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## Wargaming Russia's Military Options in Ukraine

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Stratfor conducted extensive scenario planning when considering Russia's offensive military options toward Ukraine. In this video we will examine some of the broader themes and deductions.

At the present time, Russian forces augmenting pro-Russia separatists are positioned in Crimea and southeastern Ukraine. Geographically, the area comprises rolling flat plains with no large-scale terrain features that can serve as anchors for military forces, except for the Dnieper River, running north south through central Ukraine.

When looking broadly at Russia's military course of action, Stratfor examined the limited options first. The initial scenario we considered was the most limited of them all. In this paradigm, Russia conducted small incursions along the entirety of its shared border with Ukraine in an effort to threaten various key objectives in the region and by doing so, spreading out Ukrainian combat power as much as possible. From the Russian military perspective, this is efficient and effective, but it wouldn't realize any additional political or security objectives not already underway. However, such a move would likely be used in conjunction with any future military actions by Russia or pro-Russia separatists.

Another limited option is a small expansion of current Separatist lines to the north, incorporating the remainder of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts to make the territory more self-sustaining. This

offensive would mainly consist of direct engagement of Ukrainian forces that are concentrated along the separatist held area.

One of the most commonly rumored options entails Russia driving along Ukraine's southern coast to link up Crimea with separatist positions in eastern Ukraine. For this scenario it was assumed that planners would make the offensive front broad enough to secure Crimea's primary water supply, sourced from the Dnieper. This water feature is significant because much of Russia's defensive line would be anchored on the key defensible terrain in the region: namely, the Dnieper River. This would achieve a land bridge and secure supply lines into Crimea.

In conducting such an offensive, an initial thrust would move forces rapidly through Ukraine toward the city of Kherson and Nova Kakhovka on the Dnieper River, where they would set up defensive positions. One of the potential constraints to this scenario is the fact that lines of supply would extend for quite some distance along a thin, difficult to defend, stretch of land.

Another scenario that was considered involves seizing the entire southern coast of Ukraine to connect Russia and its security forces in the breakaway region of Transdnistria. The logic goes that this would cripple Kiev by cutting it off from the Black Sea, thereby securing all Russian interests in this region in a continual arc. This would require a complicated and dangerous bridging operation over a large river, with an extended and vulnerable logistics train.

In this scenario, defensive positions cannot be anchored on the Dnieper River. This would require a greater number of forces to hold the ground, without the luxury of a geography barrier. The port city of Odessa would need to be captured eventually, which would be a massive hit to the Ukrainian economy.

The two scenarios that extend along the coast possess serious flaws, leaving Russia's force in extremely exposed locations. An extended frontage over relatively flat terrain, bisected by riverine features, is far from ideal. There are options for Russia to go beyond this; however, this would involve taking the southern half of eastern Ukraine in an overall attempt to commit less combat power.

However, this still leaves a massively exposed Russian flank and removes the security bonus of the Dnieper. A significant portion of the defensive lines would not be anchored on the Dnieper River. Instead, it would be stretched along the Kharkiv-Dnepropetrovsk axis, controlling these two cities, as well as Zaporizhia.

One last scenario considered by Stratfor could rectify these problems. In short, Russia could seize all of eastern Ukraine up to the Dnieper, controlling all of the main crossing points, and using the major obstacle of the River as the defensive front line. Yet, taking this entire area would require a significant amount of forces moving into eastern Ukraine. The resulting occupation would also require a massive counter-insurgency campaign including operations in parts of Kiev, as well as the cities of Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk and others, where a high level of resistance would be expected.