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Press release

Civil society intelligence agency lifts the lid on Russia's 'little green men'

LONDON, 24 October 2014: When uniformed irregular forces wearing no insignia moved to control key locations in Crimea in March 2014, few believed the Kremlin's claim that they were local volunteer self-defence forces. Dubbed 'Martians' or 'little green men' by locals and the media, the soldiers were wearing recent-issue matching uniforms, carrying Russian military weapons and equipment, and using military vehicles with Russian number plates.

It soon became clear that the men preparing the way for Russia's annexation of Crimea were from elite Russian military units, including paratroopers and special forces from the *Vozdushno-Desantnye Voyska* (VDV) or Russian Airborne Troops. By April, Russian President Vladimir Putin had publicly acknowledged the presence of Russian troops in Crimea, claiming they were there to protect local ethnic Russians. It is thought that paratroopers from the 7th Guards Air Assault Division, 31st Guards Independent Air Assault Brigade, 45th Spetsnaz Regiment and 76th Guards Air Assault Division, all part of the VDV, were on the ground in Crimea.

In August, the Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, awarded the 76th Guards Air Assault Division the Order of Suvorov, one of Russia's highest awards, for 'courage and heroism', including during the operation in Crimea. By then, the division was fighting alongside other 'little green men' in eastern Ukraine, where dozens of Russian paratroopers were reportedly killed and 10 soldiers from the 98th Guards Airborne Division were captured by Ukrainian forces.

With its origins in the 1930s, Russia's airborne force is currently the largest and most highly-mechanised in the world. Having fought with distinction during World War II, against the mujahideen in Afghanistan and in the Five-Day War with Georgia, the presence of Russian airborne troops in Crimea and eastern Ukraine only confirms their status as an elite force within the Russian military. Recent improvements in training and equipment have made the VDV an even more formidable force, one that should not be underestimated.

However, as journalists pore over photographs of Russian military equipment and Western military commanders dust off Cold War-era manuals, it has become clear that very little is really known about Russia's airborne forces outside the Russian military. To address this situation, Open Briefing, the world's first civil society intelligence agency, has today published *Strategic Order of Battle: Russian Airborne Forces*.



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This handbook provides an in-depth look at the ongoing transformation of Russia's airborne forces, together with a strategic order of battle that details personnel and equipment levels for each of Russia's four airborne divisions, four independent air assault brigades, Spetsnaz regiment, headquarters units and training division. As such, it represents the most detailed open source intelligence on Russia's airborne forces available today.

The order of battle has been compiled by Rob O'Gorman CD, a senior analyst at Open Briefing and a Russian military expert. Speaking at the publication launch, O'Gorman, a former paratrooper and military intelligence officer, commented:

'Any would-be aggressor force – military or paramilitary – would be gravely mistaken to underestimate Russia's military capabilities in this domain.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will have his eye on the Caucasus in particular, but in line with their use in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, airborne troops may be deployed to establish corridors to Russian-speaking enclaves, such as Abkhazia, Transnistria or Kaliningrad, in the event Putin continues his strategy of incremental invasion.

Either way, Russia's airborne forces will continue to be found wherever and whenever Russia wants high-quality troops to make a difference.'

Strategic Order of Battle: Russian Airborne Forces will be of significant value to journalists and researchers, as well as intelligence analysts, military planners and anyone with an interest in the Russian military or airborne forces in general.

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Notes to editors

1. *Strategic Order of Battle: Russian Airborne Forces* is published on 24 October 2014. It can be purchased from <http://www.openbriefing.org/thinktank/publications/russian-airborne-forces> for £95 (a PDF version is available at a 20% discount). Sample pages can also be downloaded from that URL.
2. Rob O'Gorman is available for interview and comment. Please call **+1 613 862 9653**, Skype **robogorman** or email **pathfinderrob@gmail.com** to arrange. Mr O'Gorman is based in Ottawa, Canada.
3. Rob O'Gorman CD is a senior analyst at Open Briefing and a Russian military expert. A former Canadian Forces intelligence officer, he has over 20 years' experience providing tactical, operational and strategic assessments. O'Gorman also served as a paratrooper with A (Para) Company, 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.
4. Open Briefing is the world's first civil society intelligence agency. It is a unique not-for-profit social enterprise, which provides intelligence and research services to civil society organisations and concerned citizens.
5. For more information about Open Briefing, please visit **www.openbriefing.org** or contact the executive director, Chris Abbott, on **+44 (0)20 7193 9805** or **chris.abbott@openbriefing.org**.