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NATO 'Scrambling to Catch Up' to Russian Military — British Report

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Russia's ultra-modern weaponry and tactics would give it a battlefield edge if faced with British troops, a U.K. Defense Ministry report has found.

The report, marked "official sensitive," was seen by Britain's The Times newspaper. It warned that NATO countries were "scrambling to catch up" to Russia's hybrid tactics employed in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's superior military hardware was found to give it a "significant capability edge" over British equivalents, while Russian techniques in hijacking enemy drones, hacking, transmission disruption and jamming were described as a "real game changer" which threatened NATO's capabilities in the air and on the ground.

Britain's ability to wage war against a rival state has diminished since the end of the Cold War, having largely fought only counterinsurgency campaigns, said sources cited by The Times. By contrast, Moscow has enhanced and modernized its military with a specific emphasis on outgunning NATO.

General Sir Richard Shirreff, Britain's former top officer to NATO, claimed that Britain's military had grown complacent.

"Our capability has been dramatically hollowed out," he said. "Due to the fact that some of our high-end military capabilities have been eroded since 2003, we must find ways to "fight smarter" at the tactical level, acknowledging some adversaries may be armed with weapons that are superior to our own," the report states.

Russia's BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket launcher was cited as a particular strategic weakness. The weapon, which boasts a 90 km range, shoots some 30 km further than its British equivalent.

A planned £3.5 million ($4.5 million) British fleet of light armored vehicles was also said to be "disproportionately vulnerable" to Russian mortar and rocket fire.

Russia's manipulation of communications and social media to initiate smear campaigns and spread disinformation was also highlighted.

The study aims to educate NATO commanders on Russian tactics employed during the Ukraine conflict, precipitated by Russia's annexation of Crimea in February 2014.

Russia has the world's fourth largest defense budget, with $65.6 billion spent last year, says the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Britain has the world's fifth largest military budget, spending $56.2 billion.

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