

# Return to Forecasting – ‘Flashpoints: The Emerging Crisis in Europe’

by George Friedman - July 13, 2023

As I hope you will remember, last month I had been writing about [the process of forecasting](#), sharing with our subscribers the process we will use to draw up the next 30-year forecast by around the new year. This process was rudely interrupted by the Wagner Group, Vladimir Putin and the rest, and I had to divert my attention to more immediate questions. I don't think Russia has regained its footing, but it is time to return to the forecasting project.

We are drawing these forecasts from my book “Flashpoints: The Emerging Crisis in Europe,” which was published in 2015. Its importance is that it is structured very differently than the forecast presented in “[The Next 100 Years.](#)” It is the precursor to a forecast, a checksum on prior forecasts, and more of an analysis. An analysis is an attempt to state the realities in a region and provides a framework for thinking about the future or evaluating prior forecasts. In this case, the analysis has been extracted from the book and sets a 2015 benchmark for prior works and a work table for future forecasts.

The following are summaries of some of the predictions from “Flashpoints: The Emerging Crisis in Europe.” (Keep in mind that these were published in 2015, so they were written in 2014.)

## Mainland and Peninsula

1. If the West succeeds, the key borderland will be along the Ukrainian-Russian frontier. If Russia triumphs, the line will be here, in the borderlands that Russia and the peninsula have struggled over for centuries. The outcome of the Ukraine struggle will likely determine where American soldiers will be based in the next generation.
2. The Russians are now struggling to increase their influence in Moldova, while Romania, backed by the United States, is trying to restrain them. It is a flashpoint not in the sense of war breaking out but in terms of potential internal strife.
3. Since the Dnieper also flows to the capital, Kyiv's access to the sea could be lost. It matters who controls Moldova. For Russia and Ukraine, it is the path to the Carpathians and security. For a

Western power, it is a jumping-off point to the east.

## Russia and Its Borderlands

1. Russia must have access to Germany, and it must have access without other countries adding surcharges so high that Germany will look elsewhere for energy and force Russia to keep its prices steady and swallow the surcharges.
2. Russia must, therefore, achieve a degree of control over Belarus and Ukraine, a struggle that is now underway. It must then extend its control, to some degree, to Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania.
3. Russia can't simply leave the future of the borderland open.
4. Russia faces no military threat now, but it also knows that military threats emerge suddenly and unexpectedly from the peninsula. Given that Ukraine's future is uncertain, that could come quickly. Russia doesn't have to use sudden military force to secure its interests, nor does it have that kind of force. But Russia would be reckless if it wasn't in the process of taking steps.
5. Russia does not want to overtly dominate the region. But it does want to limit the power of NATO to its east. It also wishes to limit European integration, which could evolve into a strategic threat, by offering Eastern Europe economic alternatives.
6. The fundamental question is the relationship between Germany and Russia, and this is a question that will define Europe as a whole. It is the relationship between the mainland and the peninsula. Germany is the dominant economic power on the peninsula, and Russia dominates the mainland. Between them, they will shape, if not decide, the fate of the borderland.
7. If Germany and Russia align, this would determine the fate of Poland, the Baltics and Belarus. This is not to say they would be occupied militarily. It would mean, however, that with the two major continental powers cooperating with each other, these countries would be compelled to cooperate. Economically and politically, they would have limited options.
8. For now, the Russians have other issues, but if anything goes wrong, the Baltic states will pose a significant threat to Russia. And in Russian thinking, something will always go wrong. Because of this fear, the Baltics are one place where the Russians can't relax. There are long-term flashpoints throughout the borderland, but this is the immediate flashpoint in the borderland between the peninsula and the mainland.

As you can see this type of analysis summarizes much more complex issues and extracts and tersely states the important variables. In some ways, it is the most exacting of the steps of forecasting, because it identifies important variables and establishes the parameters that will drive the forecast. These variables must be stated in a way that hides the massive analysis that is so unwieldy. Using complex and lengthy analysis as a platform for forecasting is impossible because forecasting involves searching for the essence and not the totality of reality.

Extracting these terse variables from the complex analysis is what we will be working on before the end of the year. This is the most complex part, but if done properly, in concert with other data, it makes forecasting relatively easy. Of course, accurate forecasts cost extra.

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