Some lakes are quite large. Groups of lakes, in conjunction with the swampy and wooded terrain, sometimes form defiles and favorable defensive lines; for example, the group of lakes to the south of Dvinsk (Daugavpils) and in East Prussia (the Masurian lake district)” (Harrison, 2016, p. 235). Finally, the Soviets conducted an assessment of regional infrastructure, highlighting the importance of underdeveloped roadway systems and critical bridges along the route. Perhaps most importantly it was highlighted the lateral railway system from Smolensk—Orsha—Minsk—Molodechno—Lida—Grodno—Suwalki—Danzig (Gdansk) remained of key strategic importance to advancing forces (Harrison, 2016, p. 235). This railway, which runs through Suwalki, would enable Soviet forces on their way to Warsaw and Königsberg.

These descriptions of the terrain and infrastructure of the Suwalki region remain a cornerstone of this work. They highlight the importance of critical railways, terrain features

and again highlight the importance of defensive fighting in a region marked by these types of terrain features. The Red Army decisively pushes back the *Wehrmacht* and crosses the Suwalki Corridor – solidifying their capture of Warsaw and subsequently Berlin as well as crossing into German East Prussian territory and capturing Koenigsberg. The speed at which the Red Army crossed Suwalki in the Summer of 1944 is reminiscent of the German invasion heading eastward. Operational planning and attention to regional details, coupled with the temperate summer weather, enabled both fighting forces to pass through Suwalki almost unimpeded. The legacy of the German invasion and Soviet counter-offensive, and the specific routes cannot be overlooked. It also validates the effectiveness of highly mobile, mechanized units in the region. The Soviet operational planning and attention to weather, terrain and infrastructure offers unique insight into Suwalki's place in contemporary geopolitics.

In conclusion, this section seeks to offer a comprehensive overview of historical military operations in the region. It highlights the importance of planning, terrain, weather and infrastructure as well as the overall geostrategic importance as an avenue of approach into Europe (and vice versa). Furthermore, it is clear that throughout modern history, there are many commonalities between each conflict in the region. Fundamentally, our historical analysis leads us to believe that operational planning (terrain and weather analysis), military mobility (infrastructure utilization and development) as well as an emphasis on the defense play critical roles in military conflict in Suwalki. Additionally, the over extension of lines or the consolidation of lines, plays a determinative factor in the outcome of military operations. Each one of these factors plays a predominant role in today's geopolitical environment – they will be highlighted in the next section.

A Contemporary Analysis:

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the current geopolitical situation in the Suwalki Corridor. It assesses all the major regional actors and their contributions to regional security or regional destabilization. It asks fundamental questions about the Suwalki Corridor – has Poland and the West secured the Suwalki Corridor? If not, then what more needs to be done to ensure that the Suwalki Corridor is secured? There are a few basic premises involved with this research. The first is a theoretical basis – the theory associated with the West's involvement in Suwalki is predicated on the concept of defensive realism. This theoretical concept will be elaborated upon shortly. Secondly, the rise of great power politics and a multipolar world cannot be denied - "Great power gives its possessors a big

stake in their system and the ability to act for its sake” (Waltz, 1979, p. 195). It is fundamental in understanding the geopolitical situation of the region. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a general regional (and global) reassertion of Russian dominance and influence, it is only natural that the West pursues its current course. In this contemporary analysis that aims at, inevitably, being prescriptive in nature, we will assess Polish national security strategy as it pertains to Suwalki, American bilateral security initiatives as they pertain to Suwalki and assess NATO and EU regional strategies. Finally, it will conclude with a section on capability and capacity building in the hopes of maintaining regional stability and security.

Theory:

The theoretical portion of this thesis will be based on Kenneth Waltz’s theory of defensive realism. Defensive realism, a subcategory of structural realism, is rooted in the main tenants of John Mearsheimer’s structural realism (neoliberalism):

1. The international system is anarchic.
2. States inherently possess some offensive military capability.
3. States can never be certain about the intentions of other states.
4. The basic motive driving states is survival.
5. States think strategically about how to survive in the international system.

Based on these fundamental five principles, Kenneth Waltz argues that due to the nature of structural realism, states will undergo defensive policies or defensive posturing. States do this because they are not inherently aggressive, but yet just want to maintain their place in the international system. It is clear that in the Suwalki Corridor, the West acts within the framework of defensive realism and deterrence doctrine – it is foundational to the policies and actions of the West under the current geopolitical conditions.

Theoretically, both the West and the Russian Federation can fall within this framework. Although the Kremlin’s policies in Ukraine have been offensive by nature, the outcome of this event may result in defensive realist policies. In the case of Suwalki, it seems that the defensive actions of the West and Russia seem to be mutually supportive. This is portrayed by Kenneth Waltz, “Whether or not by force, each state plots the course it thinks will best serve its interests. If force is used by one state or its use is expected, the recourse of other states is to use force or be prepared to use it singly or in combination” (Waltz, 1979, p. 113). As the West builds its military capability in the region, so does Russia – both countries

attempt to provide additional capabilities to provide a better defense, but it doing so the situation escalates and this falls well within Mearsheimer's third point. The West attempts to deter Russia from military action along the Suwalki Corridor. How is this done? Through credible deterrence. It is clear that deterrence theory falls within defensive realism – as a defensive mechanism, states, due to their distrust of one another, try to provide credible deterrents that enable survival. The process of building this power is captured by Kenneth Waltz: “The more powerful enjoy wider margins of safety in dealing with the less powerful and have more to say about which games will be played and how” (Waltz, 1979, p. 195). In a sense the situation is a Catch 22. As the West and Russia meet each other at this critical geostrategic location, each is unsure of the other's intention, so each builds its defensive mechanisms within the framework of structural realism.

The Russian Federation:

The situation in the Suwalki Corridor is reminiscent of the not so far gone Cold War days. Like the Fulda Gap, the Suwalki Corridor has become a cornerstone in the West's military contingency plan in the event of regional armed conflict. The West identifies the immediate threat as radiating from Russian Kaliningrad and Belarus. In a recent RAND report, it was estimated that Russian forces, using Kaliningrad and Belarus as a staging point, would be able to close the Suwalki Corridor and annex the three Baltic states within 72 hours. This assessment has triggered a domino effect throughout the West. It has fundamentally scared Western planners as well as sparked a conversation about regional capacity building.

At the end of WWII, all ethnic Germans were expelled from the former East Prussia. The Allies agreed on allowing Russia to annex and maintain the Kaliningrad Oblast as a full part of the then Soviet Union, it remains as such today. This small slice of land has plagued the minds of Western military leaders since 1945. The region gives Russia access to an ice-free port along the Baltic Sea. Allowing them unfettered access to the Baltic Sea and enabling the Russian Baltic fleet regionally. From a land power perspective, it has essentially given Russia the ability to build a military fortress right in the heart of Europe. With increasing frequency, Russia has deployed nuclear capable Iskander-M ballistic missile systems to the area with the capability of striking throughout all of Europe. Fundamentally, and of major concern to NATO, is the Russians' ability to deny NATO access both to the Baltic Sea and the Baltic landmass. This is done via the strategic deployment of such ballistic missile capabilities, anti-ship capabilities as well as anti-aircraft capabilities. Kaliningrad falls under

the command of Russia's Western Military District and is frequently exercised on a rotational basis – the most recent being the 2017 Zapad exercises. As Russia has developed its naval and missile footprint in Kaliningrad, it has also expanded the size of its conventional ground force component in the region as well. In Belarus, a strong ally of the Russian Federation, the situation is equally as bleak for Western planners. The command structure of the Russian and Belarussian militaries is heavily integrated, Russian troops are limitedly stationed in Belarus but have the ability to move freely within the country in the event of armed conflict – making the eastern flank of the Suwalki Corridor as precarious as its western flank.

The West – Russia military imbalance in the Baltics is important to convey as it is the basis of this entire work. The limited Baltic militaries, US presence and NATO presence regionally make the Suwalki Region and its relationship to Poland and the Baltics all the more perilous. Obviously, since 1991, NATO has experienced a smaller footprint on the European continent. The Global War on Terror changed the entire dynamic of NATO and the structuring of its forces from a heavy and large force designed for conventional conflict to a light and mobile expeditionary force. Since 2014, this has begun to change. In a 2018 RAND report, it was stated that “Russia has a large numerical advantage over NATO in local ground combat capacity” (Boston, Johnson, Beauchamp & Crane, 2018, p. 7). This report goes on to state that in the Baltics “Russia's general advantage in numbers is compounded by the fact that, compared with the Cold War balance described earlier in this report, NATO forces are not nearly sufficient to defend a contiguous line and delay a large-scale conventional advance by a mechanized adversary, such as Russia—particularly as Russian forces would have sufficient mobility to concentrate forces in time and space to substantially outnumber isolated defenders” (Boston, Johnson, Beauchamp & Crane, 2018, p. 7). This paints a bleak picture of the potential of military conflict in the Baltics.

This understanding of force posturing in the Baltics is fundamental to understanding Western rhetoric towards the Suwalki Corridor. Near the border with the Baltic States, Russia alone has 757 main battle tanks stationed opposed to NATO's 129. From a personnel standpoint, RAND estimates that in the Russian Western Military District alone, Russia has eight motorized rifle brigades, four armor brigades, six airborne infantry brigades, and four artillery brigades opposed to just eight total NATO brigades – not to mention Russia's unrivaled missile capabilities (Boston, Johnson, Beauchamp & Crane, 2018, p. 9). These numbers are stark, they serve as a point of departure for the rest of this work. Russia continues to modernize its military and build the capacity and size of the Western Military District. The West continues to do the same, but its regional capabilities are seemingly

outmatched by Russian capabilities. The next step is to assess what the West has done to offset this imbalance and promote regional security and stability.

The Republic of Poland:

The aim of this section is to assess Polish national security strategy as it is relevant to Suwalki and address Polish unilateral measures towards ensuring regional stability. Polish national defense strategy is inherently geared towards combating Russian aggression with the focal point being the Suwalki Corridor. It is important to assess the Polish National Security Strategy (NSS), its subsequent review in the National Defense Review (NDR), and its ability to meet its stated goals and aims of ensuring the integrity of the Polish state. In its National Defense Review, Poland has determined that “The strategic analysis of the current position of Poland on the international scene yielded a clear conclusion: the scale of threats resulting from the Russian aggressive policy had not been adequately assessed in the past” (NDR, 2016, p. 6). This is the point of departure for Polish national security strategy. In the case of Poland, a National Security Strategy is developed and published every seven years. In 2016, the Polish Ministry of Defense, under Antoni Macierewicz, also implemented the Strategic Defense Review to complement and correct the National Security Strategy for developing threats. In the case of Poland, it is clear that they make a concerted effort to formulate and implement a grand strategy with the key objective of deterring and combating a resurgent and revisionist Russia. The strongest pillar of this strategy is to “allow Poland to enhance our role in NATO and to serve as the unifying force of all Allied activities on the eastern flank” (NDR, 2016, p. 13). This is the basis of how Poland ensures that the Suwalki Corridor, and the entirety of Poland, remains safe and secure.

The National Defense Review (NDR) is a supplement to the Polish National Security Strategy (NSS). The most current Polish NSS was published in 2014, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Every two years, the NDR seeks to supplement NSS strategy. However, it is still important to note NSS core strategic objectives before delving into the more topical NDR. The NSS provides a broader overview of Polish defense strategy. First and foremost, the NSS highlights the fact that Polish national defense strategy is congruent with NATO and EU strategy – an important symbol of Polish willingness to operate in a multilateral context – this is important in the fundamental argument of my work and its multilateral approach (NSS, 2014). This is of increasing importance as Poland is one of those “frontline” states on both the EU and NATO’s eastern frontier. Polish National Defense Strategy states unequivocally

that NATO constitutes the most important form of political and military cooperation between Poland and its allies. Furthermore, the European Union supports Poland's socio-economic development and strengthens its position in the world – another core element of the NSS and also mentioned later in this work. Poland also highlights that the United States of America remains the most important non-European partner of Poland (NSS, 2014). Just like the Suwalki Region, NATO, the EU and the US are the pillars of Polish national security, foreign policy and its global image. They are foundational to Polish defense and security. This will be elaborated on throughout the next sections as each institution serves to secure Suwalki. Furthermore, in the National Security Strategy, Poland operationalizes its strategic objectives. The NSS provides concrete directions for the implementation of Polish strategy. Interestingly, Poland highlights the need for a “strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU” (NSS, 2014, p. 28). The security and territorial integrity of Poland depend on these relationships – each player has a stake in securing the Suwalki Corridor.

The National Defense Review states that the number one threat to Polish national security is the Russian Federation. The NDR states that Russia, “poses a threat mainly for Poland and other countries in the region, but also for all other nations desirous of a stable international order” (NDR, 2016, p. 23). Poland's assessment of Russia is congruent with other countries in the region, such as the Baltic states. The US has also determined Russia to be a threat to global peace and stability. In this sense, Poland is meeting its stated strategic objective of being “the unifying force of all Allied activities on the eastern flank” (NSS, 2014, p. 13). Russia, as a Polish (and NATO) national security threat, is a direct consequence of Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and of Ukraine in 2014. Poland believes that, “Russia's actions are often camouflaged and conducted below the threshold of an armed conflict” (NDR, 2016, p. 24). This assessment has proven accurate. The concept of hybrid conflict and combating low intensity conflicts has become a priority for Poland – and the international community. The most likely threat to Polish national security would be some form of Russian hybrid intervention in Polish territory and along Suwalki – whether it be political, cyber, etc. The concept of hybrid war is more applicable and likely in the Baltic states, in which Latvia and Estonia have large ethnic Russian populations. However, instability in Lithuania would directly affect Suwalki's security. That is why the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlights the importance of a strong Lithuanian-Polish relationship.

Another key pillar of Polish defense is the European Union. Poland recognizes that, “All EU actions in the security domain should complement and enrich NATO operations in a

non-competitive manner” (NDR, 2016, p. 32). Firstly, it is recognized that the European Union provides immense economic benefits to the Polish Republic. The European Union is still a pillar of Polish national security strategy as the EU provides prosperity to Poland and an immense amount of development investment – including infrastructure. The EU as a whole is also under threat by Russian aggression, “the Russian Federation, will continue its actions aimed at stimulating internal conflicts within NATO and the EU in order to weaken their coherence” (NDR, 2016, p. 33). In the eyes of Poland, defense of NATO and the EU is not mutually exclusive – both organizations face similar threats. This threat calls for a unified and collaborative voice on security threats. This relationship between multilateral organizations is highlighted later.

Poland also operates on a bilateral level to ensure it meets its national security objectives. Perhaps the most important relationship is the US – Polish relationship. Zaborowski & Longhurst aptly note that, “Polish-American relations have been consistently vibrant since the end of the Cold War, but particularly since Poland joined NATO in 1999, when the US singled Poland out to be its most cherished partner in the east and began grooming Warsaw for this role in earnest” (Zaborowski & Longhurst, 2003, p. 1011). We will assess US capabilities in Suwalki in the next section – however this bi-lateralization of the US-Polish relationship is another pillar of Polish defense and in turn the defense of Suwalki. Military modernization is also an important aspect of Polish security strategy. The Polish Ministry of Defense recognizes that technological advancement is key to success on the battlefield. Interestingly, the Polish Government notes that “The process of modernization of the Polish Armed Forces will be accompanied by achieving one of the highest levels of defense spending in NATO, which by 2030 should reach 2.5% of our GDP as a minimal objective” (NDR, 2016, p. 47). Increased defense spending will enhance Polish military research and in-turn “level the asymmetric playing field” with the Russian Federation. Military modernization and capacity building (directed at Suwalki) will be covered in this work’s final section.

Poland has codified its core tasks necessary for improvements in their defense strategy. This long-term strategy is designed to develop and enhance Polish military capabilities by 2032. A key goal of Polish national security strategy is to create a combat effective and credible deterrent Polish military – within the theoretical framework of defensive realism. The Ministry of Defense states that, “For the first time in our modern history, Poland will possess effective deterrence potential. We want to be capable of defending Poland, and – if necessary – to offer assistance to our Allies. This is our absolute

priority” (NDR, 2016, p. 40). The Polish government currently spends 2% of GDP annually on their military. Poland is among just five NATO members that meets the agreed upon defense expenditure criteria. This is a symbol of Polish commitment to the Alliance but also Poland’s efforts to build a defense structure that could combat Russian aggression. Creating a deterrent is relevant for the Suwalki Corridor, as deterrence will prevent any incursions into the region.

The Baltic Sea is also an area of crucial strategic importance to the Polish government. The development of A2/AD capabilities and the continuing development of the Polish Navy are a priority. The Polish National Security Strategy states that, “The Navy will also play a significant role by defending our coastline and denying enemy supremacy over the southern Baltic Sea” (NDR, 2016, p. 46). In conjunction with NATO operations, the Polish military and NATO will need to establish dominance of the Baltic Sea. The Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, home of the Russian Baltic Fleet, proves to be a greatest geographic challenge for Polish security in the Baltic Sea but also for any land operation in Suwalki. Furthermore, the Polish Government recognizes that “due to the reinforcement of the coastal missile units, manned and unmanned reconnaissance platforms, modern mine warfare and submarines, we will greatly increase our capabilities to protect our coastline” (NDR, 2016, p. 51). These crucial benchmarks will be met by increased Polish defense spending as well as operating in conjunction with US and NATO allies in the region. Control over the Baltic Sea is key to both Poland and NATO as a whole and directly related to the security of Suwalki. The geopolitical implications surrounding the Baltic Sea are immense. Furthermore, control over the Baltic Sea will determine future land and amphibious operations along the Baltic coastline – directly effecting the defense of Suwalki.

Currently, one of Poland’s most important national security objectives is home defense. Obviously, Poland’s global allies are willing and able to support Poland’s home defense model because the defense of Poland is beneficial to NATO, the EU and the US. As a Polish priority, home defense requires the synchronization of all government agencies. In the event of invasion, every citizen and government organization will play some role. Polish National Defense Strategy states that “We will strive to codify the defense law. The legal basis for non-military national defense preparations will be covered in one parliamentary act” (NDR, 2016, p. 63). This process has been common throughout NATO’s eastern flank partners. They recognize that both conventional and hybrid threats will require the citizenry as a whole to mobilize. Specific requirements also entail civilian business organizations – this program is known as the Economy Mobilization Program (NDR, 2016). Early mobilization in

the event of conflict will also require a buy-in from civilian organizations, specifically in regard to infrastructure and logistics support. Home defense also requires a dialogue with Polish pro-defense leagues. These paramilitary organizations are deemed critical to Poland's defense in the time of war. Ensuring a synchronized command structure from the Polish Armed Forces to the pro-defense leagues will be critical to wartime effectiveness. Also, Polish strategy has an engagement aspect to it too – informing the Polish people of the Polish Armed Forces role in home defense as well as informing key stake holders of their role in Polish defense. Polish defense strategy states that, “We wish to strengthen civic awareness with regard to the situation in the direct vicinity of the country and the role of the Polish Armed Forces in providing for its security” (NDR, 2016, p. 65). This means Poland will make a concerted effort to inform people how important defense of the nation is, and how precarious the overall security situation is on the Eastern Flank. Poland is taking a top down, holistic approach to territorial defense. Territorial defense is crucial in areas such as Suwalki – the legacy of partisan movements in this northeastern part of Poland are still relevant.

In conclusion, it is clear that Poland's national defense strategy enables regional security – specifically in the Suwalki Corridor. The annexation of Crimea has destabilized regional security on the Eastern Flank. Poland's priority is to plan for territorial defense as well as being the epicenter of NATO and US operations in Central and Eastern Europe. Poland provides also provides a comprehensive and unilateral approach to combating Russian aggression. Polish defense planning is in line with NATO and US strategy, in fact, Poland has become a cornerstone of both entities. Polish defense is contingent on meeting the goals of the National Defense Review. Poland has enhanced its collective security through embedding itself within NATO and the EU and fostering a strong relationship with the US and focusing global efforts towards dissuading Russia from further aggression in Europe. Suwalki is the most vulnerable region of Poland. Polish national security strategy is tailored to ensure that the Suwalki Corridor maintains its territorial integrity. The measures Poland has taken – to plan a coherent national security strategy and leverage its multilateral and bilateral relationships all secure the Suwalki Corridor. However, it is clear that Poland and the West must continue to bolster their military and diplomatic prowess in the region.

The United States of America:

Since the end of the Cold War the United States (US) has had a relatively limited presence in Europe. In fact, the closing of military facilities throughout Western Europe were

generally agreed upon and the scaling of the United States' military posture in Europe was under debate. The 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its subsequent annexation of Crimea and the sponsored war in Donbas changed the entire strategic dynamic of the region. In the wake of 2014, US force presence in Europe remained limited even until 2016. The process of bringing United States forces back to Europe was a slow process that has recently gained political support. Although the United States is bolstering its presence throughout Europe, none is more prominent than its force posturing in Poland. The US presence in Poland has a direct impact on regional security – and more directly in the Suwalki Corridor because “Russia continues to intimidate its neighbors with threatening behavior, such as nuclear posturing and the forward deployment of offensive capabilities” (NSS, 2017, p. 47). This bilateral arrangement meets Polish national defense objectives as stated in the prior section, meaning that the framework for the protection of Suwalki is codified in Polish doctrine and actually solidified through this US – Polish relationship. This section will address the United States' regional doctrine and its effect on securing the Suwalki Corridor.

President Trump has been a staunch critic of NATO and European defense spending. However, in the case of Poland, it is clear that the United States still maintains its commitment to Europe and regional security – in fact the United States troop presences in Europe and in Poland has increased since President Trump has taken office. Furthermore, European Defense Initiative spending has also increased – it can be debated whether or not these policies are a legacy of the Obama Administration or new in their own right under President Trump – both answers seem to be the case. When assessing the United States' contribution to securing Suwalki it is equally as important to look at its actions and not necessarily its codified national security directives. However, both warrant some attention. Fundamentally, the United States National Security Strategy, released in 2017, unequivocally states that the nature of international politics has changed – today we live in a competitive world in which we see the rise of a multipolar system: “China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity” (NSS, 2017, p. 2). As the invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call for the Americans, this document is the pretext for United States involvement in Poland. The United States sees Russia as its existential threat that seeks to undermine the international order and destabilize Central and Eastern Europe. Russian malign influence in the region towards US allies and partners is a direct challenge to US supremacy and regional stability. The NSS states that “The combination of Russian ambition and growing military capabilities creates an unstable frontier in Eurasia, where the risk of conflict due to Russian miscalculation is

growing” (NSS, 2017, p. 26). In a sense, this frontier is the Suwalki Corridor. The NSS directly states that Russia’s resurgent military prowess is a direct threat to US objectives – no place other than Suwalki provides a clear demonstration of this challenge.

From an operational standpoint the NSS states that “On NATO’s eastern flank we will continue to strengthen deterrence and defense, and catalyze frontline allies and partners’ efforts to better defend themselves” (NSS, 2017, p. 48). This clearly demonstrates that, doctrinally, the United States sees a clear commitment to Eastern Flank security and the states that border the Russian Federation. Again, this is a direct reference to security along the Suwalki region. In a sense this operationalizes the National Security Strategy. The question remains then, what has the United States actually done to promote security along the Eastern Flank to help its partners better defend themselves? The National Defense Strategy also lists the rise of Russian power as a threat to the United States. The United States recognizes the direct Russian challenge to its neighbors: “Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors” (NDS, 2018, p. 1). It is clear that Russia has a capability to destabilize its neighbors via the implementation of a wide spectrum of capabilities – making the security of Suwalki all the more relevant. In the National Defense Strategy, preventing Russian aggression against allies is clearly stated: “Defending allies from military aggression and bolstering partners against coercion” (NDS, 2018, p. 4). Again, it is evident that codified US strategy is tailored to combatting Russian regional aggression and preventing military incursions along NATO’s Eastern Flank. Since 2014, it is clear that the United States has made strides to ensure that these objectives are met.

Initially the European Reassurance Initiative, now the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), has the stated aim of being “the primary funding sources for U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and its Service Components’ operations in the European theater, providing the ability to respond to an evolving European security environment” (EDI, 2019, p. 1). This United States government initiative lays out the operational framework for the United States’ presence in Europe. Since 2014, the budget for this program has grown exponentially, now reaching \$6.5 billion for fiscal year 2019 (FY19) and requested \$5.9 billion for fiscal year 2020 (FY20). It is widely viewed that EDI has contributed greatly to European and Eastern Flank security. In Europe “the initiative has provided funding in support of five lines of effort: (1) Increased Presence, (2) Exercises and Training, (3) Enhanced Prepositioning, (4) Improved Infrastructure, and (5) Building Partnership Capacity” (NDI, 2019, p. 1). These objectives have been met in Europe and specifically in Poland – in fact, Poland has been the

largest beneficiary of EDI funds. Indirectly, these crucial achievements influence security along Suwalki as the United States' aim is to provide security along NATO's Eastern Flank. EDI has enabled the United States to provide for regional security and bolster its military presence in Poland.

In 2015, the United States rotated a limited number of troops into the Baltics in Poland under Operation Atlantic Resolve. This was a limited force posture that allowed US troops to at least be present in vulnerable Eastern Flank countries. As the Russian – United States relationship deteriorated further, the United States increased its European footprint. Directly enabled by European Deterrence Initiative funds, the United States has provided in Poland a rotational Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), a Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), a divisional headquarters element, increased Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities (ISR), logistical units, enhanced Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capabilities, increased Army Prepositioned Stock (APS), a larger and full spectrum Special Operational Force (SOF), a higher intensity and more frequent exercise cycle, and infrastructure development to facilitate military mobility. These are the greatest contributions that the United States, on a bilateral level, has contributed to security in Poland. The United States' focus for the region is directly on Poland. This is a concerted effort to ensure security over Suwalki. Theoretically, if the Russian Federation were to close the Suwalki Corridor, the United States and its allies would prefer to establish a front along the eastern frontier of Poland, in which it could conduct a liberation campaign of the Baltics, bolstered by its forward military presence and logistical supply lines in Poland – therefore, it is clear that the United States military force presence, with a focal point on Poland, is tailored to ensure that the Suwalki Corridor remains open. It is also important to mention this within the framework of my theoretical basis – of defensive realism. Deterrence is inherently a defensive tactic, furthermore, it is clear in US strategic doctrine that they are not developing offensive military capabilities against the Russian Federation but hedging against Russian regional power and malign influence. The United States' actions, and more broadly the West's actions, fall within the framework of defensive realist theory.

It is worth delving into a few of these major initiatives and discuss potential future bilateral initiatives within Poland. The deployment of “heel to toe” Armored Brigade Combat Teams (ABCT) began in 2017 with the aim of providing a credible armor deterrent in Poland. Since 2017, on a nine-month basis, American armor brigades have continuously deployed to Poland from the United States and consist of approximately 4,000 Soldiers. These units are stationed in western Poland and conduct bilateral and NATO training exercises. One of their

main goal is to assess European military mobility infrastructure and enhance speed of assembly. It is evident that this type of rotation, with a staging area in western Poland, is geared towards security on Poland's eastern borders. With these large mechanized units, the United States has also enlarged its logistical footprint. Staging prepositioned equipment throughout Poland and deploying the support staff that an ABCT requires. The US has also created a divisional headquarters in Poznan, Poland – it is a skeleton divisional headquarters that has the ability to take control of multiple brigades in the event of military conflict. It is the US' way of developing their command and control abilities regionally.

In conjunction with this rotation, the United States has also deployed a Combat Aviation Brigade, which brings American attack aviation and airlift capabilities to Poland. These helicopters are directly stationed in Poland. Furthermore, the United States also has deliberately developed a ballistic missile defense shield in Poland. In Redzikowo on the Baltic Sea, the US is installing its Aegis Ashore system. The United States says that the system is there to protect Europe from Iranian ballistic missile launches, but this may not always be the case as the Russian – US relationship deteriorates further. This system has a direct impact on security in Suwalki. It has both the offensive and defensive capability to strike along the Baltics, Kaliningrad or in the general area of the Suwalki Corridor. Finally, it is also important to discuss the role of American Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Poland. A portion of these SOF forces are in Poland (and Lithuania) to train these countries' territorial defense forces. These territorial defense forces are designed in the spirit of the partisan movements which littered the northeastern part of Poland and Lithuania during WWII and the Soviet occupation. In the event of armed conflict, these forces would have the ability to conduct unconventional warfare. With the help of US SOF, territorial defense forces are a direct enabler of security in the Suwalki Corridor. These are just a few of the major categories in which the US directly or indirectly provides for Suwalki's defense. It is clear that the US, both through its doctrine and actions, have enabled the Suwalki region's security.

The United States will continue to grow its footprint and capability in the region as long as the Russian Federation continues its malign influence campaigns worldwide. As of 2019, one unique possibility was the permanent basing of United States forces in Poland. Currently, all United States forces in Poland are there on a rotational basis as not to exacerbate tensions or breach international law. In 2018, President Duda went to Washington D.C. and asked President Trump to permanently base a United States division in Poland. In return the Poles would provide \$2 billion. The United States initially had seriously considered

this proposal. However, a permanent United States division in Poland would entirely change the strategic dynamic of the region – and may have a beneficial or adverse effect on security in Suwalki and the current understanding of defensive posturing. The United States had officially tasked the DoD to assess the validity of this proposal and decided on an enhanced, scaled and tailored presence of United States forces on Polish soil. Even in this case, a more limited presence of US forces will directly enhance Eastern Flank security, although it does have the possibility of enflaming tensions further and potentially undermine regional multilateral efforts.

On June 12th, 2019, President Duda and President Trump again met at the White House to discuss the aforementioned request. The US and Poland signed the *“Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation Regarding U.S. Force Posturing in Poland.”* The agreement undoubtedly changes the regional security dynamic and has direct implications on the security of Suwalki. The agreement states that the US will contribute an additional 1,000 troops to the already 4,500 strong US contingent on Polish soil. The US will establish a division headquarters forward in Poland, establish a Combat Training Center in Drawsko Pomorskie, station US MQ-9 aircraft for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities, enhance a centralized aerial port of debarkation, establish an area support group, deploy a bolstered US special operations capability to the region, and develop the local infrastructure for the already forward deployed armored brigade combat team. This agreement, although not nearly a departure from the current US strategy in Poland, does provide new capabilities to the region and solidify the Polish – US bilateral relationship. This declaration seems to be a pragmatic approach by the administration. It enhances regional security, while not enflaming broader geopolitical tensions or the defensive balance of power – nothing in this declaration is overtly offensive in nature. However, it is clear that this is purely a bilateral action and does not consider these actions within the context of the NATO alliance.

In conclusion, it is clear that the United States in its bilateral capacity plays an important role in securing Suwalki. The United States’ National Security Strategy and its National Defense Strategy all demonstrate its will to enhance regional security. Furthermore, the actions of the United States, especially EDI fund allocation and the presence of US troops in Poland highlight the importance of the United States in providing for Eastern Flank security. The United States also enhances regional security through its foreign arms sales to Poland – this will be highlighted later. Additionally, the United States Air Force and Navy play an important role in the security of Suwalki. The Baltic Sea is critical to security in

Suwalki, however, at present, the Russian Navy has clear supremacy over the Baltic Sea via their A2/AD capabilities. The United States Air Force continue to work towards regional air supremacy, but the reduction of force capabilities regionally may affect these plans and the Russian Federation has demonstrated clear anti-air capability in the region with its frequent deployment of S-400 and S-300 surface to air missile systems. Consequently, it is also clear that the bi-lateralization of the US – Polish relationship may, in the long run, negatively affect security. As President Trump constantly lambasts NATO members like Germany, and staunchly supports others like Poland, he drives a wedge through the Alliance. If NATO is to provide to regional Eastern Flank security, then the Alliance must be united. For Suwalki to be truly secure, it needs to be done within the multilateral context of NATO. This next section highlights the efforts and shortfalls of NATO operations and EU policy in the region.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization & European Union:

Recently, NATO has begun the process of reasserting itself in Europe, and more specifically, on NATO's Eastern Flank. NATO plays a critical role in the security of the Suwalki Corridor. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland are all NATO members, the territorial integrity of these states and their broader security has become a corner stone of NATO policy in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These countries all share a dark historical past with the Soviet Union and its successor state – the Russian Federation. As previously stated, NATO is one of the pillars of Eastern Flank security and specifically the security of Suwalki – in conjunction with US policy, EU policy and Polish national policy. It is clear that, since 2016, NATO has taken a concerted effort to ensure regional stability. This effort has been done through the framework of multilateral solidarity. The 2016 Warsaw Summit is the pivotal event in which NATO deliberately planned this reassertion. In 2016, heads of state gathered in Warsaw, Poland to discuss the future of the Alliance as well as its plans for the Eastern Flank. Born out of this summit were tangible, effective and new demonstrations of NATO solidarity in the face of Russian aggression.

As a point of departure, it is important to highlight the vital agreements codified in the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Fundamentally, point 11 of the summit highlights the broader strategic direction of the Alliance: “NATO has responded to this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defense posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and by suspending all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia, while remaining open to political dialogue

with Russia. We reaffirm these decisions” (Warsaw Summit, 2016). NATO seeks dialogue with the Russian Federation. In fact, NATO clearly states that it aims to normalize relations with the Russian Federation and is inherently not a threat to Russia. Obviously, Russia views this differently and believes that NATO is pursuing a strategy of encirclement. Due to Russia’s perceived antagonistic nature both regionally and globally, NATO has had to pursue this new deterrence posture. Additionally, the strategy of deterrence falls within the defensive realist theoretical framework. NATO has recognized Russia’s offensive capabilities and in turn pursues a policy of defense in the region. Furthermore, NATO’s rhetoric towards article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, is emblematic of a defensive realist position. NATO views an attack on any member of the Alliance as an attack on all members of the Alliance – a direct attack and the emphasis NATO places on this article is inherently defensive in nature – not offensive.

The Warsaw Summit also operationalizes this strategy of deterrence and defense posturing. NATO has adopted a long term “Adaptation Measures of the Readiness Action Plan.” The new plan is geared towards Eastern Flank security and countering Russian regional hegemony. These core initiatives are to develop the NATO Response Force (NRF), create a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), establish NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) along the Eastern Flank, develop military mobility, develop the Headquarters of a Multinational Corps Northeast, further develop NATO Standing Naval Forces, develop command and control capabilities, conduct regional exercises, and counter hybrid warfare. Each one of these items warrants some attention – they all directly affect the Suwalki region. The NRF is a division sized element, comprised of multinational units, that has the ability to deploy to an area of the Alliance to defend or deter aggression. This unit is joint, comprising of sea, land and air assets. It has existed since 2002, but under the Warsaw Summit, it has been bolstered. Units with the NRF, like the VJTF, have the ability to deploy rapidly. They serve as a deterrent and reassurance measure with a specific focus on NATO’s Eastern Flank.

Additionally, NATO has established Force Integration Units. These units are located throughout the eastern Alliance members but for the sake of this research, there are NFIUs in Poland and the Baltics. Their mission is to assess a myriad of different military related items in their host country to enable the smooth integration of NATO units into their positions along the flank – either in a wartime or peacetime capacity. They seek to ensure the rapid speed of assembly, in the case of Poland, into the Suwalki Corridor should the need arise. This is why a major point of the Warsaw Summit is an emphasis on developing reinforcement and military mobility. This will be discussed further, but NATO has learned

that moving forces along the Eastern Flank has proved challenging – the decisive action in a potential military escalation will be determined by a nation's ability to rapidly move forces. NATO currently lacks this capability, especially in the Suwalki region.

As previously mention, command and control is an important issue for the Alliance on the Eastern Flank. Integrating multiple national command structures and elements is a monumental task. NATO has established a Multinational Corps Northeast in Poland as an operation headquarters to take command of NATO military units in the northeastern part of the Alliance. NATO seeks to delineate command and control structures and ensure flexibility and a sound military command structure in the event of armed conflict. That is why the Warsaw Summit has listed “Enhanced advance planning and enabled accelerated decision-making to ensure both military and political responsiveness” as a core area of improvement (Warsaw Summit, 2016) Additionally, NATO has stood-up a Multinational Division North Headquarters in Elblag, Poland – in the heart of the Suwalki region. This divisional headquarters would take command of NATO brigades or battalions in the region – it is a subordinate unit of the Multinational Corps Northeast and is staffed by NATO member states. Along with developing these structures, NATO also wants to develop its Standing Naval Forces, NATO currently sits at a power deficit in the Baltic Sea. Additional capabilities in the region would ensure security on the Eastern Flank – that is why it is a NATO initiative to expand and develop these naval forces capabilities.

Of course, as the Alliance expands its capabilities and develops its ability to operate on the Alliance's Eastern Flank, it will need to conduct major exercises to ensure lessons learned and demonstrate deterrence against regional threats. Trident Juncture, which was conducted in the Summer of 2018 in Norway, is emblematic of the importance of these exercises. Additionally, NATO states that countering hybrid warfare remains a priority for the Alliance. As the Russian Federation continues to wage hybrid warfare in Ukraine and across the world, developing tools to prevent such actions remains of great importance. What is unique about this point is that NATO recognizes the importance of working in conjunction with the European Union on this matter. Russian disinformation campaigns, election meddling, conflict sponsoring etc. effect all facets of European and transatlantic life. Joint programs are required to provide a tailored response. No location is more vulnerable than the Suwalki Corridor in which Russian sponsored hybrid warfare seems like the most likely course of action for heightened aggression. Also, in Suwalki and on the other side of the corridor, Lithuania, these populations remain vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns – a form of hybrid warfare.

Perhaps the most important materialization from the 2016 Warsaw Summit was the establishment of NATO Enhance Forward Presence Battalions (EfP) in Estonia, Latvia Lithuania and Poland “to unambiguously demonstrate, as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression” (Warsaw Summit, 2016). These units are currently in place and fully staffed. They are battalion sized elements that provide unique capabilities to Host Nation militaries. Canada (Latvia), the United Kingdom (Estonia), Germany (Lithuania) and the United States (Poland) are these framework nations. These nations are the lead nations but under their leadership, multiple other nations from all over the Alliance provide the forces. Currently, they fall under the command of the Multinational Division Headquarters Northeast in Poland. These units rotate on a predetermined basis but clearly demonstrate solidarity among NATO member states. It is relevant to this research because of their physical location – in the Baltics and Poland where Russian intervention is most likely. Importantly, the EfP battalion in Poland, led by the United States, is located in Orzysz, Poland. Orzysz is in the Suwalki Corridor – this is not coincidence for military planners.

Interestingly, the European Union (EU) also plays an important role in the Suwalki Corridor. As the European Union seeks to assert itself militarily, it has the ability to provide capabilities to the region that enhance the objectives of NATO. The EU is another multilateral tool that enables the security of Suwalki. The EU has the ability to appropriate funds that enhance infrastructure development in the Suwalki region. The EU has created an *Action Plan on Military Mobility* and has explicitly determined and codified that there is a need in:

Creating a fully-fledged European Defence Union by 2025 is imperative to Europe's security and to build a Union that protects. A smooth, efficient and effective movement of military personnel and assets across and beyond the EU will enhance the EU's preparedness and response to crises. It will enable EU Member States to act faster, in line with their defence needs and responsibilities, both in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, and in the framework of national and multinational activities.

Currently, cross-border mobility is still hampered by a number of barriers that can lead to delays, disruption, higher costs or increased vulnerability (EU Commission, 2018)

As a union, the EU has a responsibility to standardize and develop infrastructure within its borders. This initiative will directly enhance the capabilities of NATO, the US and Poland. The EU plans to spend almost seven billion euro in infrastructure development (European Commission, 2018). Perhaps the largest challenge in defending Suwalki is the lack of

adequate infrastructure. This initiative will help to rapidly deploy forces to the border as well as enhance mobility after forces have reached the border. Again, this is a decisive capability and the EU has a large role to play. The three major goals of the EU in this realm are to, firstly, develop the physical infrastructure that is not sufficient for the weight and size of military equipment (European Commission, 2018). This is a critical function, proper signage must be posted and bridges, roadways and ports must be sufficiently developed to ensure the passage of Allied armor platforms and vehicles. Additionally, each member of the European Union has a separate bureaucratic movements process to cross any border for military assets – there is no centralize of standardize process. That is why the second important EU function is to address these “regulatory and procedural issues” (European Commission, 2018). Finally, the EU labels “shortcomings in the military domain” as another important issue that will be addressed to the “lack of coordination structures, movement plans and training and exercises” and to additionally “foster resilience in countering hybrid threats and to ensure access to transportation assets” (European Commission, 2018).

In conclusion, it is clear that multilateral institutions, like NATO and the EU, play an important role in securing the Suwalki Corridor. Arguably, NATO plays the most important role in regional security. Since the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO has immensely developed its deterrent capability along the Suwalki Corridor. This has been most appropriately achieved by the development of clear command and control structures, the deployment of Allied Enhanced Forward Presence Battalions and an increased exercise tempo, among many other strides. NATO has recognized the importance of its Eastern Flank and has developed its capability within the framework of defensive realism – and the application of deterrent initiatives. Fundamentally, NATO has developed its posture and laid the framework for a broader development of this policy. It is still clear that NATO does not have the capability to deter the Russian Federation in the Suwalki Corridor. Additionally, the European Union also plays a unique role in regional security. The development of infrastructure has a direct impact on military mobility and will define the initial outcome of any military escalation. This assessment clearly demonstrates the importance of NATO and the European Union in defending the Suwalki Corridor. This multilateral aspect is the third pillar of regional security. It is evident that there are many initiatives from unilateral, bilateral and multilateral actors that seek to secure Suwalki. However, it is clear that more should be done to further enable regional security. The next section will lay the groundwork for these new initiatives – the development of capabilities and an overview of new defense projects.

Current Capability Development & Way Ahead:

It is apparent that the West and Poland seek to secure the Suwalki corridor through unilateral, bilateral and multilateral measures. On all fronts, it is clear that many strides have been made to ensure this security. The Polish government has engaged in a long-term military modernization program and developed its national strategies to reflect this focus on homeland defense. The United States has, most clearly, demonstrated its solidarity with Poland through the expansion of its military footprint in Poland and its willingness to support the Polish government through a multitude of different approaches – to include military training and arms sales. Finally, it is clear that both NATO and the European Union have also contributed to security in the Suwalki Corridor. However, it is also clear that each one of these pillars of Suwalki defense must do more to ensure a lasting and secure region. Fundamentally, this can be done through capabilities building as well as enhancing NATO and the EU's commitment to the region. Of course, the development of military strategy must work in tandem with a political solution in the region – normalizing relations with the Russian Federation, through peaceful means, would be the ideal measure to ensure long-term regional security.

Foreign arms sales to the Republic of Poland must be mentioned – they directly build military capability in the region. These developments are the 'way ahead' for the Suwalki region. The first major defense project, that has a direct impact on the Corridor, is the Polish Wisla program. In 2018, the Polish government has finalized a deal with the United States for its Patriot surface to air missile system. This purchase has been finalized at \$4.75 billion and provides Poland with long to medium range surface to air missile capability. This essential procurement is fundamental to how Poland and the West develops regional security. Aforementioned, the West has a clear disadvantage in the Suwalki Corridor when it comes to the development of anti-aircraft systems. Poland has procured this system to enhance all three pillars of the Suwalki security posture. This purchase allows Poland to solidify its bilateral relationship with the United States plus it allows improvement in the interoperability of NATO air defense systems – Germany, Greece, Spain, and the Netherlands all operate this system and Sweden (non-NATO) and Romania have both concluded deals for the system. The ability to integrate NATO air defense systems provides an air defense multiplying effect. Again, regional air defense is directly related to the security of the Suwalki Corridor. Poland (and NATO) recognize that Russian airpower and missile capabilities must be met with enhanced air defense. This purchase, although significant, is only a small step in developing a

deterrent capability in the region. Further integration of air defense and the forward deployment of such systems, along all three pillars, will have to become a reality. The United States, as recognizing this deficit, has deployed mobile short-range air defense systems to the region but this is only symbolic. In order for the Suwalki Corridor to be truly secure, NATO must develop its regional air defense capability to offset a clear Russian advantage.

The West has learned from the Kremlin's war in Ukraine. In fact, one of the key lessons learned from the conflict was Russia's superiority in the employment of rocket artillery systems. Ukrainian soldiers recognized the devastation and the effectiveness in which these systems can be employed in the region. In an attempt to develop the West's capability in this function, the Poles developed their own modern response. In February 2019, Poland signed a \$414 million-dollar deal with the US for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems – including 18 launcher systems. Again, like the Wisla program, this Polish program develops the West's regional capability. However, it is not a direct deterrent or a strategic enabler. The West will have to work in conjunction with these Polish acquisitions to provide a proper, comprehensive, multilateral and tailored defense to Suwalki. Additionally, in 2016, the US approved a \$200 million-dollar deal to provide Poland with 70 AGM-158B JASSM-ER (Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile) cruise missiles. This missile is air launched (from Polish F-16 aircraft) and has the ability to strike target up to 900km's away. These systems alone do not serve as a deterrent for Russian aggression in the region, but yet complements a broader array of Western capabilities. As the Polish military modernizes, more procurement options will come available. The Polish government has recently discussed the possibility of purchasing the US' AH-64 Apache attack helicopter. In May 2019, the Polish government formally requested to purchase 32 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters from the United States. The US has subsequently agreed to this request. The F-35, currently the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world, will change the regional security environment. It provides a multiplier effect throughout the battlefield and the ability to synchronize Allied air operations and air defense capabilities. This acquisition, by no means only symbolic, provides a direct capability to both Polish and Allied operations in the region. However, the price of these systems, coupled with the progress of Poland's overall fighter program will remain to be a challenge. Overall, each one of these purchases enables regional security, however, it is not enough. It is also important to understand that these acquisitions do not occur in a vacuum.

Conclusion:

Fundamentally, the security of the Suwalki Corridor affects the entire continent of Europe. It is not only a localized issue but an issue that has a cascading effect on European security as a whole. There are many challenges to this assertion – specifically NATO and EU members’ views on security challenges. Although NATO and EU doctrine list Eastern Flank security as a priority, this is not always the case in individual member states. For example, Southern European states’ main challenges are stability along the Mediterranean basin – to include quelling unfettered migration into Europe. This is a challenge that affects Europe as a whole, but also seems more pressing to countries along the Mediterranean. Additionally, the rise of Chinese influence in Europe and the continued threat of terrorism threatens to take Europe’s (and the US’) attention away from challenges of Russia (although there is overlap). The list of emerging security challenges is long, but it is clear that individual states prioritize such security issues – this work seeks to demonstrate the importance of assigning top priority to Eastern Flank security. Allies need to be unified in their pressure on the Russian Federation and in turn the security of Suwalki. Unilateral decisions, like Germany’s decision on NordStream II, threaten regional security and are emblematic of a strategic divide among east and west (and south).

Funding also remains to be a challenge to Eastern Flank security. As just mentioned, Allies have a myriad of security challenges to address. The defense budgets of European states still prove to be challenging, although the current US diplomatic approach to this is degrading. Europe and the US need to solidify their unified approach to security and threat prioritization. It is evident that the challenge of Eastern Flank security should be a top priority, the territorial and political integrity of Europe as a whole are threatened directly in this region. European armies will have to enhance their capabilities and funding in order to meet these challenges. The development of an EU “European Army” and defense cooperation program under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project also proves to be problematic. It is clear that Europe does need to enhance its capabilities, but as the US argues, ones that enhance NATO capabilities and utilize NATO as the unifying multilateral regional defense actor. PESCO has already caught the attention of the United States, specifically the limitation of third-party defense contractors to the European market, but as the program is in its infancy, whether the program will be an asset to NATO or a challenge is yet to be seen. It is clear though, NATO has historically been the regional defense provider, a unifier, and continues to hold a much broader defense capability than that of the EU. Both

organizations need to collaborate to ensure unified and multilateral action along the eastern frontier.

The security of the Suwalki Corridor is determined by three broader pillars of security – unilateral, bilateral and multilateral actions. The unilateral policy being Polish (and Lithuanian), the bilateral being the US – Polish and the multilateral being NATO and the EU. Each one of these endeavors does directly provide enhanced regional capabilities in protection. However, and the primary argument of this work, is that each pillar cannot work without the other. Perhaps the best example of this is Polish defense acquisitions, Poland makes a concerted effort to develop its military through its modernization program, these steps enable regional security, however, in the broader geopolitical, strategic makeup of the region it does little to ensure effective defensive posturing. Meaning that the most effective way to secure the Suwalki Corridor is to mutually reinforce all three of these pillars.

Multilaterally, NATO exists to ensure the territorial integrity of its member states, therefore, unequivocally, NATO should be the lead pillar of regional security. It is clear that NATO has identified the threat and set in motion a series of enhanced deterrence initiatives. NATO has identified the need for the development of infrastructure to facilitate military mobility regionally. This is critical to ensuring a strong regional deterrent. Without the ability to rapidly deploy Allied forces, there can be no strong deterrence in the Corridor. Our historical analysis of the region should demonstrate the importance of military mobility in the region. The EU, as our other multilateral example, also highlights the need for infrastructure investment. These are the type of roles the EU should be assuming in the region. European Union defense integration should serve a purpose within the NATO framework. The EU does not have to provide redundant military capability but yet leverage its strengths to provide enhanced capabilities be it militarily, regulatory or diplomatic. Military mobility, and the development of regional infrastructure, specifically roads and railheads, needs to be on the forefront of both NATO and the EU's agenda. Additionally, from NATO's standpoint, it does need to continue to develop and codify lines of command. The Alliance has made strides in ensuring that it has a developed command and control (C2) capability. This is imperative in the multinational alliance structure. Enhanced C2 will ensure deterrence – clarified lines of command will facilitate a more battle-ready force. Furthermore, during times of conflict, C2 wins battles, as was evident through German victories in the region during WWI. The Alliance also has the unique capability of intelligence sharing. In the event of armed conflict in Suwalki, enhanced Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance will be able to early and accurately identify an impending invasion. These ISR systems will be a corner stone for

mounting a strong defensive. NATO is the best prepared to develop ISR capabilities because of its ability to facilitate intelligence gathering and sharing among member states. Of course, NATO brings hard military capability to the region as it is an aggregate of its member states but it also brings years of experience in combating hybrid conflict and ensuring deterrence. NATO also brings naval assets and missile defense (and offensive) missile capabilities to the region. For the security of the Suwalki region, NATO posturing in the Baltic Sea will be crucial – as well as offsetting Russia's A2/AD capabilities. This can be done through developed and capable deterrence measures. The largest challenge for NATO will be providing a credible deterrent while not further threatening the Russian Federation – this balance is hard to find but NATO cannot look weak.

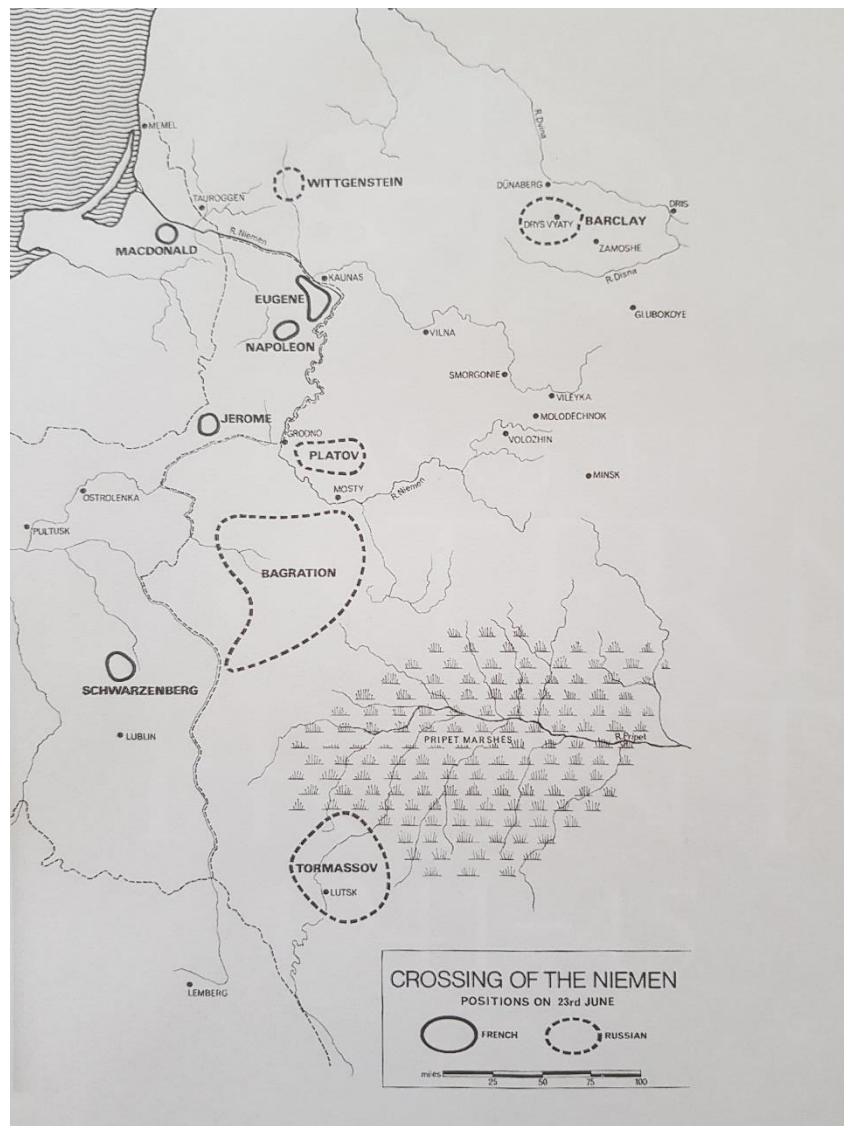
The bilateral aspect also plays a crucial role in Suwalki – but does not come without flaws. The United States plays a unique role in regional security. The United States is a regional, European power, and has been since 1945. In a sense, US and Poland have bi-lateralized their relationship. This ensures that the United States will invest in providing deterrence measures in the region as well as diplomatic involvement. Most would agree that ensuring US involvement in a regional conflict would be beneficial to the security of the Suwalki Corridor. However, two issues arise – an inflated US presence will heavily militarize the region and inflame tensions with the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. And secondly, and perhaps the starkest detriment to regional security, is the fundamental bi-lateralization of regional security. When the US and Poland bi-lateralize the security situation, they alienate key members of the Alliance. Afterall, the Alliance is built on compromise and the Alliance itself is the sum of all the security concerns of its members, not just Poland. This bi-lateralization leads to a strategic divide in Europe – one in which the Central and Eastern European countries wish to strategically engage with the US and another in which Western European countries seek to strategically distance themselves from the US. It has the potential to undermine the transatlantic nature of NATO. This divide has been sparked by the Trump Administration's rhetoric towards NATO and its Western members. However, one aspect is certain, in order for Suwalki to be secured, the NATO Alliance must be unified under one voice. Although a US presence does enhance regional security, it must be done within the framework of NATO.

Finally, the unilateral, or singular development of the Polish Armed Forces and Poland's Suwalki strategy, cannot occur only in a vacuum. Fundamentally, the actions of the Polish Republic are only credible if it meets its strategic intent of operating in a multilateral

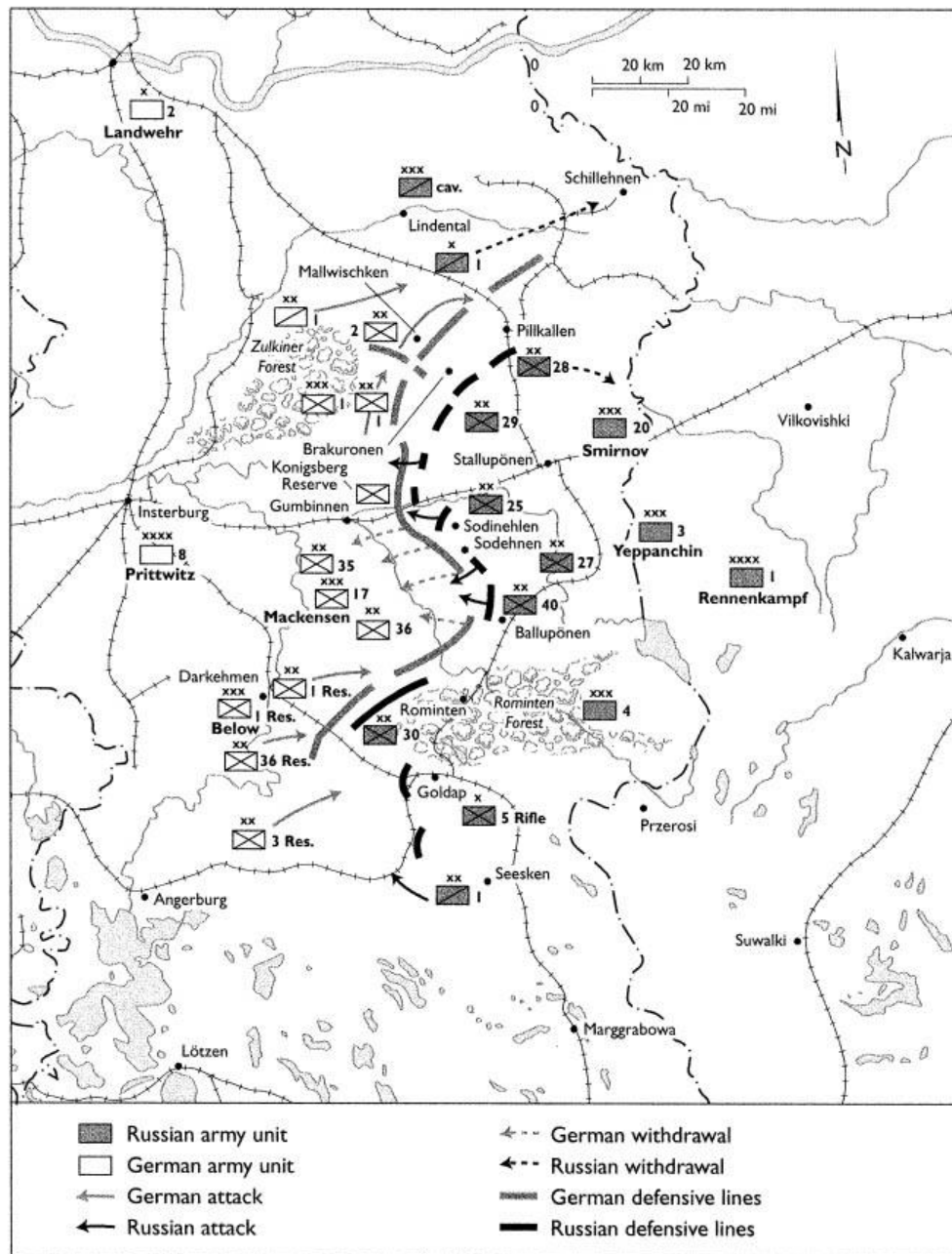
environment along NATO's Eastern Flank. Poland has made immense strides in providing military deterrence capabilities to the Suwalki Corridor – as emblematic its acquisition of Patriot and HIMAR systems. Polish defense strategy highlights just that – Poland recognizes its need for development and modernization but also the multilateral context in which it derives its true defense. This also means that the members of NATO, domestically, need to develop their armed forces and tailor it for deterrence missions along NATO's Eastern Flank. Each member state will have to contribute to regional security through fair and tailored defense spending. Deterrence is only effective in Suwalki if each member state of the multilateral pillar are able to domestically improve their military capabilities, tailored for the defense of NATO.

It is evident that, since 2014, the West has taken strides in ensuring the defense of the Suwalki Corridor. These actions of been done within the framework of deterrence theory and more specifically defensive realism. It is clear that the defense of Suwalki lies in three pillars – the multilateral (NATO and EU), the bilateral (Poland and US) and the unilateral (Poland). Each one of these pillars in mutually reinforcing, but it should be clear that NATO should be the primary regional provider, unifier and guarantor of security. Additionally, it is apparent that the West needs to continue to develop its regional posture to ensure a credible deterrent. This includes the synchronization of Allies' priorities and strategic understanding and increased European wide defense spending. This can be done by working in a constructive multilateral environment (including the EU and NATO) to develop and close this clear capability gap between Russia and the West. Additionally, it is clear that the West should pursue a path of peace with the Russian Federation but the current geopolitical environment continues to demonstrate that the Suwalki Corridor remains an existential challenge to Europe as a whole. The US, specifically, continues to highlight the rise of great power politics and a multipolar world. The West will have to recognize Russia as an equal and continue to search for a diplomatic solution to regional instability. Historically, it is clear the Suwalki region remains a crucial strategic area. Our historical analysis seeks to demonstrate just that. It also seeks to highlight crucial historical aspects of the region that have a direct impact on military operations. Even if it just skims the surface, the information highlights the importance of Suwalki and the complications of military campaigns through the corridor in the hopes of not repeating the same mistakes twice. Today, Suwalki remains of critical geopolitical importance. The defense of the region has untold geostrategic implications for all actors.

Annexes:



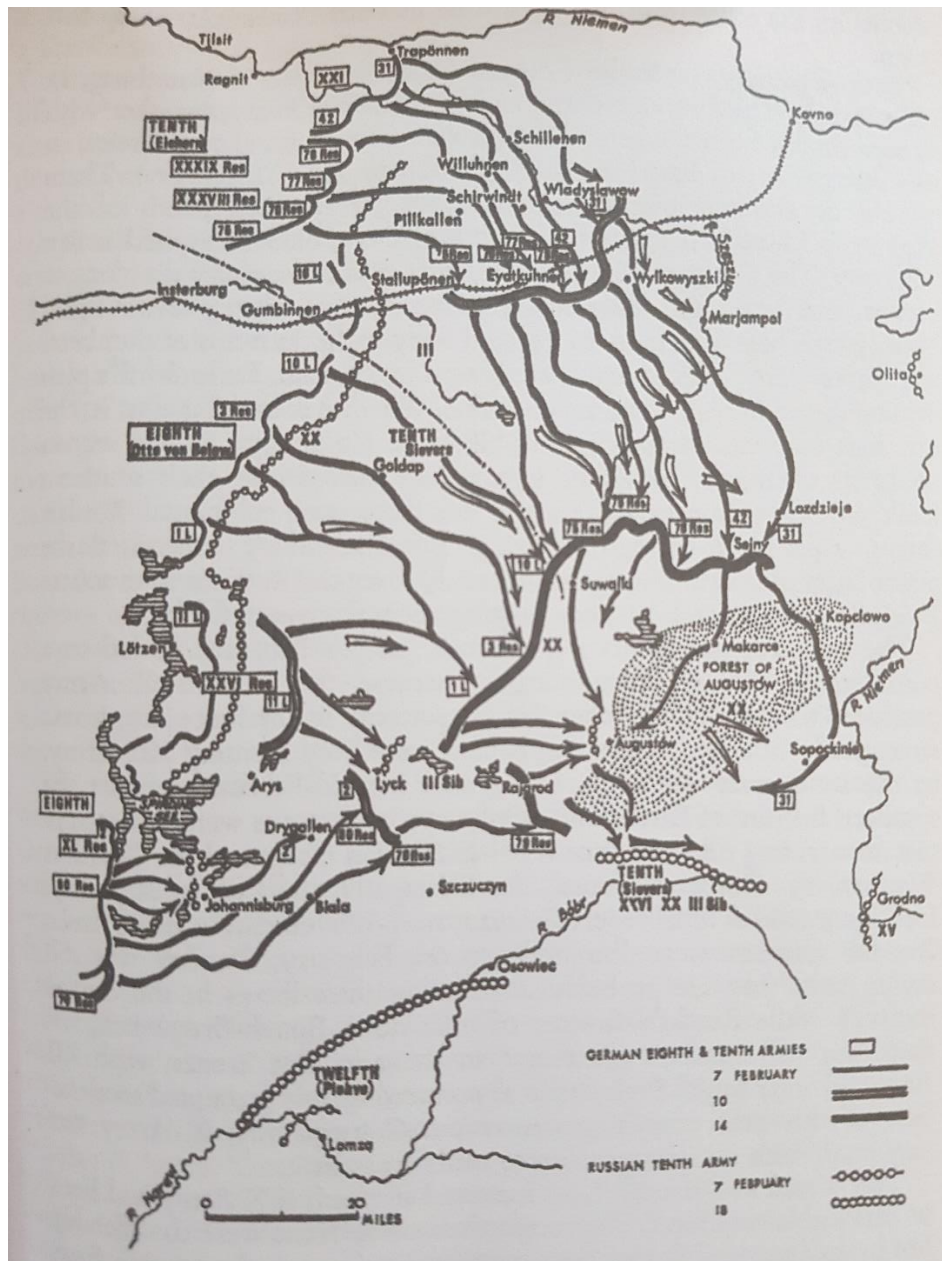
Annex I: Napoleon's positions along the Suwalki Corridor and extending to the Niemen River. Note that the Pripet Marshes and the Baltic Sea serve as a natural geographic left and right limit of advance.
Source: Palmer, 1969



Annex II: The Battle of Tannenberg (1914)

First contact between Russian and German forces along the Suwalki Corridor. Note the significance of rail lines, dense forests and lakes in the positioning of forces.

Source: Showalter, 2004, p. 175



Annex III: The Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes (1915)

A tactical German victory with no strategic significance. Railways enabled German forces to defeat the Russian army. The forests in Augustow play a crucial role as a terrain feature.

Source: Stone, 1998, p. 115

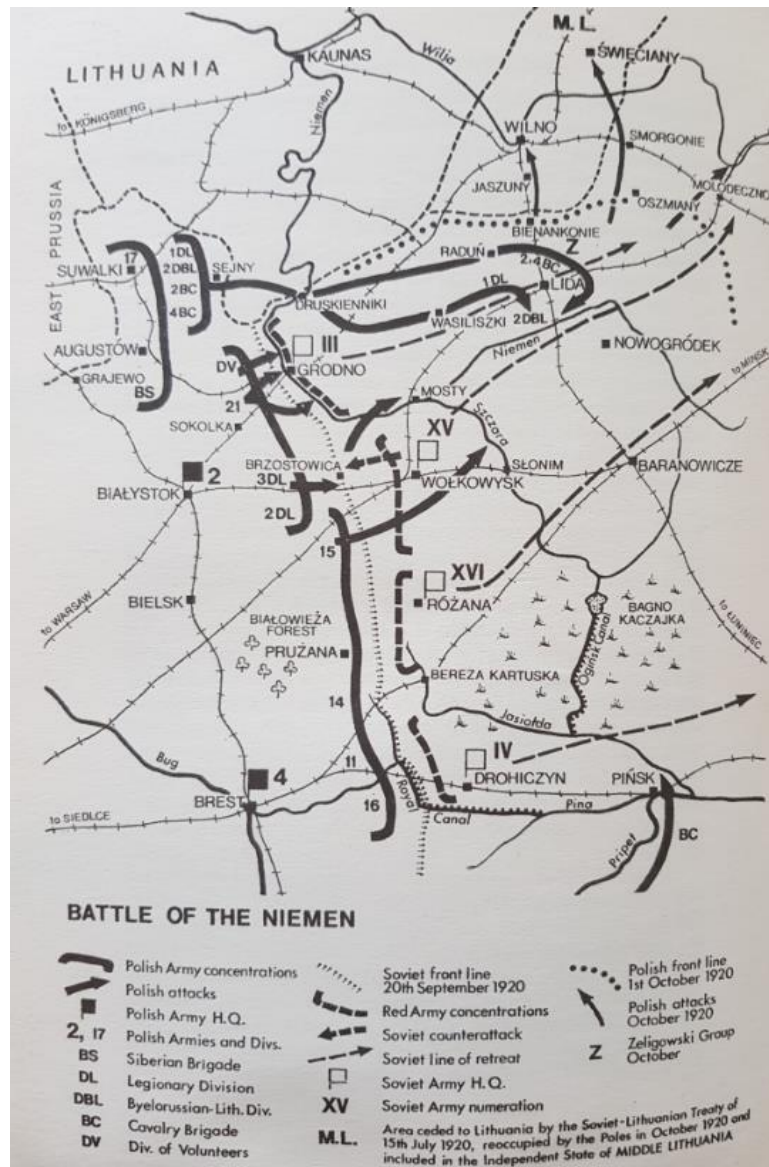


Annex IV: Polish Soviet War (1919)

Borderland military movements depict the Polish capture of Vilnius and the surrounding region.

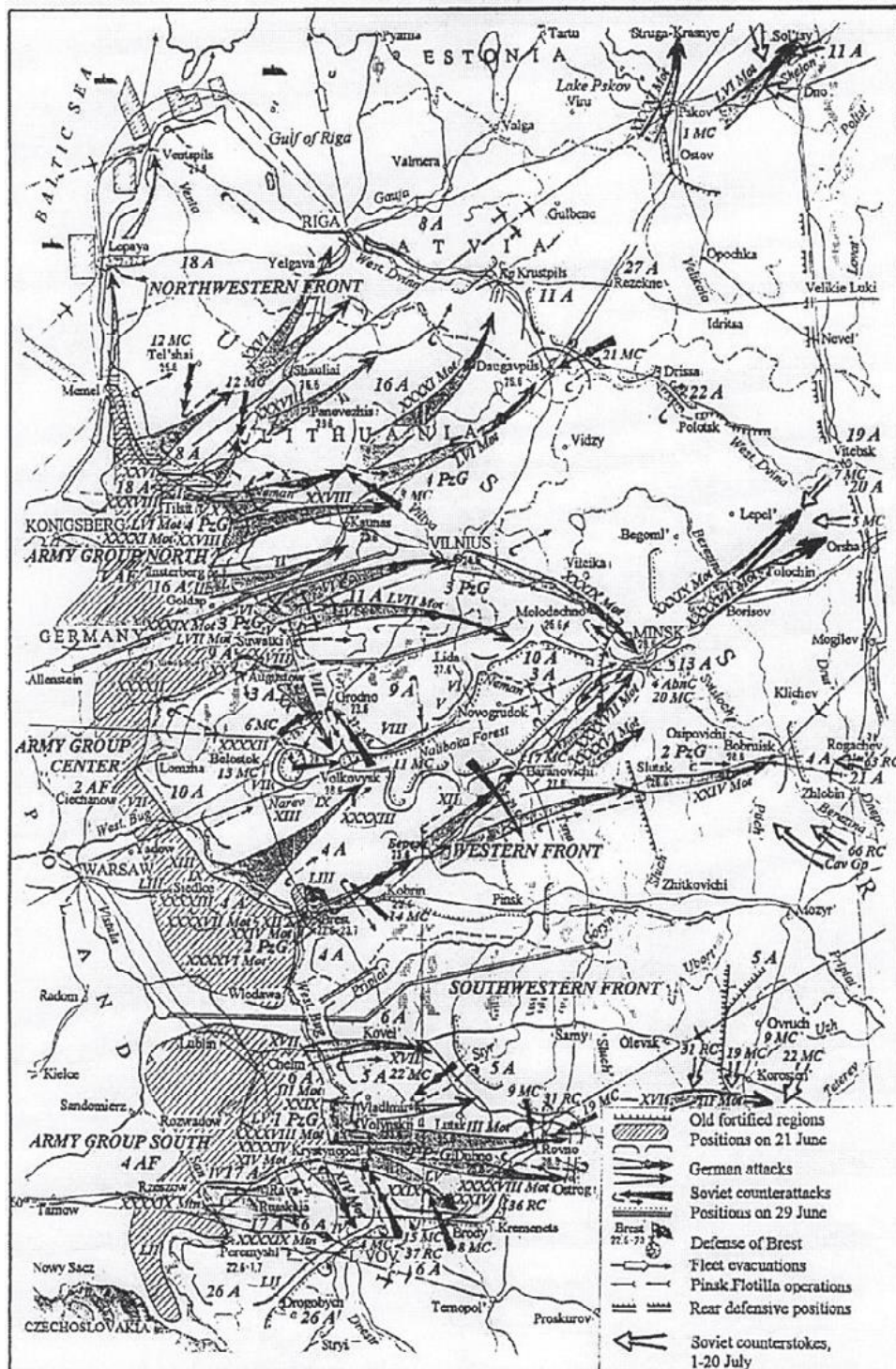
Warfare in the Suwalki Region proved to be austere with limited military objectives.

Source: Davies, 2003, p. 60



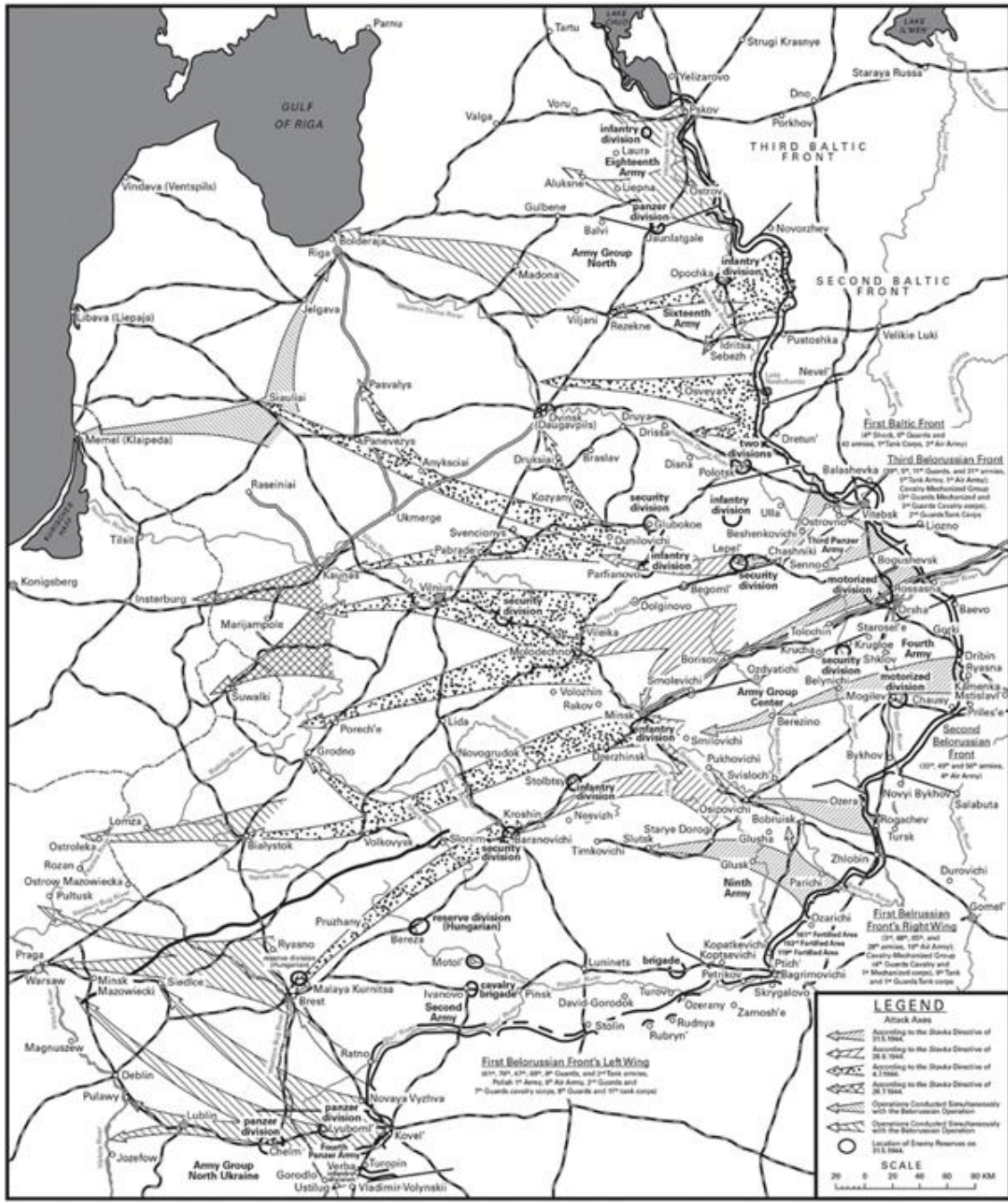
Annex V: Battle of the Niemen (1920)

Source: Davies, 2003, p. 234



Annex VI: Operation Barbarossa (1941) Shows the movements of *Wehrmacht* forces as they cross the Suwalki corridor. Demonstrates key objectives for Germany's mechanized forces as well as the clear delineation between Army Group Center and South along the Pinsk Marshes.

Source: Glantz, 2010, p. 30



Annex VII: Operation Bagration (1944)

Depicts the Soviet counter offensive Bagration. Soviet forces crossed Suwalki and conquered the former East Prussia.

Source: Harrison, 2016, p. 47

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“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.”

Signed: David A. Golonka 06/13/2019