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The Ice: The Confrontation That Cannot Thaw

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THE FIRE, THE ICE, AND THE FOG: A SUBLIMATION OF THE RUSSIAN THREAT

Europe's debate over Russia is sharply divided along ideological, epistemological, and geographical lines, crystallised by Fiona Hill's June 2025 warning that "Russia is at war with Britain." While sceptics downplay the threat and frame Western policy as the driver of Russian behaviour, others emphasise Russia's capabilities and ambitions yet struggle to reconcile its simultaneous weakness and aggression. Van Bladel resolves this through the fragile-state paradigm, where capacity limits foster risk-taking coercion rather than restraint. This brief (Part II in a three-part series) systematically assesses Russia's layered challenge: battle-hardened forces, grey-zone campaigns, conventional build-up in key regions, nuclear signalling, and adaptive but inconsistent execution. Democracies must prepare for rare but catastrophic "fat-tail" risks, emphasising endurance over spectacle—munitions stockpiles over prestige platforms, redundancy over efficiency, rehearsed decision-making over rhetorical unity—ensuring a measured response compatible with liberal democracy.

This is **Part II: The Ice**, focusing on Russia's long confrontation with NATO and Europe's security order—below, at, and occasionally across the threshold of armed conflict.

Part I: The Fire focused on Russia's war against Ukraine. One further Policy Brief will follow, covering Russia's internal struggle.

THE ICE: THE CONFRONTATION THAT CANNOT THAW

"When peace, especially a long peace, ends, the methods which it has introduced are the first enemies which the organised defenders of a country have to overcome."

Sir Cyprian Bridge, 1901.

1. A HOUSE DIVIDED: EUROPE'S STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

Europe's public debate about Russia has rarely been as loud, or as confused, as it is today — and it is distinct from official policy lines. From London to Brussels, from The Hague to Rome, arguments flare about whether Moscow poses an imminent danger or whether warnings of a clash are merely the product of alarmists, "warmongers", and arms lobbyists. The controversy surrounding Fiona Hill's remarks in *The Guardian*, and the cascade of responses that followed, revealed more than a dispute over facts. It exposed fundamental fault lines that shape Europe's strategic debate.

The Great Divide: Two Visions of the Russian Threat

Hill's intervention advanced two provocative claims: that Ukraine represented merely the opening phase of broader Russian dominance across Europe, and that Moscow was already conducting systematic hybrid warfare against the UK through poisonings, sabotage, and cyber-attacks, constituting an undeclared state of war demanding comprehensive societal response.¹

The reaction revealed deep fractures in the Western European strategic debate. Nine distinguished diplomats and analysts published a *Guardian* letter rejecting Hill's premises as "a classic example of how a seemingly rational argument based on a false premise and scanty evidence can lead to a mad conclusion," warning against inflaming "the warmongering mood of official Britain."² Political scientist John Mearsheimer dismissed NATO-Russia conflict forecasts as "strategic foolishness,"³ while economist Jeffrey Sachs characterized discussion of Putin "reconstructing the Russian empire" as "childish propaganda."⁴

The skeptics' alternative reading often masked deeper sympathies for Russian positions. They correctly identified Russian constraints but incorrectly assumed these limitations would translate into reduced external threat, reflecting a troubling tendency to rationalize Russian behavior through Western frameworks that treat aggression as flowing from strength rather than weakness. Such reasoning effectively provided intellectual cover for Russian aggression by treating it as natural responses to Western "provocations" rather than recognizing it as the primary cause driving states toward NATO membership.

This assessment exemplified the "democracy trap"—interpreting unclear evidence as indicating threat absence rather than recognizing that ambiguity itself may constitute strategic design. A counter-letter signed by over thirty Russia specialists defended Hill's assessment, yet even her defenders struggled to articulate why Russia might simultaneously appear threatening and constrained.⁵

The Triple Fracture

This controversy revealed that Europe's strategic discourse fractures along three persistent fault lines that extend far beyond the Hill debate itself, shaping how different societies and institutions approach Russian threat assessment across the continent.

The ideological fault line divides those who interpret Russian actions as unprovoked aggression requiring

defensive preparation from those who frame Russian behaviour as understandable responses to Western provocations, effectively treating Moscow's stated grievances as legitimate while questioning the wisdom of military countermeasures. This division persists despite mounting evidence of systematic Russian pressure campaigns, with critics characterizing rearmament advocacy as "rhetorical theatre" while defenders argue that preparation itself serves deterrent functions.

The epistemological fault line concerns how we know what we claim to know—whether we privilege intentions and rhetoric, or capabilities and observable behavior patterns. Europeans often approach identical evidence with radically different premises about causality and risk assessment, making consensus elusive even when underlying data are widely shared. This disparity reveals deeper assumptions about how rational actors behave in international politics, with many Western frameworks struggling to process adversaries whose external aggression emerges from internal fragility rather than confident strength.

The geographical fault line divides frontline states—Poland, the Baltic republics, Finland, and Sweden—which interpret Russian threats with clarity derived from historical experience and geographic proximity, from Western European societies where distance diminishes urgency and promotes relativization. The contrast is stark: while Baltic countries develop mass evacuation contingencies in response to regional tensions, voices in Western European capitals continue to question whether ambitious defense commitments remain realistic given production constraints and competing social priorities.

2. FROM OPINION TO ASSESSMENT: THE ANALYTICAL METHOD

Democracies excel at pluralism but struggle with speed under ambiguity. The solution is not to silence disagreement but to discipline it through systematic methodology that separates verifiable patterns from contested interpretations.



Three Forms of Analytical Discipline

Separate rhetoric from realised force. Intentions change quickly; assembled capability and posture shift slowly and are harder to fake. Russian strategic documents of the 2010s spoke of “risks” and “challenges,” while contemporary discourse centres on existential struggle with the “collective West.” This linguistic shift performs crucial political work domestically, but the strategic significance lies in observable force structure changes: the recreation of Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts, the systematic reinforcement of Kaliningrad’s area-denial capabilities, and the irreversible military integration with Belarus.

Treat uncertainty as design, not failure. Ambiguity is often the point of the adversary’s approach, especially in grey-zone operations that deliberately exploit legal and political ambiguity by operating below conventional Article 5 thresholds. The September 2025 Russian drone violations of Polish and Romanian airspace, forcing NATO’s first direct interceptions of Russian military assets since the conflict began, illustrate this pattern. Russia’s response followed a predictable escalatory pattern that illustrates deliberate ambiguity as strategic design. Initially, Moscow denied the drone violations were deliberate attacks on Polish targets, maintaining plausible deniability. When this position became untenable, Russian officials shifted to proposing discussions about the ‘incident,’ framing it as a technical matter requiring diplomatic resolution. Finally, spokesman Dmitry Peskov escalated dramatically, declaring ‘NATO is at war with Russia’ and casting defensive interceptions as proof of Western belligerence rather than legitimate responses to airspace violations.⁶

State confidence levels explicitly. Policymakers deserve to know what we know, what we infer, and what remains genuinely unknowable. The default error in democracies is overconfidence in intentions-based analysis and underinvestment in capabilities-based preparation. This brief assesses capabilities over declared intent, treating potential Russian aggression as fat-tail risk requiring disciplined preparation regardless of probability assessments in any given year.⁷

3. THE RUSSIAN THREAT IN FULL SPECTRUM

Russia’s challenge to European security operates across five interlocking layers that together create persistent confrontation with escalation potential. Each layer lowers thresholds for the next; together they create cumulative pressure designed to test Alliance cohesion while maintaining strategic ambiguity.

3.1 Military Culture: Endurance, Improvisation, Attrition

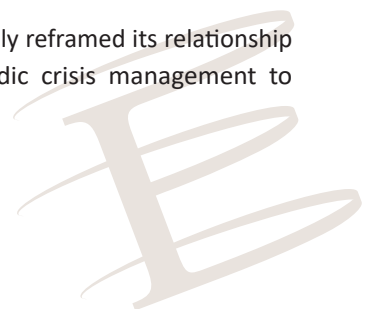
Three years of sustained, high-intensity combat have produced a force more experienced at fighting, absorbing punishment, and adapting under pressure than existed in February 2022. This battlefield-hardened military culture, long characterized by endurance over elegance and attrition over precision, has been reinforced rather than transformed by the Ukraine experience.

The war has hardened large segments of the force to operate under persistent UAV surveillance, electronic warfare interference, and logistics shortfalls—behaviors that translate into tactical stamina even when systems falter. Russian forces now deliver approximately 1,500 tanks and 3,000 armoured fighting vehicles annually, while artillery production has reached an estimated 3 million rounds per year—production levels that dwarf combined Western output and demonstrate sustained industrial mobilisation under pressure.

Crucially, Russian military effectiveness operates according to different metrics than Western systems. Where NATO militaries emphasize precision and efficiency, Russian doctrine prizes demonstrated will and persistence. This cultural asymmetry creates systematic analytical challenges for threat assessment. Russian operations appear simultaneously wasteful and resilient, chaotic and persistent, generating not despair but conviction within Russia that victory remains possible through endurance.

3.2 Permanent War: Normalising Confrontation

The Kremlin has systematically reframed its relationship with the West from episodic crisis management to



existential struggle, creating domestic discourse that justifies sustained sacrifice while projecting strategic ambiguity internationally. This permanent-war narrative serves three strategic functions across the threat spectrum.

Domestically, it legitimises extraordinary costs by reframing material sacrifice as spiritual necessity. The militarisation of civil society through educational reforms illustrates this operationalisation. In September 2022, Russia introduced mandatory weekly lessons called “Conversations About Important Things,” aligned to the National Security Strategy.⁸ More significantly, the long-standing “Fundamentals of Life Safety” curriculum was replaced nationwide with “Fundamentals of Homeland Security and Defence,” incorporating explicit military content including weapons handling, basic tactical skills, and “information-psychological warfare” alongside civil-defence topics.

This institutional scaffolding prioritises administrative scalability over immediate military efficacy.⁹ Youth militarisation expands through Yunarmiya, cadet programmes, and military-sports clubs, with compliance enforced through broader “discrediting the army” statutes that chill dissent. The system maintains momentum through rituals and mass-participation activities when resources prove thin, privileging volume of participation over depth of instruction.

Internationally, the narrative recasts offensive operations as defensive responses, presenting sabotage, espionage, and grey-zone pressure as “protective” measures rather than escalatory aggression. This rhetorical inversion enables routine nuclear references and staged exercises that cultivate constant background menace, raising perceived costs of Western counter-moves through what might be termed ambient escalation.

The objective appears to be conditioning rather than immediate escalation: blurring boundaries between conventional and strategic levels so that ordinary Alliance activity feels inherently escalatory, thereby constraining Western responses through pre-emptive deterrence.

3.3 Espionage, Sabotage, and the Grey Zone

Europe confronts a sustained, state-directed sabotage campaign whose intensity increased markedly during 2024 and remains elevated in 2025. Multiple research institutions document this escalation despite attribution challenges, with methodological differences explaining variance in incident counts while all major datasets point toward systematic escalation.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies records 51 incidents assessed as Russia-linked sabotage during 2024—nearly triple its 2023 count—with attributed targets including communications infrastructure (21%), transport nodes (18%), and facilities damaged by arson (27%).¹⁰ The International Institute for Strategic Studies documents an approximate quadrupling from 2023 to 2024, concentrated on energy, transport, and logistics nodes supporting Ukraine aid flows.¹¹

These operations demonstrate consistent characteristics. They exhibit systematic targeting of critical infrastructure—power interconnectors, undersea cables, rail hubs, defence manufacturing facilities, and dual-use logistics networks. They reflect deniable operational design, with Moscow increasingly relying on non-official operatives including criminal elements, ideological sympathisers, and commercial contractors recruited through online platforms while coordination reportedly remains with established intelligence entities including GRU Unit 29155.

Documented incidents illustrate this pattern’s scope and sophistication. Finnish authorities detained the shadow-fleet tanker *Eagle S* after it allegedly severed multiple telecommunications and power cables including the Estlink-2 electricity interconnector, causing estimated tens of millions in damage and requiring months of repairs.¹² Norwegian authorities confirmed an April 2025 cyber-attack in which suspected pro-Russian actors temporarily seized control of dam gates—marking the first verified infrastructure attack in Norway since 2022.¹³

The assassination dimension has re-emerged as a documented threat vector. NATO publicly confirmed



intelligence regarding a Russian-linked plot to assassinate Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger, connecting it to broader sabotage efforts including train derailment attempts, arson campaigns, and attacks on politicians' property. The apparent objective involves intimidating Europe's defence industrial base while signalling that Ukraine support carries personal consequences for decision-makers.¹⁴

Network adaptation following diplomatic expulsions reveals Russian operational flexibility. The 2022-23 expulsions significantly degraded traditional intelligence infrastructure, with MI5 assessing that "more than 400" Russian intelligence officers were removed from European postings by late 2022. However, Russian services appear to have adapted operationally, with Germany's BfV warning that Moscow was "purchasing" intelligence assets through financial incentives and compromise material, reportedly offering six-figure payments for sensitive penetrations.¹⁵

3.4 Conventional Build-up: Military Districts, Kaliningrad, Belarus, EW & Drones

Russia's systematic force-structure changes reveal strategic intent beyond the Ukraine theatre. Defence Minister Andrei Belousov's December 2024 declaration that the Armed Forces were preparing for "a possible military conflict with NATO in Europe in the next decade," explicitly linking the re-establishment of Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts to NATO enlargement, operationalises the permanent-war narrative through concrete force planning.¹⁶

This reorganisation serves multiple strategic functions within the fragile-state framework. It provides institutional mechanisms for managing prolonged confrontation while maintaining domestic legitimacy through visible military expansion. It creates regional commands specifically oriented toward NATO territories—the Leningrad Military District assumes responsibility for the Baltic frontier and newly NATO-member Finland, while the Moscow Military District covers sectors bordering Ukraine and Poland.

The clearest case is the Leningrad Military District (LMD). Moscow has announced the creation of the 44th Army Corps, likely based in Petrozavodsk, structured around two to three maneuver units and more than a dozen supporting formations. Additional division conversions in Leningrad and Pskov oblasts further strengthen this force pool. These formations are explicitly oriented toward Finland—a strategic response to Helsinki's accession to NATO—and underscore how the northern flank has become a prioritized theater in Russia's confrontation with the Alliance.

The second pillar is Kaliningrad, where force generation combines traditional formations with advanced enablers. The 11th Army Corps provides the ground backbone, while naval and air assets fall under Russian Navy command, cementing the exclave as a forward bastion. Satellite imagery shows a vast 1.6 km antenna complex, just 25 km from Poland, built to intercept NATO signals and relay to submarines or satellites. This supplements the long-range jamming and spoofing operations that already disrupt civilian and military systems in Norway and Finland, gradually eroding NATO's technological edge in the Arctic-Baltic theater. Since 2017, Russia has reinforced the exclave with layered air-defense systems, surface-to-surface and surface-to-sea missiles, and Iskander launchers capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Beyond the northern flank, on the western front and in Ukraine, force generation continues apace: the 3rd and 40th Army Corps, the 18th and 25th Armies, and the restructuring of divisions all point to sustained expansion.

Technology serves as force multiplier through "good-enough" scaling rather than comprehensive modernisation. Russia created a dedicated Unmanned Systems branch in early 2024, with the Iranian-assisted Yelabuga line delivering roughly 6,000 Geran/Shahed-type loitering munitions by late 2024, with sustained output projected into 2025-26. Persistent GNSS interference emanating from the Kaliningrad-Belarus corridor repeatedly disrupts civilian aviation across the Baltics and Nordics, creating

low-cost, high-friction pressure on reinforcement routes. Belarus represents the most consequential development through irreversible integration under Union-State arrangements. The Regional Grouping of Forces and Common Regional Air Defence System bind Belarusian and Russian units in unified operational frameworks, while Russia forward-deploys S-400, Pantsir, and Iskander-M systems, integrating Belarus's 465th Missile Brigade into Iskander operations and extending precision-strike coverage across Poland and Central Europe.

Critically, Belarus functions not only as staging area but as growing industrial amplifier. BELPOL assesses at least 500 Belarusian enterprises now fulfill Russia's state defence order, with planned 2027-2028 capacities including 300,000 Grad 122mm rockets, 450,000 152mm shells, 1,000,000 rounds of various calibres, 2,000-2,500 sighting systems for legacy armour, 20-25 EW systems, and up to 100,000 UAVs across strike/ISR/training types.

The Zapad-2025 joint strategic exercise illustrates how posture, industry, and integration converge. The main site shifted to Barysauski training ground, with auxiliary activity at fortified areas in Hrodna region and at Baranavichy/Lida airfields. The Russian contingent comprised approximately 1,200-2,000 personnel while Belarus fielded 5,000-7,000 across Ground, Air/Air Defence, Special Operations, and territorial troops. The concept emphasised UAV/EW mass, defensive combat, and stabilisation phases over offensive manoeuvre, with total troop figures remaining below Vienna Document observer thresholds while no OSCE observers were invited—maximising ambiguity while minimising transparency.¹⁷

3.5 Nuclear Signalling and Escalation Ladders

Nuclear signalling functions as continuous coercive communication rather than preparation for immediate employment. Russia's approach emphasises intra-war coercion and deliberate threshold ambiguity rather than automatic escalation, creating purposeful semantic elasticity that establishes deterrent baselines while enabling coercive messaging.

Russia's signalling infrastructure relies on dual-capable systems positioned for maximum visibility. Ground-launched Iskander-M brigades, long-range air and sea-launched cruise missile platforms, and newer systems like Kinzhal provide multiple channels for conspicuous movement and presence operations. Nuclear warheads remain under 12th Main Directorate custody until operational transfer, making custodial facility activity, convoy movements, and site posture changes observable signalling variables.

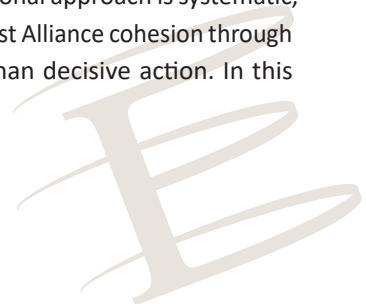
The escalation ladder operates through observable steps from rhetorical elevation through alerting gestures, forward deployments, non-nuclear strategic pressure, demonstration activities, to potential limited nuclear use presented doctrinally as responses to existential threats. Moscow's strategy appears focused on extracting deterrent value from steps 2-4, where costs remain manageable and ambiguity serves coercive purposes.

Geographic amplification through Belarus deployment and Kaliningrad infrastructure creates nuclear signalling stages near NATO territory. Geographic proximity shortens political decision cycles in Brussels and national capitals, serving Russian strategic purposes even when actual nuclear readiness may lag behind signalling activities.

Within the fragile-state framework, nuclear signalling offers high-visibility, relatively low-cost political theater that compensates for conventional shortfalls while supporting domestic legitimacy narratives. Yet this approach faces diminishing returns through normalization, while the gap between signalling and actual capability creates vulnerabilities through potential miscalculated responses, technical failures, or alliance adaptations that reduce signalling effectiveness.

4. FAT-TAIL RISK AND THE LOGIC OF DEMOCRATIC PREPAREDNESS

The evidence assembled across multiple domains indicates Russia's confrontational approach is systematic, persistent, and designed to test Alliance cohesion through sustained pressure rather than decisive action. In this



environment, arguments for comprehensive preparedness carry stronger strategic logic than approaches that defer investments pending clearer threat indicators.

4.1. The Preparedness Paradox

Democratic societies face structural challenges in sustaining resource allocation for persistent, ambiguous threats. The strategic requirements identified—ten-to-fifteen-year institutional development projects, sustained cross-party consensus, patient procurement processes—demand precisely the kind of long-term political unity that societal debates reveal to be increasingly elusive.

When probability assessments remain uncertain but potential consequences would prove catastrophic, prudence demands preparation regardless of precise forecasting ability. This fat-tail risk framework suggests treating potential Russian aggression as requiring disciplined preparation regardless of probability assessments in any given year, particularly when adversary behavior patterns increase unpredictability through execution gaps.

The challenge extends beyond resource allocation to political sustainability requirements. Building public understanding of why “unglamorous” capabilities—ammunition production capacity, infrastructure redundancy, maintenance and repair systems—provide more effective deterrence than high-visibility procurement programs becomes essential for countering persistent confrontation strategies.

4.2. Strategic Preparedness Framework

Effective response requires systematic preparedness across three overlapping capability domains addressing specific vulnerability categories. All three elements demand immediate implementation without further delay.

Immediate resilience focuses on building capacity to absorb and respond to grey-zone pressure without inadvertent escalation. Priority areas include munitions

stockpiles sized for sustained high-tempo operations, alternative navigation systems and degraded-mode operating procedures, rapid repair capabilities for critical infrastructure, and streamlined legal frameworks enabling swift military movement across Alliance borders.

Structural deterrence develops capabilities that systematically raise costs and reduce benefits of Russian pressure campaigns. This encompasses layered integrated air and missile defence systems, hardened and redundant logistics networks, diversified industrial supply chains with surge capacity, and interoperable Alliance command structures capable of operating under electronic warfare conditions.

Adaptive capacity creates institutional flexibility to respond effectively as Russian approaches evolve. This requires professional military education emphasizing multi-domain operations, rehearsed civilian-military coordination mechanisms, and strategic communication capabilities that maintain public support during extended periods of tension.

4.3. Critical Vulnerability Assessment

Preparedness efforts must prioritise interconnected vulnerabilities that Russian operations specifically target because they prove expensive to replace and difficult to defend comprehensively. Information infrastructure dependencies including navigation timing systems, undersea communication cables, and electrical grid interconnections support both military operations and civilian economic activity, making them attractive targets for campaigns designed to impose costs without triggering clear retaliation thresholds.

Critical civilian infrastructure agencies—including postal services, railway operators, and electrical grid operators—represent essential societal resilience assets that require dedicated technical resilience planning. The Ukraine conflict has demonstrated that disrupting these systems creates cascading effects across both military logistics and civilian life, making them high-value targets for hybrid warfare campaigns. These agencies must

develop redundant communication systems, alternative operational procedures for degraded conditions, and rapid repair capabilities to maintain essential services during sustained pressure.

Industrial surge limitations encompass production bottlenecks for critical munitions, secured supply chains for energetic materials, and repair-forward maintenance concepts that reduce logistics tail vulnerabilities. Alliance coordination mechanisms require pre-negotiated response thresholds, standardized multinational operating procedures, crisis communication protocols, and common legal frameworks for host-nation support during emergencies.

5. COMMUNICATING PRUDENCE IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

Democratic leaders must speak clearly about risk without lapsing into theatre. Three forms of communication discipline help sustain public support for long-term preparedness investments. First, explain why low-probability events deserve preparation when impact is high; citizens grasp insurance logic in private lives and will grasp it in public life if treated with respect. Second, publish preparedness dashboards—limited but meaningful—to anchor debate in facts rather than speculation. Third, avoid moralising domestic divide; fellow citizens who weight risks differently are not enemies.

The central communication challenge involves building public understanding that persistent preparation matters for deterring adversaries whose behavior patterns reflect internal fragility driving external aggression. This requires acknowledging uncertainty about timing while demonstrating systematic preparation across multiple scenarios and time horizons.

Strategic communication must also address the temporal asymmetry between democratic decision-making processes and compressed timelines Russian pressure campaigns create. Building consensus around prudent preparation measures requires explaining how current political time converts into future military time and societal time during crisis periods.

6. CONCLUSION: BACK TO THE DIVIDE

The confrontation with Russia may not thaw soon, but this reality should sharpen rather than corrode liberal character. Europe can remain plural and open while preparing for long, fat-tailed contest with a fragile but dangerous adversary. The method involves letting assessment decide: observe capabilities, map rehearsals, measure preparedness, and invest in endurance.

The societal divisions documented throughout this analysis are not merely obstacles to overcome but ongoing features of democratic politics requiring management while building effective responses to documented threats. Democratic debate becomes strategic asset when it produces better policies through rigorous analysis rather than liability preventing necessary action.

Russia's challenge to Europe represents fundamental contest of institutional resilience and strategic patience. The outcome will be determined not by dramatic military confrontations but by which side can better sustain its approach over time while adapting to changing circumstances. European success requires acknowledging that the post-Cold War period of strategic complacency has ended while developing new frameworks for democratic strategic competition.

The choice facing European societies is not between war and peace but between vulnerability and resilience. Societies that can absorb shocks through redundant infrastructure, stockpiled supplies, rehearsed procedures, and institutional flexibility possess strategic advantages over those optimizing for efficiency during stable periods but proving brittle when pressures accumulate.

Understanding Russia's behavior through the fragile-state framework carries urgent implications for European policy development extending beyond conventional threat assessments. The same system producing impressive drone manufacturing capabilities while generating unsustainable casualty rates continues posing genuine threats to European security precisely because internal pressures drive rather than constrain external aggression.

This analysis suggests strategic certainty about Russian intentions and precise timing remains elusive not because of analytical failures but because of inherent unpredictability fragile state adversaries exhibit. The execution gap between plans and implementation means even Russian leadership may not know precisely how strategic pressure will unfold. This uncertainty counsels not inaction but systematic preparation across different time horizons, developing capabilities remaining useful across different contingencies.

Cool heads, deep stocks, and institutions that can fight through friction—that is how democracy answers confrontation it did not choose and cannot simply wish away. The western dilemma resolves not through choosing war or peace but through recognising the choice as pay now or pay more later. Democracies need not mimic authoritarian mobilisation to prevail; they must convert political time into military and societal time through boring budgets over brave speeches, consent over compulsion, and delivery over declaration.

This is how resilience becomes strategy, and how strategy earns consent in the confrontation that cannot thaw.

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