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Resurrection of the First Guards Tank Army

Elite Russian armored unit sends a message to Europe.

- Abraham Blondeau
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A little over 70 years ago, the residents of Eastern Europe and Germany could hear the thunder of Russian tanks lumbering toward their homes and farms. After the Russians stopped the German offensive at Stalingrad and Kursk, they were on the attack, leaving a trail of devastation behind them. The warfare on the Eastern Front in World War II may have been the most brutal of the entire war, where soldiers were tortured and dismembered, women and children killed indiscriminately, and cities leveled into burning piles of rubble. Both sides participated in atrocities, seeking vengeance on the other. The Russians would eventually reach Berlin in 1945.

At the tip of this Russian spear was the First Guards Tank Army. The unit was created in 1942 to reinvigorate the battle against the Germans at Stalingrad and led the offensive into Germany. After the war ended, the First Guards Tank Army was a part of the occupation force of Eastern Germany and would have led the offensive into West Germany if the Cold War ever became a hot war. The unit represented the terror of the Russian military machine to many European armies, but it was disbanded in 1998.

Now the First Guards Tank Army is back, and it is on the border of Belarus.

Zapad Exercises

This summer, Russia is going to begin amassing troops for the biggest military exercise since the end of the Cold War. In an article by the *New York Times* titled "[Russia's Military Drills Near NATO Border Raise Fears of Aggression](#)," Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt wrote:

Russia is preparing to send as many as 100,000 troops to the eastern edge of NATO territory at the end of the summer, one of the biggest steps yet in the military buildup undertaken by President [Vladimir V. Putin](#) and an exercise in intimidation that recalls the most ominous days of the Cold War.

The troops are conducting military maneuvers known as Zapad, Russian for "west," in [Belarus](#), the Baltic Sea, western Russia and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. The drills will feature a reconstituted armored force named for a storied Soviet military unit, the First Guards Tank Army. Its establishment represents the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union that so much offensive power has been concentrated in a single command.

The Zapad exercises were also held in 2009 and 2013, but this year has the significant addition of the First Guards Tank Army. The Zapad exercise is a direct response to NATO activity on the western Russian border, including increased United States troop deployments to the Baltic states and Poland. This saber rattling has the direct intention of intimidating Europe, especially the smaller, Eastern countries who fall under the power of Russia or NATO and the European Union.

The Zapad exercises are not just theatrics. Russia has a substantial advantage in land forces in Eastern Europe compared to NATO. Russia has about 800 tanks in the region, which is more than what NATO has in the Baltics, Poland and Germany

combined, including contingent reinforcements from the United States.

The most threatening aspect of the Zapad exercises is the First Guards Tank Army, which resurrects a legacy of aggression and occupation, as the *New York Times* pointed out:

But there is nothing subtle about the tank-heavy unit at the heart of the coming Zapad exercise.

The First Guards Tank Army, made up mainly of forces transferred from other units, including elite motorized and tank divisions near Moscow, has an extensive pedigree. The unit battled the Germans during World War II on the Eastern Front and eventually in Berlin before becoming part of the Soviet force that occupied Germany. In 1968, it participated in the invasion of Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring.

After the end of the Cold War, the unit was withdrawn to Smolensk, near the border with Belarus, before being disbanded in 1998. But it was reconstituted by Mr. Putin to give the Russian military more offensive punch and present a visible demonstration of Russian power.

"That name was chosen for a reason," said Philip M. Breedlove, a retired four-star Air Force general who served as NATO commander. "It sends a very clear message to the Baltics and Poland."

The First Guards Tank Army will also be the first armored unit to receive the [newly developed T-14 Armata](#) main battle tank, which, in theory, is superior to the American M1A2 Abrams and the German Leopard 2. Germany is in the process of developing the Leopard 3 battle tank, but currently do not have any deployed. This represents another advantage and threat that Russia holds over NATO in the current strategic circumstances.

The Threat of Time and Space

Part of the threat is geographical. Eastern Europe lies right in the middle of the North European Plain, which stretches from the Pyrenees mountains to the Urals. Besides the occasional river, there is no geographic barrier separating many great powers. France, Germany and Russia all lie on this plain, making armed clashes against each other inevitable. In fact, Europe's history is mostly wars between these three powers.

For the current strategic situation, Poland, the Baltic states, Belarus and the Ukraine are all considered to be a part of a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. This is where any future battle between Russia and nato/Europe would be fought. With no natural barriers, armor becomes essential to have the advantage. The geography also favors the aggressor. With Russia having such a large superiority in numbers in such a vulnerable geographic region, both nato and Europe should be concerned, as Gen. Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, commented: "There is only one reason you would create a Guards Tank Army, and that is as an offensive striking force. This is not something for homeland security. That does not mean that they are automatically going to do it, but in terms of intimidation it is a means of putting pressure on allies."

While the exact strength of the First Guard Tanks Army is still undetermined, the offensive capabilities of the Russian forces remain clear. While conflict is not imminent, the potential for a Russian offensive does reveal how undermanned NATO has become, as the *New York Times* pointed out:

"Just the presence of the First Guards Tank Army near the Polish border would put nato on the horns of a dilemma," Mr. Karber [president of the Potomac Foundation] said. "Does nato reinforce the Baltics or defend eastern Poland? NATO does not have enough forces to do both in a short period of time. It adds to the political pressure Russia can bring to bear to keep the Baltic nations and Poland in line."

NATO finds itself in a position where it must sacrifice the security of two vital regions. The current security arrangements, including several troop deployments in the region by the U.S.A., Canada and Great Britain, are completely inadequate for a realistic defense. This pressure could have major ramifications for Europe, as the American-led NATO agreement appears to be more of a paper edifice than a legitimate defensive option. However, without some sort of broad military cooperation, each European nation would be swallowed up by the Russian military machine.

This leaves only one possible alternative: the creation of a European army separate from NATO. With the United States looking more and more unwilling to deploy more troops to Europe, this may become a much greater priority. For Americans, the Eastern European theater is a far off area that has little historical significance beyond the Cold War. For the Europeans, it is a much different story.

When Russian T-44 tanks began to push westward into Poland and Ukraine in 1943, the geographic advantage once enjoyed by the German aggressors was now used by the Soviet aggressors. The vast plains of Eastern Europe proved very difficult to defend. The depleted but well-trained German Wehrmacht were constantly on the "horns of a dilemma" where they did not have sufficient troops and tanks to defend two strategic objectives, and thus were forced to retreat or fight to the death against the Red Army. Russian tank columns were able to achieve deep breakthroughs in German lines, forcing a retreat back to Berlin. The Red Army left a bloody trail of destruction and slaughter that strikes fear in the people of Eastern Europe and Germany to this day.

While it is loathful to compare modern NATO troops to the Nazi Wehrmacht of World War ii, the strategic situations are similar. The memories are even stronger. The presence of the First Guards Tank Army on the vast open stretches

resurrects the fear of a similar offensive that could roll into the heart of the Continent, especially since the First Guards were the same unit that rolled over the soil of Poland and Germany 70 years ago. If the much larger and more desperate German Army of World War II could not stop the Russian armor, does NATO stand much of a chance today? This threat may seem distant to American military planners, but is very personal to European militaries, especially those in Germany.

Russia's Threats, Germany's Rise

This is the exact history and reaction Putin is seeking to provoke, hoping it will force Eastern Europe back into Russian orbit and intimidate the West. However, this gamble is likely to cause an aggressive response from the heart and powerhouse of Europe: Germany. With the brutal history of Soviet occupation hanging over Germany, and the lack of American will to stop Putin's aggressive behavior on their eastern flank, all of these actions are likely to catapult Germany to continental leadership, even more so than it already claims.

[Germany is already leading the European Union's initiative to create an integrated army](#), where the nations of Europe make one united army under a central command. This is already well underway with Dutch, German and Polish military units. However, much of Europe remains reluctant to surrender the autonomy of their armed forces. The increased buildup of Russian forces could very well be a trigger to expand the scope of European military integration, especially with Russia contemplating leaving some troops in Belarus following the Zapad exercise.

What is even more astounding is that [Europe is poised to become a military superpower](#). All it needs is a political union. If European defense budgets were combined, it would account for 15 to 16 percent of all defense spending, coming second to the United States. Russia accounts for around 7 percent of the global total.

The potential of Europe as a military superpower, partially triggered by Russian aggression and American weakness, is not a recent realization. All the way back in 1980, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote in the April *Plain Truth*:

You may be sure the West European leaders are conferring hurriedly and secretly about how and how soon they may unite and provide a united European military force so they can defend themselves! And so they will no longer have to give in meekly to Russia! And who will they blame for their humiliation and their necessity now to have a united Europe, with a united government, a common currency, and a common military force as great or greater than either the USSR or the U.S.A.? They will blame the United States!

Much of the blame for the current situation in Eastern Europe is being meted out to the United States, and the weakness of NATO is being blamed on President Donald Trump. While the United States has lacked the will to oppose Russian aggression for years, the tensions between Europe and Russia are much more historical.

The two great powers at play in Eastern Europe are Russia and Germany. This rivalry goes back for centuries, and many of the current strategic circumstances are merely a repetition of the past, only cloaked in modernity. The First Guards Tank Army perfectly symbolizes what is at the heart of the struggle; both Russia and Germany fought bitter wars for domination of Eastern Europe, and that generational conflict will facilitate the rise of a federalized Europe, just as Herbert W. Armstrong prophesied.

While war is not imminent, the deployment of the First Guards Tank Army on the western border of Russia is sending a message of intimidation to Europe. It is also reviving the memories of the last world war, where the First Guards were the vanguard of the Russian conquest of Eastern Europe. Thirty million people died on the Eastern Front, with the Soviets accounting for 90 percent of all Allied casualties during the war. This bloody history will further spur Germany to call for European integration. With NATO dangerously inadequate to stop any Russian offensives, the resurrection of the First Guards Tank Army is a vivid, urgent call to action for Germany and Europe to resurrect their own heritage: the Holy Roman Empire.

To learn more about the future of potential conflict between Russia and Germany, order our free booklets [The Prophesied 'Prince of Russia'](#) and [The Holy Roman Empire in Prophecy](#). ■

