

Current Russia Military Affairs

Assessing and Countering Russian Strategy,
Operational Planning, and Modernization

John R. Deni
Editor



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Cover photo: Russian T-14 Armata tanks parading through Moscow, imgur.com/gallery/og5VwuM, accessed June 12, 2018.

Editor's Note

THIS compendium of essays is based on presentations delivered at a one-day workshop sponsored jointly by the U.S. Army War College and the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), with additional funding generously provided by the U.S. Army War College Foundation. The invitation-only event was held on May 1, 2018 at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC and included North American and European experts from the policymaking community, academia, think tanks, the intelligence community, and the military services. These individuals gathered together to address Russia's geopolitical strategy, its operational capacity and capabilities, and its military modernization efforts, all in an effort to inform EUCOM and U.S. Department of Defense planning as well as strengthen allied deterrence in Europe.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, its invasion of Ukraine, its large-scale no-notice military exercises, its violations of allied sovereignty, and its norm-shattering actions elsewhere across Europe in recent years have brought collective defense, deterrence, and near-peer competition back to the fore of transatlantic security. The West in general and the United States specifically are slowly waking to the new reality in relations with Russia. At best, Russian foreign policy is destabilizing what had been a relatively quiescent theater, compelling the West to reinforce its deterrent posture. At worst, Moscow is engaged in an unofficial hybrid war against the West, employing cyber-attacks, information manipulation, political interference, electronic warfare, and other methodologies designed to avoid provoking a full-throated alliance response and invocation of Article 5.

Correctly identifying and understanding Moscow's motivations, its modalities, and its vulnerabilities are critical to successfully constructing and maintaining a response that defends and secures the United States, its allies, and its vital interests. The essays of this compendium seek to do just that, providing decision-makers and policy-makers in both the executive and legislative branches with not simply analysis and insights, but also recommendations for strategy or policy. The Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College is proud to have convened this expert group of thinkers in an effort to benefit U.S. national security.

— John R. Deni, PhD

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Russian Strategic Objectives: It's About the State

Eugene Rumer

THROUGHOUT Vladimir Putin's nearly two decades as the man in charge of the Russian state, he has been often described as a capable tactician who can respond quickly to a rapid shift in the circumstances facing him and his country, but does not have strategy for the long term. The most recent episode that triggered such comments was the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, when Putin annexed Crimea and unleashed a war in eastern Ukraine. He succeeded in damaging Ukraine's prospects for success in transforming its economy, its political system, and joining the West. But he accomplished that at a steep price – a ruined relationship with Ukraine and the West, and a blow to Russia's prospects to modernize its own economy.

events of the late-1980 and 1990s from happening to Russia again.

To understand this and fully appreciate the significance of that era, one has to follow the trajectory of Russian foreign policy since 2000 as well as the mentality of Putin and his inner circle. Such an exercise would produce a very different picture of the Russian president's priorities and the strategy that he has employed to achieve his goals.

The trajectory of Putin's life is well known. Born to working class 'greatest generation' parents and raised in modest circumstances, he was treated well by the Soviet system. It provided him with an education, a prestigious career path, and a promise of upward mobility, and thus good reasons to believe that the system worked. Other men in Putin's entourage – Security Council secretary Nikolay Patrushev, Federal Security Service chief Alexander Bortnikov, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu – came from comparable backgrounds, followed more or less similar career paths, and shared similar beliefs. They probably were not hard core Communist ideologues, but they belonged to the Communist Party and were loyal servants of the Soviet state, proud of its accomplishments and confident of its – and their – future.

“Born to working class ‘greatest generation’ parents and raised in modest circumstances, he was treated well by the Soviet system.”

This criticism of Putin would have been fair if his goal had been good relations with the West and with Ukraine, and a modernized economy and political system in Russia. However, his goal is different – it is to protect the Russian state as he and his cohort of top national security decision makers understand it and to prevent the

All of that crashed rapidly and unexpectedly in the late-1980s. The ideology, the economy, and the very country collapsed with hardly any warning. In 1991, when the Soviet Union broke up, Putin was 39 years old. What greater catastrophe could have befallen a man who was brought up believing in the Soviet state, brought up

by the Soviet state, and committed to serving the Soviet state? For many who were shocked by Putin's 2005 description of the break-up of the USSR as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, this ought to provide some context for the Russian leader's remark. The event that was celebrated in the West as the beginning of a new bright era is still remembered as a tragedy by a whole generation of Russians who were left without a country.

Worse yet, the break-up of the USSR was only the beginning of new Russia's troubles. The decade of the 1990s was truly a horrible

well as its heartland. The government of Tatarstan, an oil-rich autonomous republic on the Volga River carved out for itself a degree of control over its own affairs from the federal government that raised doubts about the latter's sovereign control there. Moscow's mayor Yuri Luzhkov ran the capital with little regard to the federal authorities. In the North Caucasus, Chechnya rose in an open rebellion forcing the Russian government to wage a protracted military campaign there that lasted into the next century. It seemed the very existence of the Russian state was at stake.

The Kosovo campaign and de-facto independence in its aftermath was a signal to the Putin cohort that a weak country could be dismembered against its wishes.

decade for the country as it limped along from one crisis to another. The succession of crises, both political and economic, was accompanied by a profound transformation in the security environment of Russia. The post-World War II security buffer that protected it from the West – which was the source of devastating invasions in 1812 and 1941 – was gone. The Warsaw Pact – the outer ring of the Soviet empire – dissolved and its former members were clamoring to join NATO and the European Union. The inner ring of the empire – the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova – were now independent states, also seeking to secure ties to the West.

However, Russia faced more challenges even after these dramatic changes. The threat of disintegration did not end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the centrifugal forces that had torn it apart persisted in the Russian Federation. The threat of separatism spread to parts of the Russian Federation along its periphery as

Compounding these political and internal security challenges was a succession of economic policy moves that seemed to further weaken the Russian state. The campaign of privatization launched during the first Yeltsin presidency with help from Western advisors transferred the most valuable assets of the Russian economy into the hands of a small group of businessmen connected to the Kremlin, who used their political ties to amass vast fortunes. They became the lucky winners in the wild sweepstakes of Russian privatization, while many former loyal servants of the state were left out. Along with massive wealth, these businessmen gained unprecedented political power and were able to dictate their preferences to the Kremlin that grew dependent on them for support.

Russia's retreat from the global stage was equally striking. Its domestic weakness necessitated its retreat from far-flung commitments in Asia, Africa, and in the Western hemisphere, abandoning decades-



Figure 1: Then-Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov talks with then-Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, 1997. Photo: Department of Defense (DoD).

long commitments. It became a virtual non-actor in the Middle East, a region where it had long exercised considerable influence and positioned itself as a competitor to the United States. Russia's withdrawal from the global stage was such that some scholars began to envision a world without Russia, where Russia would become so withdrawn as to become inconsequential.

Few things demonstrated their country's weakness to the Putin generation of loyal servants of the Soviet state than the NATO campaign in Kosovo against the rump Yugoslav Serbian-dominated state and the expansion of NATO into the former Warsaw Pact. The Kosovo campaign and de-facto independence in its aftermath was a signal to the Putin cohort that a weak country could be dismembered against its wishes. The subsequent arrest of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and trial in The Hague

on charges of war crimes was also a signal – that a weak Russian government could be compelled by the West to surrender those accused of war crimes in Chechnya to international authorities.

To the Putin generation of Russian national security officials who witnessed the break-up of their country, the collapse of the state they had served, the retreat from the world stage, and the prospect of further humiliating defeats, all of these events were associated with the rise of the U.S.-led international liberal order, or as they saw it the unipolar world. Opposition to that order and pursuit of an alternative, a multipolar world with Russia as one of the poles, became the principal goal of Russian foreign policy, its guiding principle to the present day. For a generation of Russian national security officials who have experienced the dislocation of the 1990s

and watched the United States' rise as the preeminent global power, this is more than a foreign policy pursuit. It is their most important defense against the threat from the U.S.-led unipolar international system to Russia's internal stability and survival as a state.

The intellectual foundation for this policy was established by Yevgeniy Primakov, a long-time Soviet academic, politician, foreign policy theorist, and practitioner, who in the 1990s served in succession as foreign intelligence chief, Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister of Russia. Beginning in the mid-1990s, he articulated a foreign policy vision for Russia that emphasized strengthening ties to China and India as a constellation of rising powers to counterbalance the United States. Primakov's original idea of partnering with India and China eventually morphed

Putin's experience in dealing with the United States early in his presidency only reinforced the commitment of the new foreign and security policy team to the Primakov doctrine. The new Russian president's attempts to build a partnership with the Bush Administration produced few results and multiple disappointments, including the U.S. decisions to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and to launch the war in Iraq, both of which the Kremlin had opposed. The signal received by the Putin cohort of national security decision-makers was that the United States would exploit its unilateral advantages in order to pursue its own foreign and security policy line with little if any regard to Russian objections or interests. The Bush Administration's efforts to promote democracy in the countries of the former Soviet Union and pursuit of NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia only

Putin's experience in dealing with the United States early in his presidency only reinforced the commitment of the new foreign and security policy team to the Primakov doctrine.

into the Russian-pioneered construct of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa—as a grouping of major regional and global actors posing as an alternative to the U.S.-led G7.

Primakov could do little to act on this vision as Foreign and Prime Minister while the Russian economy was weak and dependent on U.S. support in order to secure multiple lifelines from international financial institutions and the United States bilaterally. However, as the Russian economy recovered in the first decade of the 21st century, so did the Russian government's ability to stand up to perceived U.S. encroachment upon its interests.

reinforced the Putin government's resolve to oppose the expansion of the U.S.-led unipolar or international liberal order around the periphery of Russia, as well as in other regions farther away.

Buoyed by the global commodities boom of the first decade of the 21st century, the Russian economy underwent a spectacular recovery. Economic growth and political consolidation under Putin in turn enabled a more activist and muscular foreign policy whose principal goal was still to oppose the U.S.-led international liberal order. The 2008 Russian-Georgian war signaled that Russia would not tolerate the expansion of NATO into the former Soviet states and would act to enforce its

U.S. rhetorical support of the 2013-2014 revolution in Ukraine was interpreted in the Kremlin as a geopolitical power play and a land grab by the United States, NATO, and the EU designed to cut off Russia from its centuries-old ally Ukraine.

sphere of ‘privileged interests’ and protect it against Western encroachment.

The 2011-2012 protests in Russia triggered by the corrupted elections of the Duma and Putin’s decision to reclaim the presidency from Dmitry Medvedev further reinforced the Putin cohort’s perception of the United States as a hostile actor seeking to weaken the Russian state. U.S. criticism of the conduct of the election was interpreted by the Kremlin as an encouragement to protesters intended to upset the political order in Russia and weaken it. In response, the Kremlin expelled USAID from Russia and cracked down on civil society, including effectively banning foreign assistance to Russian NGOs.

U.S. rhetorical support of the 2013-2014 revolution in Ukraine was interpreted in the Kremlin as a geopolitical power play and a land grab by the United States, NATO, and the EU designed to cut off Russia from its centuries-old ally Ukraine. Comments by Western commentators that a democratic revolution in Ukraine could trigger similar changes in Russia only reinforced the Kremlin’s view that the ultimate goal of U.S. policy is regime change in Russia and its weakening to the point where it can no longer act as an independent and sovereign actor on the

world stage, or in other words a return to the 1990s’ Russia.¹

Since then, the world has seen a very different Russian posture on the world stage, which many observers have found surprising. Instead of assuming a defensive position, the Kremlin has launched a counter-offensive, seeking to counter U.S. and Western influence beyond its immediate sphere of ‘privileged interests.’ It has intervened militarily in Syria and saved the Assad regime from collapse. It has engaged in active diplomacy in the Persian Gulf. It has emerged as a financial backer to the financially strapped Maduro regime in Venezuela. It has intervened in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and meddled in European politics.

These are just some of the more prominent examples of Russia’s newfound activism and ambitions on the global stage. The Kremlin appears determined to pursue this policy with a two-fold aim—constraining the United States, which it sees as its principal adversary, anywhere opportunities to do so arise, and thus protecting Putin’s Russia from the threat of the U.S.-led international liberal order. Agile, well resourced, and determined, the Kremlin’s vision of a world with Russia is here to stay. ❧

¹ See, for example, Brian Whitmore, “Ukraine’s Threat to Putin: Why the protests in Kiev could deal a major blow to official corruption in Russia,” *The Atlantic*, December 6, 2013, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/ukraines-threat-to-putin/282103/. Accessed June 12, 2018. See also Carl Gershman, “A Fight for Democracy: Why Ukraine Matters,” *World Affairs*, March/April 2015, www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/fight-democracy-why-ukraine-matters. Accessed June 12, 2018.



Figure 2: Soldiers provide support during a multinational training event for exercise Puma 2, with Battle Group Poland, at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland, June 14, 2018, as part of Saber Strike 18. Army photo by Spc. Hubert D. Delany III.

What Drives Russian Foreign Policy?

Angela Stent

THE Kremlin's goals are varied, but they are all targeted at one overriding desire: to renegotiate the terms under which the Cold War ended. Putin wants to re-litigate the settlement that was agreed upon in 1990-1991, as he has already done by annexing Crimea. Although he does not seek to restore the Soviet Union, he would like the rest of the world to treat Russia as if it were the USSR, a country whose interests are as legitimate as those of the West, one that is respected and feared. He would like the West to reduce its involvement in the

post-Soviet space, because he believes that Russia is at a great strategic disadvantage as long as its neighbors look West.

Moscow's national security policy is driven by several key concerns. Foremost among these is the notion that Russia has a right to a seat at the table on all major international decisions. From the Kremlin's perspective, excluding Russia from these discussions disrespects one of the world's great powers. Even if the West defines its interests differently than Russia, the Kremlin wants the West to acknowledge that Moscow's interests are as legitimate as those of Washington or Brussels.

Second, Moscow believes it has a right to a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space. Hence, neither NATO nor the EU should move any closer to Russia's borders. Russia defines its security



Figure 3: Military engineers of the Russian army's International Anti-Mine Center prepare to leave Aleppo. Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

perimeter not as the borders of the Russian Federation, but rather as the borders of the post-Soviet space.

Third, and related to the previous two concerns, the Kremlin clearly believes that some states are more equal than others, and states that enjoy absolute sovereignty must enjoy more freedom of maneuver than states with limited sovereignty. Putin has said on several occasions that only a few states are truly sovereign—Russia, China, and India, for example. The United States, in his view, is not fully sovereign because it has allies who limit its freedom of maneuver. Ukraine, in this view, is less sovereign than Russia. The Kremlin does not seek allies in the Western sense of the term, but mutually beneficial instrumental partnerships with countries such as China that do not restrict Russia's freedom of maneuver.

Finally, Russia believes its interests are best served by a fractured Western alliance. The Kremlin has supported 'Euroskeptic' parties in the EU and populist groups in the United States either through financial support or through the targeted use of social media. It has actively worked to promote the questioning of the value of democracy through its cyber-interference in the United States and Europe.

Russia presents itself to the outside world as a supporter of the status quo and of established governments, regardless of how they were elected. On this issue, among others, the Kremlin believes it stands in opposition to the West, which promotes regime change and chaos, as happened during the Arab spring.

However, Russia acts as a revisionist power in its own neighborhood when revisionism



Figure 4: President Reagan and President Gorbachev sign the INF Treaty, 1987.
Source: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library–Public Domain.

suits its purposes. For instance, Russia, like China, is pushing to create a new ‘post-West’ order that will jettison the post-Cold War liberal international order. This time, posits the Kremlin, Russia will have a key role in setting the agenda, unlike in 1991. It is unclear what this order will be, but from the Kremlin’s point of view it would resemble a tripolar Yalta, where the world is divided into spheres of influence between the United States, China, and Russia, and where America no longer dominates the global financial system.

Viewed from the Kremlin, Russia has been quite successful in achieving its goals. Many countries – including some in Europe – believe that Russia does indeed have a historical right to a sphere of influence in its neighborhood based on its geostrategic location. Moreover, because of Russia’s actions in Georgia and Ukraine, it is highly unlikely that Euro-Atlantic structures will move any closer to Russia’s borders. Neither

NATO nor EU membership is on offer for any post-Soviet state nor will they be for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, Russia is benefitting from serious challenges confronting the West. The United Kingdom’s intent to leave the EU, the rise of Euroskeptic parties, a potential trade war between the United States and the EU, and transatlantic disagreements over alliance burden-sharing all represent fractures that the Kremlin can and will exploit for its own benefit.

Through its bombing campaign in Syria which began in September 2015, Russia has returned to the global board of directors. It has become the go-to power in the Middle East, enjoying productive ties with Iran, the Sunni states, and with Israel. There will be no solution to the Syrian civil war without Russia. The West tried to isolate Russia after the annexation of Crimea, but was unable to because of Russia’s

increasingly close partnership with China, which has supported Russia in its foreign policy agenda.

A post-West order is unlikely to emerge any time soon, but the post-Cold War liberal order is fraying. Russia is able to exercise influence on the global stage well beyond what its limited military resources and weak economy would suggest. Putin has skillfully taken advantage of opportunities presented by Western policies – or lack thereof – in Syria and other places.

In response, the United States and its allies need to follow policy guidelines toward Russia as they did toward the USSR – deterrence where necessary and engagement where possible and realistic. The most important precondition for deterrence is a united NATO that projects its power convincingly. The European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and new NATO deployments are an important part of the Western response. What is less clear is how efficacious sanctions are. Sanctions against Putin's inner circle and their companies have had the opposite effect than what was intended: they make the


cyber defenses against Russia.

The West also needs to engage Russia where appropriate. The Syria de-confliction channels are important to prevent unforeseen accidents, as are the contacts between the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his Russian counterpart. Counter-terrorist cooperation should continue, although it is often unproductive. Likewise Ambassador Kurt Volker's negotiations to resolve the Ukraine conflict should continue, however frustrating they can be.

Given the imminent expiration of the New START Treaty, the United States and Russia should discuss whether to extend the treaty by another five years or negotiate a new treaty. Likewise, talks on the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty and how to preserve it must continue. Otherwise, we could be in a situation where, for the first time since 1972, there is no arms control regime between the United States and Russia. This could have negative effects not only on the U.S-Russian relationship but also on the future of WMD nonproliferation.

“For the rest of Putin’s fourth term in office, the West’s challenge will be to exercise strategic patience...”

oligarchs more dependent on the Kremlin, and their companies are more likely to be nationalized.¹ It is unclear whether sanctions have changed Russian behavior in Ukraine, although Obama-era officials have argued that Russia might have taken more territory had sanctions not been imposed. The United States and its allies also need to continue to strengthen their

For the rest of Putin's fourth term in office, the West's challenge will be to exercise strategic patience while containing Russia's ability to disrupt transatlantic ties as it strengthens its defenses against Russian incursions. Should the Kremlin step back from its current confrontational policies, the West must be ready to re-engage more actively with the Kremlin. 

¹ Max Seddon, “Londongrad Oligarchs are being forced back to Russia’s embrace,” *Financial Times*, June 3, 2018, www.ft.com/content/35843d8e-6580-11e8-90c2-9563a0613e56. Accessed June 12, 2018.

How (and Why) Russia Does More With Less

Julia Gurganus

BY NOW, the West has become familiar with Moscow's relatively low budget approach to achieving its strategic foreign and security policy objectives. Moscow has employed this methodology in Ukraine, Syria, and around the world. This approach is fueled by a number of drivers, including two key domestic components: stoking Russian national pride and ensuring Russian elite and public complacency regarding the economy. These two elements are paramount to President Putin's popularity and his regime's stability, and they are interrelated.¹

In today's Russia, national pride relies on foreign policy successes, such as the annexation of Crimea, the military expedition in Syria, and Putin's projection of himself as a peer with world leaders. Such pride and perceived success has been useful to Putin and his domestic standing because it has offset public and elite dissatisfaction with the economy. Putin's public approval rests on his security and foreign policy achievements. According to

a Levada Center survey conducted in April 2018, the top two answers to the question "What is Putin's greatest accomplishment while he's been in power?" were: 1) Increase in military capability and the reform of military forces and 2) Strengthening of international position of Russia.²

Since first becoming president in 2000, Putin has worked to restore a sense of national pride among Russians. In the early 2000s, Putin leveraged powerful symbols—such as a new national anthem set to the Soviet hymn and the Russian tricolor flag and coat of arms—to shore up patriotism among the Russian populace still reeling from the collapse of the Soviet Union.³ As a result his approval rating surpassed 80 percent by late 2003.⁴ Putin also benefited from high commodities prices during his first two terms—the trickledown effect of which pulled many Russians out of poverty and filled state coffers with cash. Russia enjoyed an average of about 7 percent economic growth per year between 2000 and 2008.⁵

However, as the economy felt the reverberations of the 2008 global financial crisis, Putin's approval rating dipped to 60 percent.⁶ At the same time, opportunities opened up for Putin to raise Russia's status in the international arena and leverage the specter of the West at war with Russia. Russian actions have included the negotiation of the chemical

¹ Andrei Kolesnikov and Denis Volkov, "The Perils of Change: Russians' Mixed Attitudes Toward Reform," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, February 6, 2018, [carnegie.ru/2018/02/06/perils-of-change-russians-mixed-attitudes-toward-reform-pub-75436](https://www.carnegie.ru/2018/02/06/perils-of-change-russians-mixed-attitudes-toward-reform-pub-75436). Accessed June 12, 2018.

² Press Release, "Vladimir Putin," *Levada Center*, May 7, 2018, www.levada.ru/2018/05/07/vladimir-putin-6/. Accessed June 12, 2018.

³ Duma Approves Soviet Anthem," *BBC News*, December 8, 2000, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1060975.stm. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁴ Press Release, "Putin's Approval Rating," *Levada Center*, May 7, 2018, www.levada.ru/en/ratings/. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁵ "GDP Growth (annual %), 1990-2016," *The World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=RU. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁶ Press Release, "Support for Government Institutions," *Levada Center*, April 25, 2018, www.levada.ru/2018/04/25/odobrenie-institutov-vlasti-2. Accessed June 12, 2018.

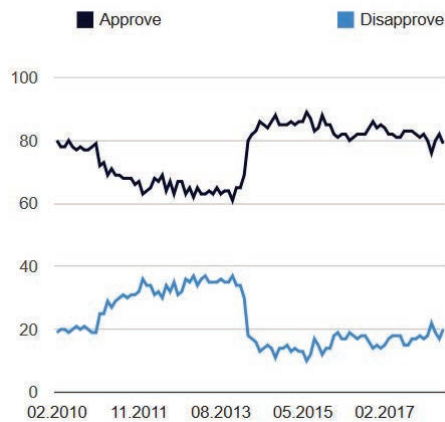


Figure 5: Putin’s Approval Rating, Feb 2010 - May 2018. Source: Levada Center.

weapons agreement with Syria in 2013, the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent war in Donbas, and the military intervention in Syria starting in 2015. Through these actions, Putin was able to boost Russian national pride and distract the public from the poorly performing economy.

Putin remains popular today—with an 82 percent approval rating as of April 2018⁷—but the economy is stagnating. Western sanctions have rattled Russia’s financial market. GDP recovered last year to 1.5 percent growth and is projected to grow at a similar rate this year.⁸ The Russian public has expressed its desire



Figure 6: Russian President Vladimir Putin. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

for a shift in focus from foreign policy to domestic economic issues. According to a survey conducted last summer by Levada Center and the Carnegie Moscow Center, more than 80 percent of Russians agree that some degree of change is needed for Russia. Forty two percent said that there was a decisive, comprehensive need for change.⁹ Thus far, Putin has prioritized economic stability for Russia (rather than economic reform) in order to ensure he has the continued support of elites and the public, which are critical to regime survival. For Putin, reform is a threat to the structure of the system, which revolves around elite enrichment through access to state assets.¹⁰

“Putin remains popular today... but the economy is stagnating.”

⁷ Press Release, “Putin’s Approval Rating.”

⁸ Zlata Garasyuta and Andrey Ostroukh, “Sanctions to limit room for Russia’s rate cuts, economic growth,” *Reuters Business News*, April 28, 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-economy-poll/sanctions-to-limit-room-for-russias-rate-cuts-economic-growth-idUSKBN1HZoJC. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁹ Andrei Kolesnikov and Denis Volkov, “The Perils of Change: Russians’ Mixed Attitudes Toward Reform,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, February 6, 2018, carnegie.ru/2018/02/06/perils-of-change-russians-mixed-attitudes-toward-reform-pub-75436. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹⁰ Andrei Kolesnikov, “Permanent Stagnation: Putin’s Invisible Fourth-Term Agenda,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, April 20, 2018, carnegie.ru/commentary/76103. Accessed June 12, 2018.

“For the rest of Putin’s fourth term in office, the West’s challenge will be to exercise strategic patience...”

In Putin’s annual address to the federal assembly on March 1, 2018, he recognized, at least rhetorically, the demand for change. He promised a breakthrough that would shore up the economy and improve living standards and suggested that this would be done primarily through spending on infrastructure, but he provided few details on how this would be financed.¹¹ In fact, Russia’s resource constraints suggest that Putin will need to continue to rely on foreign policy successes—or at least the Russian public’s perception of them—in order to maintain domestic order and the integrity of the Russian political system. The lower the cost of the effort, the better. Leveraging low cost forms of power projection, disruption, and influence therefore plays a key role in the stability of the Putin regime because it allows the Kremlin to continue to demonstrate foreign policy success while also freeing up more funds to share among elites or to spend on social programs.

Putin has demonstrated the return of Russian military power over the past few years, particularly in Syria, but this does not mean that the military will serve as the “go-to” tool to accomplish Russian objectives. In cases where Russia has deployed its military forces—most recently in Ukraine and Syria—it has done so in a limited and cost-effective manner. Russian hard power serves as a foundation

to demonstrate Russian strength and resolve, but economic realities suggest that Moscow will be motivated to rely increasingly on lower cost means to promote its foreign policy agenda. New tools and opportunities have broken in Russia’s favor in this respect. Moscow has leveraged a variety of tools short of the use of military force to promote Russian interests, including:

- **Cyber capabilities** – in the form of potential infrastructure attacks, as seen in Russia’s penetration of the U.S. energy grid,¹² and in the form of hacking and targeted leaking of information for political purposes as Russia did with the DNC emails in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.¹³
- **Propaganda** – used to create environments conducive to Russian interests, such as creating a variety of narratives to explain the crash of flight MH-17 over eastern Ukraine in order to complicate U.S. and EU decision-making regarding sanctions against Russia.
- **Diplomacy** – used to promote Moscow’s image as a key player and decision-maker, as Russia did in organizing the series of Astana talks that were held with some but not all of the players in the Syria conflict.

¹¹ Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” *Events, President of Russia*, March 1, 2018, en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹² Nicole Perloth and David E. Sanger, “Cyberattacks Put Russian Fingers on the Switch at Power Plants, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/03/15/us/politics/russia-cyberattacks.html. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹³ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections,” National Intelligence Council, January 6, 2017, www.dni.gov/files/documents/JCA_2017_01.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2018.

- **Influence campaigns and active measures** – employing automated networks and false personas on social media to manipulate public opinion or sow political or societal chaos in the domestic affairs of other countries, as Russia did in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.¹⁴

Looking forward, we can also expect Putin to devote resources to advance Russia's technological capabilities, both for economic reasons, but also to further Russia's foreign policy tool kit. The degradation of higher education in Russia raises questions about how competitive Moscow is in terms of high tech development, but there is expertise in Russia in this area, and the government has been creative in attracting private high-tech and hacker experts into government service. In the March 1 address, Putin


and promote its virtual currency, the Petro, and participating in early international conversations about blockchain standards.¹⁷

As the economy comes under additional pressure, Putin will increasingly look for opportunities to showcase Russia's great power status as a way to offset domestic dissatisfaction. Using non-military means—especially those that are low cost, high tech, and provide an element of deniability—will be the preference.

This approach will not be easy, as Putin has a lot to manage at home. The Russian people have given him credit for advancing Russia's international status, but now they are expecting that he will turn his attention to the needs of the population. According to a recent Carnegie Moscow Center / Levada Center study, Russians are

“**Looking forward, we can also expect Putin to devote resources to advance Russia's technological capabilities...**

noted: “Those who manage to ride this technological wave will surge far ahead. Those who fail to do this will be submerged and drown in this wave. Technological lag and dependence translate into reduced security and economic opportunities of the country and, ultimately, the loss of its sovereignty. This is the way things stand now.”¹⁵ Putin has also spoken in recent months about the importance of artificial intelligence to great power competition and security¹⁶, and Russia has dabbled in the digital realm, helping Venezuela to develop

calling for improved living standards and social protections to be the main focus of change in Russia. Foreign policy goals rate last in terms of priorities as the populace perceives that Russia's great power status has been achieved. But with no political room for economic reform, the Putin regime will likely continue to go back to the well of foreign policy, leveraging conflict with the West for domestic purposes, and increasingly relying on non-military means to advance its interests. How long this will remain effective remains to be seen. 

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly.”

¹⁶ Jeremy Straub, “Artificial Intelligence is the Weapon of the Next Cold War,” *The Conversation*, January 29, 2018, theconversation.com/artificial-intelligence-is-the-weapon-of-the-next-cold-war-86086. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹⁷ “Whoever leads in AI will rule the world”: Putin to Russian children on Knowledge Day,” *RT World News*, September 1, 2017, www.rt.com/news/401731-ai-rule-world-putin. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹⁷ Nathaniel Popper, “Blockchain Will Be Theirs, Russian Spy Boasted at Conference,” *The New York Times*, April 29, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/04/29/technology/blockchain-iso-russian-spies.html. Accessed June 12, 2018.

From Plans to Strategy: Mobilization as Russian Grand Strategy

Andrew Monaghan

SINCE Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, and particularly since the mid-2000s, the Russian leadership has consistently sought to shape a strategic agenda. Numerous documents have resulted, including the National Security Strategy, the Foreign Policy Concept, the Military Doctrine, the Economic Security Strategy, the Maritime Doctrine, and even in much more specific areas such as food security. There are also important documents that, though publically acknowledged, remain highly classified, such as the Defense Plan.

However, this strategic agenda is perhaps most obviously reflected in the ‘May Decrees,’ which Putin signed into force in 2012. These 11 documents set out an ambitious cross-government agenda. One of the decrees focuses on foreign policy and another on military matters (including the modernization of the armed forces), but the other nine address domestic priorities, from administration to education and health, to social housing and utilities. The leadership team, including Putin himself, often refers to these documents as being the core agenda – a transformative, not to say aspirational one that seeks to drag the Russian state into the 21st century.

Underpinning this agenda has been an attempt to modernize and improve Russian



Figure 7: Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

strategic planning legislation. Though the Russian leadership has long engaged in strategic planning, it was recognized in 2006 that there was no legal basis for creating a comprehensive federal level strategy. A prolonged debate about this within the Russian government resulted in the documents On the Foundations of Strategic Planning (2009), which provided the basis for the “determination of directions and means of achieving the strategic goals of Russia’s stable development” and, five years later, the Law on Strategic Planning. This legislative basis seeks to provide the foundation and structure for the regular necessary updates and refreshments of the plans.

A number of different organizations have been involved in strategic planning, including the Ministry of Economic Development, which played an important

role in shaping the planning legislation. Other organizations such as the All-Russian Popular Front (ONF), established in 2011, have played an increasing role not only in formulating policy but in overseeing its implementation. Perhaps the most important organization though in overall state strategic planning is the national Security Council. By presidential decree of 2011, the Security Council is to form the main directions of state domestic and foreign policy. In 2013, Nikolai Patrushev, a long-term ally of Putin and since 2008 the Secretary of the Council, stated that it was the chief interagency coordinator of decisions formulating policy and overseeing implementation.

A critical understanding of this strategic agenda helps to understand Russian activity on the world stage, and whether the Russian leadership is strategic in its actions, or more opportunistic. Indeed, it illustrates that it is strategic in its outlook.

This suggests the need for a more holistic understanding of Russia, one that illuminates the attempt to generate unified, integrated, and coherent activity

early 2000s with a horizon of 2020 and beyond. Today, for instance, the new State Armaments Plan sets a horizon of 2027, and there are initial discussions underway about the shaping of Strategy 2030.

Even though a detailed understanding of the planning process is important, grand strategy is more properly understood as the relationship between means, ways, and ends. Theorists of grand strategy also argue that it is the bridge between the formulation of plans and their implementation. It is an executive function – the executive management of a purposeful set of ideas. Consequently, it is also necessarily both an ongoing dialogue with the context in which those plans must be implemented – past, present and future – and a question of “conducting the orchestra” of ministries and agencies of state power. Herein lie important complications and problems. Strategy not only relies on other people following the script, it is also a constant engagement with the friction of events and the fog of uncertainty since it includes planning about the future. It is, therefore, above all difficult. Moscow has not been able to avoid these difficulties.

 **It is, therefore, above all difficult. Moscow has not been able to avoid these difficulties.**

across regions as disparate as the Levant and the Arctic. It also underscores the importance of weaving together analysis of different but often related themes, such as the relationship between national security and energy.

Furthermore, such an understanding highlights the need to think in terms of a longer-term trajectory: much of the strategic agenda has taken shape since the

A number of factors complicate the Russian leadership’s attempt to convert the plans into action and thus generate strategy. These begin in the planning process itself. Russian analysts are critical of the ability of the Russian bureaucracy to shape a meaningful agenda. Some even assert that there has been an accelerating de-professionalization of the bureaucracy.¹

Certainly, planners face a series of practical

¹ Vladislav Inozemtsev, “NeoFeudalism Explained,” *The American Interest*, March 1, 2011, www.the-american-interest.com/2011/03/01/neo-feudalism-explained/. Accessed June 12, 2018.



Figure 8: Russian Federation Air Force Su-27 aircraft. DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Robertson, U.S. Air Force/Released.



Figure 9: Russia's Energy Security Strategy to 2035.

challenges. First, planners in Russia as everywhere else, must face considerable uncertainty as they make their forecasts and prognoses. This has led to substantial delays in planning processes. The drafting of the Energy Security Strategy to 2035 was significantly delayed, for instance, because of the great difficulties planners faced in coming to terms with the many inter-related domestic and international factors and global changes underway.

Second, strategic planning in Russia, as elsewhere, is not monolithic. There has been an ongoing tension, for instance, over the prioritization of socio-economic matters and national security. Furthermore, Putin is among those who have publically criticized ministries for protecting and advancing their own interests above those of the state, even using their veto powers to do so.

Third, Moscow's attempt to shape a strategic agenda has placed a huge burden on what is a rather limited bureaucracy. As the leadership has acknowledged, one of the results of this has been that strategic planning documents are too often vaguely worded. Again, this is a common feature

of such documents, a problem not limited to Russia. Although a certain vagueness is often a result of the compromises required to achieve the necessary political consensus, that same vagueness means that there is too little precision for the plans to be implemented. Thus, the planning process is extended as drafts are returned for further work.

A number of domestic factors also hinder Moscow's attempt to generate strategy. The Soviet inheritance and the legacy of the 1990s weigh heavily even now, enhancing pressure on resources and their prioritization. The way that the Soviet economy was structured still exerts a distorting effect on today's Russian economy. The chronic underinvestment of the 1990s across the state has left the Russia with a limited and decrepit infrastructure and widespread obsolescence from the military to the industrial and energy sectors and across the transport network. The ongoing impact on Russian strategy is two-fold. First, the limits and obsolescence of large parts of the economy and infrastructure limit economic potential. Second, their repair and modernization absorb huge resources – the railway network alone is estimated to



Figure 10: Russia's National Defense Control Centre. Source: Wikimedia Commons.


need in excess of \$330 billion. This pressure on resources is exacerbated by inefficiency within the system, particularly widespread corruption and other forms of waste in the state budget.

Perhaps as importantly, the chain of command – or what is often termed Russia's vertical of power – is often dysfunctional. Plans are frequently tardily or partially implemented. Indeed, this became so severe that the term 'sabotage' returned to the political debate in the mid-2010s, and Russian parliamentarians debated whether to introduce legislation criminalizing the failure to implement the leadership's instructions. Though this did not pass into legislation, it illustrates the extent of the problem the authorities face in implementation. While the vertical of power works better when the authorities use manual control – effectively direct micro-management – to oversee implementation, this serves to illustrate that Moscow too suffers from a limited bandwidth.

Such a view of Russian grand strategy, bringing together the evident consistency of strategic planning with the problems inherent in implementation, informs a more sophisticated understanding of Russian activity. It enables observers to

incorporate an understanding of how the Russian system does and does not function, and it exposes the doubts and difficulties Moscow faces.

Indeed, it is here, in the nexus of strategic planning and the ability to implement the plans, where Russian strategy is to be found. Though the planning process is important, the leadership's main emphasis has been on measures to improve the implementation of plans. The pressure the leadership is applying on the system is best described as state mobilization. This term has much in common with Western definitions of grand strategy – mobilization is defined by the Russian state as the set of measures for activating the resources, strength, and capabilities of the state for the achievement of military-political aims. One of the most notable features of this sense of mobilization has been the attempt to enhance coordination and implementation across the state. In doing so, the Kremlin hopes to bridge gaps between ministries and agencies, civilian authorities and military leaders, and federal, regional, and local levels, a process symbolized by the establishment of the National Defense Control Centre.

Other papers in this volume examine the key external objectives in Russian foreign and security policy, and one of Moscow's core strategic objectives is to ready the Russian ship of state for what the Kremlin forecasts will be a turbulent decade ahead internationally. One of the core objectives, therefore, is to make the Russian vertical of power less dysfunctional. The combination of a strategic planning process, albeit one that is complicated, and the high pressure on the system to implement the plans means that it is possible to speak of the rebirth of Russian grand strategy – troubled and difficult, to be sure, but broadly consistent and clear, and beginning to show practical results. 

The Russian Way of Warfare

Jānis Bērziņš

BY EMPLOYING well known methods of warfare in innovative ways and with the help of new technologies, Russia's strategy in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine took most of the West by surprise. The Russians refer to these methods collectively as New Generation Warfare (NGW). Almost immediately, Western analysts started looking for definitions, mostly within the West's own theoretical framework and ignoring the vast Russian theoretical debate about new ways of conducting warfare.

Initially, Western analysts referred to it as Fourth Generation Warfare, referring to William Lind's idea of the state losing the monopoly of violence and fighting non-state adversaries.¹ Another term, this time made popular by Mark Galeotti but

The main rationale is that since traditional geo-political paradigms no longer hold, the Kremlin gambles with the idea that old alliances like the European Union and NATO are less valuable than the economic interests it has with Western companies. Besides, many Western countries welcome obscure financial flows from the post-Soviet space, as part of their own mode of economic regulation.

Therefore, the Kremlin bets that these interconnections mean that Russia can get away with aggression.³ More recently, Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely used the term, 'Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict' to refer to New Generation Warfare.⁴ Today, the most widely accepted term for Russian New Generation Warfare is Hybrid Warfare. NATO itself has adopted it. The seminal work on Hybrid Warfare is Frank Hoffman's, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges." He developed the idea that the main challenge results from state and non-state actors employing technologies and strategies that are more appropriate for their own field, in a multi-mode confrontation.⁵

... Hybrid Warfare still presupposes the application of kinetic force in some way.

coined by Putin's close advisor Vladislav Surkov's (under the pseudonym of Nathan Dubovitsky), was 'Non-Linear Warfare.' It appeared for the first time in an article describing the Fifth World War, in which all will fight against all.²

Hoffman's concept is appealing, but like all approaches discussed above, Hybrid Warfare still presupposes the application of kinetic force in some way. Although Russia might resort in using military power, conceptually Russian New Generation

¹ William S. Lind, *Understanding Fourth Generation War*, Antiwar.com, January 15, 2004, www.antiwar.com/lind/?articleid=1702. Accessed June 13, 2018.

² Nathan Dubovitsky, "Bez Neba (Without the Sky)," *Russkii Pioner*, March 12, 2014, ruspioner.ru/honest/m/single/4131. Accessed June 13, 2018.

³ Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: the Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

⁴ Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2015.

⁵ Frank Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 52, 2009, www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a516871.pdf. Accessed June 13, 2018

Warfare does not require it. Besides, the Russian military uses the term Hybrid Warfare to refer to the strategy of Color Revolutions allegedly employed by the West in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Russian New Generation Warfare is not something new, or even an entirely novel creation of Russian military thinkers. Rather, it reflects how Russian military thinkers understand the evolution of military art, especially in the West. Although it is not correct to affirm that the Western way of conducting warfare determined how Russian military thinkers developed their own understanding on the subject, its influence is undeniable. Thus, to analyze the way Russia does warfare, it is necessary to think within the Russian framework.

The Russian strategy has five elements. The first and most important one is Asymmetric Warfare. It forms the main base defining the Russian way of conducting warfare. The second is the strategy of Low Intensity Conflict, as borrowed from the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command, which developed it in the 1980s. The third is Russia's understanding and theoretical development of Network-Centric Warfare. The fourth element is General Vladimir Slipchenko's Sixth Generation Warfare, which essentially reflects his understanding of the strategic implications of Operation Desert Storm and the NATO bombing in Yugoslavia.⁶ The final element is the strategic concept of Reflexive Control, which has a vital role in shaping how military and non-military means are combined. These means can be combined in different proportions accordingly to the strategic characteristics of each operation.

For example, in Ukraine the Russians used mostly Low Intensity Conflict while in Syria they have been resorting mostly to Sixth Generation Warfare.

The operational application of Russian New Generation Warfare follows eight phases.⁷ They are to be employed in a sequential way, although they are not rigid or mutually exclusive. The phases are:

1. Non-military asymmetric warfare, encompassing information, moral, psychological, ideological, diplomatic, and economic measures as part of a plan to establish a favorable political, economic, and military setup.
2. Special operations, to mislead political and military leaders by coordinated measures carried out through diplomatic channels, media, and top government and military agencies leaking false data, orders, directives, and instructions.
3. Intimidation, deception, and bribery of government officials and military officers, with the objective of making them abandon their service duties.
4. Issuing destabilizing propaganda to increase discontent among the population, boosted by the arrival of Russian bands of militants who engage in subversion.
5. Establishing no-fly zones over the country to be attacked, imposition of blockades, and extensive use of private military companies in close cooperation with armed opposition units.

⁶ Victor I. Slipchenko, "Voiny Shestogo pokoleniya, Reshayushchaya rol' v nikh budet prinadlezhat," *Na strazhe Rodiny, Ezhednevnaia gazeta Leningradskogo voennogo okruga*, May 7, 1997.

⁷ S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of New-Generation War," *Military Thought*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2013, www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2018.




Figure 11: Russian private military contractors in Syria, March 2017. Source: gazeta.ru.

6. Conducting military action, immediately preceded by large-scale reconnaissance and subversive missions. This involves all types of military activity, including special operations forces, space, radio, radio engineering, electronic, diplomatic, intelligence, and industrial espionage.
7. Combination of a targeted information operation, electronic warfare operation, aerospace operation, and continuous air force harassment, combined with the use of high-precision weapons launched from various platforms (long-range artillery, and weapons based on new physical principles, including microwaves, radiation, and non-lethal biological weapons).
8. Crushing remaining points of resistance and destroying surviving enemy units. This is accomplished using special operations forces to spot which enemy units have survived; artillery and missile units to fire barrages at the remaining enemy units; airborne units to surround points of resistance; and regular infantry to conduct mop-up operations.

The first four phases are basically non-

kinetic, using strategies of Low Intensity Conflict as understood by the Russians. The fifth phase is when military action really starts, by setting the theater for a kinetic operation. It is important to stress the role of private military companies (PMCs). The United States has extensively used them in Iraq and Afghanistan from operating mess halls to providing security and, sometimes, performing military duties. For the Russians, PMCs must be understood as mercenaries in the worst sense of the word. The objective is to have an active military force that cannot be linked to the Russian Armed Forces. These mercenaries can act as if they were locals, part of the enemy's Armed Forces, police, or whatever necessary. They will often engage in sabotage, blackmailing, subversive activities, terrorism, kidnapping, or any other activity that is not considered regular warfare. Russia can and will deny any connection with its mercenaries, publicly accusing them of being part of the enemy's forces. The last three phases are a combination of Network Centric Warfare, Sixth Generation Warfare, and Reflexive Control.

Throughout all of these phases, because Russia considers itself weaker in comparison to the United States and NATO, its actions are going to be asymmetric. This asymmetry will occur not only in terms of operations and capabilities but also in terms of what is and what is not acceptable in warfare. Russia is ready to go much farther than what might be acceptable to the West. At this moment, NATO's and Europe's greatest challenge is to establish a feasible strategy to cope with this, without jeopardizing Western values. 

The Role of Pre-Conflict Conflict and the Importance of the Syrian Crucible

Michael Kofman

THE vibrant writing and discussion that forms the corpus of ideas in Russian military thought is exemplary of a timeless tradition among defense establishments, ever debating the changing character of war, operational concepts, and capabilities that will define the battlefield. Naturally the debates never end, but eventually the time comes for military reform, modernization, and to choose a direction for the development of the armed forces based on a congealed view of the operating environment and the future tendencies in warfare. For Russia's General staff this period began with the military reforms of 2008-2012, and a state armament program launched in 2011 that was subsequently renewed in 2018. Since 2014, the Russian military has also had ample opportunity to bloody itself in multiple conflicts, putting the new force through a trial by fire, and integrating those experiences into the next cycle of concept development for armed forces.

The evolution of current Russian thinking on warfare can be confidently traced to the debates in the 1980s on how best to reform Soviet armed forces, and the subsequent discussions on the nature of Sixth Generation warfare in the 1990s and early 2000s. The Russian General Staff's understanding may begin with a classical reading of the correlation forces, but is based more on the correlation of forms and methods in warfare. As such, the salient features of Russian military thought include: a greater appreciation that modern precision guided weapons and standoff conventional capabilities can create effects throughout the depth of the enemy's lines, that there are no longer operational pauses in conflict, and non-military or indirect methods are at times much more effective than direct action. The absence of spatial distance, made prominent by advancements in global domains such as cyber, space, or information, all of which are commonly integrated in Russian writing on information superiority, has led to a battlefield shaped by capabilities that yield persistent effects.



Figure 12: The BM-30 Smerch, a Russian heavy multiple rocket launcher. Source: Shutterstock/ID1974.

Russian conceptualization of the modern battlefield sees a leveling off of the tactical, operational and strategic, with the armed forces now living more firmly in the operational-strategic or operational-tactical space. Based on a strong appreciation of the U.S. way of warfare, which is principally aerospace blitzkrieg enabled by an information

unmanned systems, and robotics designed to integrate into Russia's advantages in the area of ground-based fires. Beyond making the current force much more lethal and capable against current generation counterparts, the goal is to successfully engage in confrontation via non-military means during crisis, establishing information superiority over the adversary,

... the goal is to successfully engage in confrontation via non-military means during crisis...

driven military machine, Russia sees the initial period of war as being decisive to the conflict. Modern weapons, persistent effects, and a host of capabilities that are employed during a threatened period prior to the onset of overt hostilities have raised fundamental questions about the viability of territorial defense and the pacing of conflict. In the Russian view, massed conventional strikes with precision guided weapons can impose damage equivalent to that previously assigned to tactical nuclear weapons. As a consequence, the emphasis has shifted from 20th century industrial warfare to the threatened period of war and the initial period of conflict. Large armored formations, or operational maneuver groups of the 1980s, are now consigned to the much later and less relevant phases of war.

Russian thinking is informed by the desire to acquire the advanced capabilities fielded by Western militaries, as successful organizations often seek to replicate each other's advancements, but to use them for different purposes, adopting said technology or approaches to counter and defend against the perceived Western way of warfare. Hence Russian armed forces are investing heavily in precision guided munitions, electronic warfare, new generations of long range standoff weapons,

and blunt or retaliate against a massed aerospace attack in the initial period of war. Understanding that Russia is not an expeditionary maritime or aerospace power, it does not need these capabilities for global power projection, but instead for defense of the homeland, to impose the Kremlin's will on neighbors, and to project power into adjacent regions just beyond Russia's near abroad.

Several offense and defense centered concepts have emerged to answer the challenges defined by this conception of the threat environment, integrating newly available capabilities after considerable investment in the armed forces. Russian armed forces are organized around a series of 'strategic operations', many of them overlapping. These are designed to attack the adversary as a system, targeting the opponent's ability and will to sustain a fight, with emphasis on logistical, information, and critical civilian infrastructure.

A second approach develops the tactical-operational space, allowing Russia's ability to conduct war through the adversary's operational depth by linking reconnaissance complexes with long range fires. This is designed to leverage Russia's firepower and compensate for the military's historic blindness – that is, its inability to

target enemy forces in real time beyond the tactical ranges of a battlefield. Russia's goal is to make much greater use of that 100km-500km tactical-operational space, which will allow it to successfully conduct warfare across domains, and substantially bolster its conventional deterrence against would-be attackers, regardless of their technological or numerical superiority.

Finally, the country is headlong into developing the capability and capacity to conduct long range fires that can target the full depth of adversary lines, at operational-strategic distances (500km-2500km), investing in the number of available fires. Such strikes will be integrated with offensive non-kinetic capabilities targeting enemy infrastructure, based around the desire to challenge the adversary's will, create operational pauses during conflict for negotiation, and destroy key infrastructure that the other side would need to sustain a campaign. This approach is flexible, aimed at both denial and punishment. It is an attempt to coerce through cost imposition while remaining scalable to achieve warfighting aims. The scalability remains aspirational, as Russia still has a long way to go in acquiring conventional standoff weapons in large quantities.

Defensive concepts seek to solve the Russian nation's historic vulnerability and penetration by opponents' modern offensive systems, against which defense is both technically and economically difficult to mount. Russia is integrating civilian and military infrastructure under a concept in which everyone fights, creating new decision-making mechanisms like the National Defense Control Centre, and bringing civilian leadership into military simulations. This is in effect the ability to conduct total mobilization, particularly effective in bolstering a country's coercive credibility in a crisis, allowing them to signal the readiness to absorb casualties

and engage in total war. Meanwhile, the job of aerospace forces is to blunt aerospace attacks and impose high costs with integrated air defenses against technologically superior air powers like the United States. Air defense, missile defense, and electronic warfare come together to reduce the effectiveness of Western weapons, absorb those fires, and protect critical infrastructure in the Russian homeland.

A phased concept of strategic deterrence, increasingly prominent since 2009, is intended to make use of imposed operational pauses to effect escalation management, or deterrence in conflict. Integrating instruments of national power, Moscow seeks to prevent hostilities via anticipatory operations in a time of crisis, and attack key enemy nodes during the initial period of war. A pulsed attack on critical enemy infrastructure, for example, could impose 'gut checks' on an opponent's desire to further continue fighting, assuming the asymmetry of interests at stake favors Moscow (and in the Kremlin's conception it always does). If escalation management fails, the final step is to demonstrate the readiness and determination to use nuclear weapons, and if necessary, employ them. Nuclear escalation when defending is quite credible, as it presumes greater resolve, based off of interests at stake, and distinct force advantages favoring the Russian side. In this respect Russian nuclear concepts differ little from NATO's Flexible Response of the 1960s and the Schlesinger Doctrine of limited nuclear options of the 1970s. However, for Russia such approaches are inherently much more credible, as Russia's deterrence is central versus extended, and the decision-making mechanisms involved will be unitary as opposed to in consultation with allies or an alliance command.

However, military thought and operational concepts rarely survive actual combat

experiences, which shape internal debates like nothing else. Whatever senior officers may write or say, all militaries have a tendency to want the same things: high-end capabilities, larger force structures, expensive platforms, and numerous general officer billets. These are what one might call institutional proclivities borne of the profession. It is war that helps to focus the minds of General Staff officers on those capabilities and concepts they need in order to win. Ukraine demonstrated the need to restructure the ground force, rethink maneuver elements like battalion tactical groups, and tilt back from overly focusing on just defending against the U.S. way of warfare.

There is no substitute for a large and effective ground force if one seeks to impose their will on neighbors, because only a capable ground force can hold terrain. Without it one cannot threaten invasion, and thus cannot effectively coerce, as airpower is notoriously ineffective as a tool of coercive diplomacy. At the end of the day, Russia is a Eurasian land power, and at the


but the entire Russian cadre of senior officers have gained operational experience in warfighting. Russian Aerospace forces came of age in Syria, with much of the air force intentionally bloodied in the conflict. Most long range missiles and other high-end capabilities have been tested in Syria, together with various reconnaissance platforms to direct them. Russian armed forces quickly realized their limitations in both the dearth of weapons available to prosecute moving targets on the battlefield, and the lack of planning experience that would permit real time integration of ground forces with airpower. These problems are in the process of being addressed. The Russian military establishment has proven fairly forthright in evaluation of its performance, seeking to leverage Syria in order to build a proven military.

However, the Russian armed forces deployed in Syria today are already quite different from the force that first began the campaign in fall 2015. Based on that experience, the backbone infrastructure is slowly falling into place, allowing Russian airpower to

Whatever senior officers may write or say, all militaries have a tendency to want the same things...

heart of its force beats land-based firepower together with a large armored fist. Ukraine was a stark reminder that local and regional wars remain the most likely contingencies for Moscow, and Russia would have to reinvest in not just equipment but the force itself, dramatically increasing the number of contract servicemen, improving their personal kit, and integrating land-based fires with autonomous ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) systems on the battlefield.

Syria on the other hand is proving a transformative conflict for the Russian armed forces, where not only equipment

effectively support ground units, in real time, with newly developed precision weapons. Most importantly, the Russian military experience in Syria exposed the weaknesses in modern equipment, force structures, and operational concepts at a time when they were relatively nascent, giving the Russian General Staff useful results when there is plenty of opportunity to adjust course. As a result, Russian armed forces are increasingly able to conduct combined arms warfare, project fires at operational distances, and establish the state's coercive credibility to shape adversary decision-making, restoring the military as a useful and reliable instrument of national power. 

The Concept of Pace in Current Russian Military Thinking

Rod Thornton

THIS essay focuses on four wide-ranging yet linked factors that have a considerable influence on current Russian military thinking. These factors are examined under the subtitles of *aktivnost'*, electronic warfare (EW), surprise, and manpower. What links them is the effect they have on the concept of pace. It is a given that the Russian military today is focused on increasing the speed of its troop deployments and its overall combat activity. However, there is also the concomitant Russian aim of slowing down the pace of the troop deployments and combat activity of adversaries. This includes lengthening the response times of NATO governments and their military organizations to what may be viewed as Russian military aggression and, at the operational level, decreasing the reaction times of NATO commanders in any future combat scenarios. Fundamentally, a faster pace of Russian military undertakings is being developed to take advantage of a Russian-imposed slower NATO pace.

When it comes to warfighting, militaries in

the West tend not to be too concerned about what the opponent is doing. In contrast, Russian measures to hinder an opponent's ability to bring its military power to bear is seen as just as important as those measures that enhance its own application of military power.¹ This idea is captured in the Russian (and before that, Soviet) concept of *aktivnost'*.² This is basically 'activity' designed to disrupt an opponent's warfighting capabilities.³ As Shimon Naveh puts it, "*Aktivnost'* represents a unique idea, constituting one of the fundamentals of Russian military thought."⁴

When considering how this *aktivnost'* manifests itself, the first point to be mindful of is the seeming inhibition in Russian military culture of maintaining a passive defensive posture – from the strategic down to the tactical level.⁵ To flesh out this idea, it should be noted that in the Russian military lexicon there are two words for 'defense' – *zashchita* and *oborona*. The first (meaning 'shield') is what Western militaries would view as defensive in nature in that it emphasizes passivity involved in waiting to be attacked.

However, this does not suit the Russian military psyche. The favored form of defense, adopted by the Soviet and now by the Russian military, is that espoused in the idea of *oborona*. This is not passive in nature. Held within this notion of *oborona* is the sense of a more aggressive defense posture or an 'active defense.'⁶ This is very much practiced today. The overall Russian aim at the strategic level, and even before

¹ See William Baxter, *Soviet Airland Battle Tactics* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), p. 113.

² Nathan Leites, *Soviet Style in Warfare* (New York, NY: Crane Russak, 1982).

³ S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of New-Generation War," *Military Thought*, 22(4), 2013, www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁴ Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 172.

⁵ Jacob Kipp, "The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art: The Significance of 'Strategic Defense' and 'Premeditated Defense' in the Conduct of Theatre-Strategic Operations," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, 4(4), December 1991.

⁶ Baxter, *Soviet Airland Battle Tactics*, p. 124.

any hostilities have commenced, is to neutralize the effectiveness of any potential opponent's military capabilities. This is done through the application of non-kinetic measures (often via the machinations of the GRU).⁷

The Russian military packages such acts of neutralization within the concept of 'strategic deterrence'.⁸ Within its ambit are several *aktivnost'* measures familiar to NATO governments, such as saber-rattling military exercises, attempts to alter election results, cyber and information warfare attacks, and attempted assassinations. The aim at this strategic level is to create among the political leaders of adversary states a degree of uncertainty and indecision that undermines their resolve to counter these Russian activities. This would include counters involving military action.⁹ Moreover, a specific goal of 'strategic deterrence' measures is the fostering of division between NATO allies so that no decision is ever taken – or is taken too late – by the Alliance to respond to any Russian military aggression. Affecting the pace of NATO decision-making is thus designed to create greater freedom of action at the strategic level for Moscow.¹⁰

At the operational level, the application of *aktivnost'* (this time including kinetic

measures is again designed fundamentally to neutralize an opponent's ability to react effectively on a battlefield against Russian forces. Targeting the decision-makers – now at the operational level – is again key.¹¹ They will be put under pressure to make the wrong decisions or, if they do make the correct decisions, to do so too slowly. The generation of deception measures is an important element here but so also is the undermining of any opposing commanders' ability to maintain effective command and control of their assets.¹² A force whose command and control are disrupted is, of course, a force weakened – 'neutralized' – by the fact that the pace and thus the timeliness of decision-making is compromised.¹³

A crucial factor in the slowing down of an opponent's ability to make timely decisions at this operational level – and one very much embraced by the Russian military – is through the use of Electronic Warfare (EW) and in particular, through jamming. The use of jamming technologies in modern warfare can be an operational as well as strategic, game-changer.

As part of Moscow's post-2008 military modernization process, the Russian military's EW capabilities have been significantly refined. By the time of

⁷ GRU – the intelligence arm of the Russian military. See, for instance, Russian Federation, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014*, rusemb.org.uk/press/2029. Accessed June 12, 2018. See also Chekinov and Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of New-Generation War."

⁸ Russian Federation, *Russian National Security Strategy 2015*, www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2018. See also Anon., "Strategic Deterrence and Russia's National Security Today," *Military Thought*, 21(3), 2012.

⁹ Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "From Moscow with Coercion: Russian Deterrence Theory and Strategic Culture," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(1-2), 2018, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2017.1347872?src=recsys. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹⁰ See Kier Giles, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West," *Chatham House Paper*, March 2016, www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf. Accessed June 12, 2018.

¹¹ Rod Thornton, "The Russian Military's 'New Main Emphasis': Asymmetric Warfare," 162(4), 2017, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2017.1381401. Accessed June 13, 2018.

¹² See Notra Truelock, "The Role of Deception in Soviet Military Planning," in Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker (eds), *Soviet Strategic Deception* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987).

¹³ See, for instance, V. I. Orlyansky and N. F. Kuznetsov, "Operational Masking: Problems to Solve," *Voennaya Mysl'* [Military Thought], 22(1), 2013.

the conflict in Ukraine (2014-present), Russian forces were using improved EW assets to good effect. They were employed to protect friendly systems but also, and perhaps more importantly, to neutralize those of the Ukrainian military. Jamming proved to be a notable force multiplier.¹⁴

Jamming is certainly an important element in current Russian operational thinking.¹⁵ It is heavily emphasized. It may also be said to suit the Russian military psyche because of its *aktivnost'* qualities. Again, disrupting an opponent's ability to send and receive signals freely will have a deleterious effect on timely command-and-control activity.¹⁶ At the very least, jamming will generate pause in the decision-making processes of opponent (read NATO) commanders in any combat situation and reduce the overall pace of their operational activity.¹⁷

In order to take full advantage of its emphasis on slowing down the response times of the opponent at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels,



Figure 13: Russian electronic warfare equipment. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 14: Russian troops on exercise. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

¹⁴ Sergey Sukhankin, "Russian Electronic Warfare in Ukraine," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 14(71), May 24, 2017, jamestown.org/program/russian-electronic-warfare-ukraine-real-imaginable/. Accessed June 13, 2018.

¹⁵ Roger McDermott, "Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities to 2025," International Centre for Defence and Diplomacy (Estonia), September 2017, icds.ee/russias-electronic-warfare-capabilities-to-2025-challenging-nato-in-the-electromagnetic-spectrum/. Accessed June 13, 2018.

¹⁶ Yu. I. Lastochkin, "Electronic Warfare Today and in the Future," *Voennaya Mysl'* [Military Thought], vol. 24, no. 4, 2015.

¹⁷ Kim Sengupta, "War in Syria: Russia's 'Rustbucket' Military Delivers a Hi-tech Shock to West and Israel," *The Independent*, January 29, 2016, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/war-in-syria-russia-s-rustbucket-military-delivers-a-hi-tech-shock-to-west-and-israel-a6842711.html. Accessed June 13, 2018.

the Russian military is currently taking the additional step of trying to increase the speed of movement of its own forces. Again, it is here acting just as its Soviet predecessor wanted to do. The Soviet armed forces used speed to help create degrees of surprise that would disorient opponents. However, this concept went beyond the goal of merely generating surprise – it also looked to create *vnezapnost'*.¹⁸ This is a word which encompasses not just the sense of something unexpected but also that of a stunning and almost paralysing blow.¹⁹ Such blows are more likely to be successful if they are conducted at considerable pace (and using considerable mass and firepower) against an opponent that has already been made vulnerable because it is not able, because of prior *aktivnost'* measures, to react in a timely manner.

This desire to move its own forces at greater speed is becoming a major factor in current Russian military thinking. The Russians seek to have their forces both deploy to theatres and operate within theatres at such speed – with such *vnezapnost'* – that they create *fait accompli* situations.²⁰ That is, troops are deployed, established, and diplomatically and militarily immovable before U.S. or NATO forces have a chance to react effectively (as in Crimea in 2014).

Of course, the ability to generate the required *vnezapnost'* means that Russian forces must be capable of moving at considerable speed without losing combat potential. Such forces thus need to be of

high quality and to carry a certain degree of mass, not just in terms of equipment but also of personnel. Here is a further major requirement of the Russian military in its search for the pace that is crucial to *vnezapnost'* – a high personnel count of skilled soldiers.

On paper, the Russian army (the Ground Forces and the Airborne Forces) appears to comprise a considerable number of units and formations. However, only a limited number of these are fully manned and at high readiness. The Ground Forces are currently undermanned overall by an estimated 19 percent.²¹

Moreover, the troops within these units are not always of the right quality. The presence of conscripts in the Russian military has always acted as a drag on operational efficiency. The length of conscript service is now down to just one year and laws have been passed preventing their use in combat zones. Having such ill-trained and undeployable conscripts within its ranks does little for the army's operational effectiveness (conscripts make up about 50 percent of the Ground Forces personnel strength²²). The process of professionalization of the military, ongoing since the early 1990s, was designed in part to alleviate this combat utility problem caused by having conscripts. However, because the pay and terms of service have been so poor, it has proven difficult to both recruit and retain the right quality of personnel.²³

¹⁸ Baxter, *Soviet Airland Battle Tactics*, p. 113.

¹⁹ See David Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (New York, NY: Frank Cass, 1989).

²⁰ Dan Altman, "By *Fait Accompli*, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 4, December 2017.

²¹ Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk, *Russia's New Ground Forces: Capabilities, Limitations and Implications for International Security* (London: Whitehall Papers, RUSI, 2017).

²² The Airborne Forces are only about 30 percent conscript. Sutyagin and Bronk, *Russia's New Ground Forces*, p. 50.

²³ Keir Giles, "Assessing Russia's Reorganized and Rearmed Military," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 3, 2017, [carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853](https://www.carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853). Accessed June 13, 2018.

Nonetheless, in recent years reforms have meant that the Russian army has grown in both number and quality of troops. Foreigners can now serve in the Russian army,²⁴ members of private military companies are being employed on occupation duties,²⁵ and recent structural reforms mean that rear-echelon troops can now be moved to serve in front-line units.²⁶ Moreover, combat potential has also improved in the development of Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs). These

Russia is trying to increase the pace of its own military activities at both the strategic and operational levels. In many ways, the Russian military is very effective in its approach.

Adequate responses by both U.S. and NATO authorities to these Russian approaches will ultimately rely on education. Education of the appropriate personnel can create a better understanding of Russian motives and of the ways in which Moscow is seeking

The presence of conscripts in the Russian military has always acted as a drag on operational efficiency.

are reinforced battalions raised within brigades. Thus while the whole brigade is not operationally deployable, the BTG is. Better operational tempo is now also being created by having enough BTGs in reserve to generate a continuous rotational deployment capacity for the likes of the mission in Ukraine.²⁷ Despite these improvements though, manpower is probably causing the greatest headache for Russian military planners in terms of creating the degrees of pace and mass that can generate the requisite *vnezapnost'*.

Russian military thinking, with its *aktivnost'* and allied 'strategic deterrence' logic, is currently aimed at undermining the decision-making processes within NATO itself, within individual NATO countries, and within their military organizations. The Russian aim is to make these processes run in Moscow's favor or to at least slow them down so that their effectiveness is reduced. At the same time,

to fulfil its goals. Education will lead to the development of better counters. In particular, the education of commanders at the operational level is crucial, so that their leadership qualities are enhanced. The need now is for leaders who are better able to make informed and timely decisions when subject to Russian *aktivnost'* measures. Leaders must be developed who are comfortable with the idea of mission command and who are able to make decisions and take action quickly and in the absence of orders from above but within an understanding of their commander's intent.

The Russian military's current concentration on the concept of pace must also be matched by a similar concentration within NATO ranks. If not, Moscow will continue to have the capacity to generate freedom of action at both strategic and operational levels – and Western politicians and NATO commanders will then always be trying to play catch-up. ❧

²⁴ Farangis Najibullah, "Russia's Foreign Legion of Doubt," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 18, 2015, www.rferl.org/a/russia-foreigners-military-recruiting/26800177.html. Accessed June 13, 2018.

²⁵ Niklas Eklund and Jorgen Elfving, "Russian Private Military Companies – Redwater?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 14(39), March 22, 2017, jamestown.org/program/russian-private-military-companies-redwater/. Accessed June 13, 2018.

²⁶ Sutyagin and Bronk, *Russia's New Ground Forces*, p. 18.

²⁷ Dimitry Gorenburg, "Contractees in BTGs," *Russian Defense Policy*, September 17, 2016, russiandefpolicy.blog/tag/battalion-tactical-group/. Accessed June 13, 2018.

Russia and Strategic Competition with the United States

Kristin Ven Bruusgaard

RUSSIA'S strategic capabilities, and her nuclear arsenal in particular, have since the end of the Cold War been fundamental to Russia's pursuit of security. The role of nuclear weapons has shifted over time in Russian military strategy, in part as a result of variation in the conventional balance of military power between Russia and the West. As Russian perceptions of Western conventional superiority have intensified, Russia has balanced by changing its doctrine for nuclear weapons use and by modernizing its nuclear and conventional inventory.¹

deter any adversary through the threat of “inflicting unacceptable damage on an adversary under any conditions.”²

Russia competes hard in the strategic realm, despite its economic and technological shortcomings. Several factors explain the intensity of Russian efforts, ranging from the deterioration of relations and mutual misperception, to actual capability gaps and the increased influence of the Russian military over security policy. An exaggerated emphasis on adversary capability over intentions is a characteristic trait of this policy. In Russia today, the political pushback against an exaggerated threat perception is likely minimal. The military industry's role in pushing the new strategic capabilities Putin displayed in a March speech remains understudied. Regardless of whether his threat perception is real or propagandistic, the consequences for force modernization are material and significant.

In the current strategic environment, Russia perceives three pressing tasks. First, to secure an effective second strike capability. Second, to secure nuclear

An exaggerated emphasis on adversary capability over intentions is a characteristic trait...

Russian conventional modernization has picked up in recent years, and Russia's own inventory for high tech and modern warfare is improving incrementally. Still, Russia perceives itself behind, especially in areas such as C4ISR and ballistic missile defense. This continued lag means Russia still deems nuclear capabilities vital for deterrent and warfighting purposes. Russia jealously guards its ability to

or conventional options to respond to conventional aggression. Third, to demonstrate non-traditional capabilities that enhance deterrence of adversary efforts to undermine the very existence of the Russian state. The rest of this essay will examine each of these in detail.

Although most Western analysts portray Russian second strike capabilities as

¹ Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, *Russian nuclear strategy after the Cold War*, forthcoming.

² *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], (Russian Federation Security Council), December 25, 2014.

massive and secure, Russian strategists have consistently questioned the reliability of this second strike capability. The increased preponderance of U.S. conventional strategic strike capability, emphasized also in U.S. official strategy documents, has intensified this paranoia.³ The scenario that describes Russia's endangered retaliatory capability is one in which the United States carries out a massive conventional precision decapitating strike, and effectively hinders Russian retaliation with its (future and potential) ballistic missile defense capabilities.

In the nuclear domain, Russia seeks to overcome such challenges by developing new strategic systems more capable in the current environment. They have decided to renew their nuclear triad to overcome what they see as challenges to strategic stability. This entails increasing the survivability of their retaliatory force by producing new

It seems to stem from a Russian concern that the United States no longer accepts mutual vulnerability with Russia and pursues superiority across domains. This impression was displayed with Russian reactions to the release of the 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review.⁵

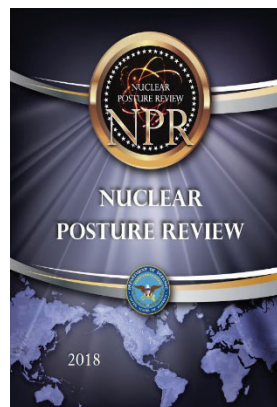


Figure 15: U.S. Nuclear Posture Review of 2018.

“In the nuclear domain, Russia seeks to overcome such challenges by developing new strategic systems more capable in the current environment.”

strategic submarines with new submarine-launched ballistic missiles, producing new ICBMs with enhanced features for mobility and survivability, and by investing in substantial cruise missile capabilities.⁴ Their ability to overcome missile defenses is rapidly improving, perhaps at a surprising rate to missile defense pessimists.

Although most Western analysts question the premise that Russia's retaliatory nuclear capability is threatened, the Russian drive to upgrade these capabilities is genuine.

Despite these concerns over its nuclear second strike capability, the trickiest strategic challenge for Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union has been to effectively deter conventional aggression, including of a smaller caliber than the bolt from the blue massive attack as described above. Russia revoked the Soviet no first use pledge in its first military doctrine in 1993, and has since become more and more concerned with how its deterrent strategy can contain or deter an increasing number of non-nuclear threats.

³ One interesting aspect of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review is how it explicitly reduced the emphasis on nuclear weapons because of conventional superiority. U.S. Department of Defense, “Nuclear Posture Review Report” (2010).

⁴ Hans M. Kristensen, “Russian Nuclear Forces: Buildup or Modernization?,” *Russia Matters*, September 14, 2017, www.russiamatters.org/analysis/russian-nuclear-forces-buildup-or-modernization. Accessed June 13, 2018.

⁵ Sergei Lavrov, “Statement at the Conference of Disarmament, Geneva,” (2018).

The early solution to this problem was to rely on nuclear options to compensate for conventional shortcomings. This approach was revitalized toward the end of the 1990s,⁶ when the display of Western air power in Kosovo made a significant impression in Moscow. Russian theorists then started deliberating the potential limited use of nuclear weapons for de-escalation of conflicts. A limited nuclear strike could potentially convince an adversary of the futility of continuing the fight in the face of Russian resolve to escalate to the nuclear level.

This increased utility of nuclear weapons to national security resulted in decisions made by President Yeltsin and later President Putin to sustain a strategic triad and to upgrade the significant Russian sub-strategic nuclear arsenal. The latter was perceived as potentially most useful to deter or contain regional conflict scenarios.⁷

Russian theorists continued to discuss the effectiveness and associated risks of this strategy, as it assumed an adversary not willing to match nuclear escalation. This uncertainty was one likely reason the theory of de-escalation never made it into official Russian strategy, although the word “de-escalation” appeared in a non-official strategy document issued by the Ministry of Defense in 2003.⁸ The Western debate on whether Russian strategy contains this concept continues, as does the Russian debate about whether it would work.⁹

Even when the concept emerged, many Russian military strategists preferred larger reliance on conventional rather than nuclear options. From around 2008, Russian theorists started discussing non-nuclear deterrence options to augment nuclear deterrence.¹⁰ Since 2010, Russian military doctrine has formally emphasized the role of conventional weapons in

Even when the concept emerged, many Russian military strategists preferred larger reliance on conventional rather than nuclear options.

⁶ There are some indications such nuclear weapons utility was entertained also by the Soviet and Russian General Staff in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁷ Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, “Nuclear Incoherence: Deterrence Theory and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2014.

⁸ This strategy document was, according to many observers, the result of bureaucratic infighting between the Ministry of Defense and the Security Council on the priorities of military reform, and an attempt by the Ministry to pre-empt the formulation of military doctrine which in turn should guide modernization. Jacob W. Kipp, “Russian Military Doctrine: Past, Present and Future,” in *Russian Military Politics and Russia’s 2010 Defense Doctrine*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011). The Russian 2017 maritime doctrine apparently mentions de-escalation as one of the missions of the Russian Navy. Katarzyna Zysk, “Escalation and Nuclear Weapons in Russian Military Strategy,” *RUSI Journal*, vol. 163, no. 2, 2018.

⁹ S.G. Chekinov and S.A. Bogdanov, “Strategicheskoe Sderzhivanie I Natsional’naia Bezopasnost’ Rossii Na Sovremennom Etape/ Strategic Deterrence and Russian National Security in the Contemporary Era,” *Voennaya Mysl’ [Military Thought]*, no. 3, March 2012. Alexey Arbatov, “Understanding the U.S.-Russia Nuclear Schism,” *Survival*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2017.

¹⁰ Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Ensuring Strategic Stability in the Past and Present: Theoretical and Applied Questions* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2011); Varfolomey Korobushin, “Metamorfosisy Strategicheskogo Sderzhivanie,” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie*, April 15, 2005.

strategic deterrence,¹¹ and the 2014 doctrine update explicitly contains a concept of “non-nuclear deterrence.”¹² This doctrinal shift has been matched by significant Russian advances in developing air- and sea-launched cruise missiles.¹³ The Russian political and military leadership continue to emphasize the increased relevance of non-nuclear technologies in the strategic competition.

The purpose of enhancing non-nuclear deterrent options has thus been to reduce reliance on nuclear options for dealing with conventional and regional contingencies. New sea- and air based cruise missiles significantly improve Russia’s ability to hold targets at risk and inflict damage across a wide geographical space. Where previously, only ballistic missiles with intercontinental range could reach the continental United States, Russia now has a demonstrated ability to hit the lower 48 states with dual-capable cruise missiles, and it has displayed other capabilities such as hypersonic (and nuclear powered) cruise missiles. In Russia’s Western, Southern, and Eastern strategic directions, such capabilities increase Russia’s strike range. This pertains to air, sea, and land-based capabilities, including capabilities that

would violate the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Despite this drive to reduce reliance on nuclear options, Russian strategists continue to debate the utility of nuclear options as well as dual-use options. Russian strategists now discuss a range of strategic operations that can be carried out by both non-nuclear and nuclear deterrent forces. They include demonstration strikes, operations to hit critically important targets, and strategic air space operations, to name a few.¹⁴ Conventional precision strike capabilities are displayed as potentially taking over the tasks of sub-strategic nuclear weapons, adding a rung to the ladder of escalation. The deterrent or compellent effect of non-nuclear options may increase as a result of the dual-capable systems that are now a predominant feature in the Russian inventory. Military theorists debate the utility of mixed fires and the importance of assessments of the battle damage and likely reaction to such strikes.¹⁵

The sustained modernization of the relatively large sub-strategic arsenals can only be read as a manifestation that Russia perceives deterrent and/or military utility in these systems. Although

Despite this drive to reduce reliance on nuclear options, Russian strategists continue to debate the utility of nuclear options as well as dual-use options.

¹¹ Kremlin, “Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoy Federatsii/ Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” (Moscow: President of the Russian Federation, 2010).

¹² “Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii/ the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” 2014.

¹³ Roger N. McDermott and Tor Bukkvoll, “Russia in the Precision-Strike Regime - Military Theory, Procurement and Operational Impact,” *FFI-Rapport (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment)*, August 1, 2017, www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/17-00979.pdf. Accessed June 13, 2018.

¹⁴ Dave Johnson, “Russia’s Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crises, and Nuclear Thresholds “ *Livermore Papers on Global Security*, February 2017.

¹⁵ V.I. Poletayev, Alferov, V.V., “O Neyadernom Sderzhivanii, Ego Rol’ I Meste V Sisteme Strategicheskogo Sderzhivaniya/Nonnuclear Deterrence in the Strategic Deterrence System,” *Voennaya Mysl’ [Military Thought]*, July 2015.


“A final and critical element in Russian efforts to compete strategically and asymmetrically is integrating capabilities for enhanced effect and planning conceptually for and exercising integrated operations.”

the purpose of reducing reliance on nuclear options is explicit and official, nonofficial deliberations regarding the interchangeability of non-nuclear and nuclear deterrence options persist. The two components function as a whole in Russian thinking – non-nuclear deterrence options are more credible because of the nuclear shadow under which they operate.

Meanwhile, Russian strategists and planners believe they face a major challenge in terms of deterring non-traditional threats, such as efforts at undermining societal cohesion, which Russian strategy documents now define as military problems. These threats are also part of the reason Russian strategists continue to refine the concept of strategic deterrence, an integrated concept for military and non-military levers of influence to affect adversary perception of Russia.

Since the 1990s, Russian military planners have been looking to develop forces and capabilities specifically tailored to eliminate the advantages of the adversary.¹⁶ The above mentioned conventional superiority has likely influenced the Russian calculus in this regard, in terms of fixing Russian efforts on non-military technologies. Russian concepts

of information confrontation, as well as an asymmetrical approaches are deemed vital to any Russian ability to prevail in future conflict. They are two ways in which Russian strategists look to influence the center of gravity in modern warfare, which they define as the willingness of the adversary to fight. This willingness to fight consists of the will of both political leaders and the population. In this light, efforts to influence elections, domestic politics, and particular policy decisions in Western countries seem unsurprising.

A final and critical element in Russian efforts to compete strategically and asymmetrically is integrating capabilities for enhanced effect and planning conceptually for and exercising integrated operations. None of the operations above take place without a significant information operations component across the range of such efforts, including cyber, electronic warfare, propaganda, and subversion. Military hardware – even just the potentiality of it, as displayed in Crimea – remains crucial to prevail in the mind of the adversary. Although their application may not be preponderant, their relevance will sustain Russia’s focus on both nuclear and non-nuclear assets in future competition with the West. 

¹⁶ Mary C. FitzGerald, “The Russian Military’s Strategy for “Sixth Generation” Warfare,” *Orbis*, Summer 1994.

Force or Modernization?

Fredrik Westerlund

RUSSIA'S perception of the world as an unpredictable and dangerous place is a strong driver for military force modernization. However, Russia's threat perception and security policy choices also tend to pose challenges to modernization. This essay will reflect upon the double-sided nature of the overall strategic objectives in Russian foreign, defence, and domestic policy.

The Russian political and military leadership sees the world as inherently hostile and unstable.¹ The Russian National Security Strategy² and Russian Military Doctrine³ describe a wide range of threats from all directions. To counter international and domestic instability, the leadership has launched a dual, complementary strategy: to assert Russian sovereignty internationally while safeguarding regime security at home through ever tighter control.⁴

These two overall strategic objectives in Russian security policy are intrinsically linked, due to the threat environment. From Moscow's perspective, external and internal threats to Russia are increasingly

interwoven: domestic unrest is regarded as sponsored from abroad. In the Russian National Security Strategy and the Military Doctrine, the so-called Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring are presented as examples of the intermingling of internal and external threats.⁵

Russia pursues international sovereignty in order to give itself room for maneuver in an unsafe world. In its foreign policy, this is expressed in 'strategic solitude – not isolation, but going alone'⁶ – and in external aggression to fend off real or imagined attacks. For defence policy, it entails having vassal states rather than allies and aiming for military self-sufficiency.

Moscow's choice of maintaining regime security through control is leading the country further down the path of authoritarianism. For example, the Kremlin has engaged in rising domestic repression and an increasing centralisation of power and decision-making. Pervasive anti-Western rhetoric coupled with patriotism and propaganda limit the scope for political criticism or dissent.⁷

Both of Russia's strategic objectives stem from a fundamental lack of trust. Russia believes it must be sovereign rather than rely on potentially treacherous allies and partners and it must control society and institutions rather than foster a new societal contract based on democracy and

¹ Jakob Hedenskog, Gudrun Persson and Carolina Vendil Pallin, "Russian Security Policy," in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2016), 114–9.

² Strategija natsionalnoi besopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation], (Russian Federation Security Council), December 31, 2015.

³ Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], (Russian Federation Security Council), December 25, 2014.

⁴ Hedenskog et al., "Russian Security Policy," 121–2.

⁵ Hedenskog et al., "Russian Security Policy," 107–11; 115; 122.

⁶ Gudrun Persson, "Security Policy and Military Strategic Thinking," in Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2013* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2013), 82–3.

⁷ Hedenskog et al., "Russian Security Policy," 100–7

rule of law. This doubt in others also guides Russia's choice of means: to primarily rely on hard – rather than soft – power. To achieve foreign and domestic policy objectives, the Russian government prefers to coerce, compel, and constrain, rather than to coach and convince.⁸ In doing so, Russia puts an emphasis on force.

The wide array of threats, the ambition of military self-sufficiency, and the reliance on force both at home and abroad is a driver for Russian military force modernization. To cater to foreign, defence, and domestic policy needs, Russia's military organization must be capable of handling a range of missions. These include what Mark Galeotti aptly called 'heavy metal diplomacy'⁹ and strategic deterrence¹⁰, as well as domestic insurgencies, local wars, large-scale conventional combat, and nuclear warfare.¹¹

It should be noted that 'force modernization' contains two contesting parts: 'force' is primarily quantitative while 'modernization' is qualitative. Consequently, a balance between force size and degree of modernisation has to be struck. This decision will impact the main building blocks of military power: operational concepts, organisation, manning as well as weapons and equipment.

The growing number of threats perceived



Figure 16: Russian MiG-35 multi-role combat jet. Source: Creative Commons.

has stimulated the development of new and a revisiting of older operational concepts. Special Forces operations, expeditionary air operations and stand-off warfare with long-range weapon systems have been introduced or explored, often mimicking the United States. Large-scale, high-intensity warfare concepts, which were abandoned in the 1990s, have been reintroduced and honed through strategic exercises over the past decade.¹² Russia has also improved unit combat readiness and mobility to better handle swiftly rising threats.¹³

This has in turn affected the Armed Forces' organization. Army, Army Corps, and division level units have been reintroduced to allow fighting in larger formations.¹⁴ Heavily-armed units are being developed

⁸ Hedenskog et al., "Russian Security Policy," 115.

⁹ Mark Galeotti, "Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia's Political Use of its Military in Europe Since 2014," Policy Brief (London, European Council on Foreign Relations), December 2016.

¹⁰ The Russian view of strategic deterrence is more extensive than in the West, including coercion and containment as well; see Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Russian Strategic Deterrence," *Survival*, vol. 58 no. 4, 2016: 7–26.

¹¹ Hedenskog et al., "Russian Security Policy," 107–9.

¹² Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight – Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011–2014*, (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2015); Johan Norberg, "Military Exercises and Russian Fighting Power 2009–2016," in Beatrice Heuser, Tormod Heier, and Guillaume Lasconjarias, eds., *Military Exercises: Political Messaging and Strategic Impact* (Rome, NATO Defense College, April 2018).

¹³ Johan Norberg and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russia's Armed Forces in 2016," in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2016), 53.

¹⁴ Fredrik Westerlund and Johan Norberg, "The Fighting Power of Russia's Armed Forces in 2016," in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2016), 92.



Figure 17: Russian Armata T-14 tank. Source: Creative Commons.

to allow for increased firepower in high-intensity warfare.¹⁵ The Armed Forces have created a Special Forces command and reconnaissance functions are being reinforced. The General Staff has established inter-service force groupings for stand-off warfare in all strategic directions and has for years been working on merging long-range reconnaissance functions and stand-off strike assets of the various arms and branches of services into a unified reconnaissance-strike system.¹⁶

More sophisticated equipment, operational concepts and higher readiness levels require a larger share of professional soldiers and less reliance on conscripts. At the same time, large-scale warfare requires mass, which explains why Russia continues to experiment with reserve personnel and mobilization units.¹⁷

In 2011, Russia launched an ambitious State Armaments Program, devoting 19 trillion

Rubles to weapons and equipment in the coming decade. In early 2018, it was replaced with a new program with a corresponding budget and the same key target: that 70 percent of the arms and equipment of the Armed Forces should be modern by 2021.¹⁸

However, there are downsides to the pursuit of sovereignty through military self-sufficiency. A wide array of military mission types to cover all threats, cost-intensive large-scale conventional and nuclear warfare concepts, and no allies to shoulder the burden drain resources for modernization. Maintaining and modernizing operational concepts and an organizational structure that can handle a wide range of missions is no easy task.

The policy of ‘strategic solitude’ and external aggression also complicates efforts to modernize the Armed Forces’ weapons and equipment. Technology transfer from abroad – for instance certain engines, machine tools, electronic components, and know-how – has already been impeded by Western sanctions following Russian aggression in Ukraine.¹⁹ A continuation of those sanctions and the imposition of counter-sanctions by Russia are likely to further impede technology transfer from the West. Also, the import-substitution programs – initiated by the government to attain technological self-sufficiency in order to increase Russia’s international sovereignty – further reduce transfer of technology and goods from abroad. In the short run, this leads to higher prices and

¹⁵ Gudrun Persson, “Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective,” in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2016), 192.

¹⁶ Viktor Khydoleev, “Voennaia nauka smotrit v budushchee” [Military science looks at the future], *Krasnaia Zvezda* [Red Star], March 26, 2018.

¹⁷ Johan Norberg and Fredrik Westerlund, “Russia’s Armed Forces in 2016,” 48–50.

¹⁸ Tomas Malmjöf, “Russia’s New Armament programme – Leaner and Meaner,” *RUSF Briefing* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Mars 2018), No.42; Tomas Malmjöf, “The Russian Defence Industry and Procurement,” in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2016), 152-3.

¹⁹ Tomas Malmjöf, “Russia’s New Armament programme – Leaner and Meaner,” 154–5.

lower quality for these goods. In the long run, Russian technology development may be hampered due to a limited inflow of know-how and necessary components and machinery.²⁰

Moreover, state domination of the Russian defence industry together with centralization of decision-making, internal repression, and weak intellectual property rights stifle technological innovation. This, in turn, hampers the modernization of operational concepts, since they depend on technology.

Technological challenges, together with the need for large volumes of equipment due to the emphasis on large-scale warfare, has resulted in most of the defence industry deliveries consisting of renovation, modernization, and new production of Soviet-era military equipment.²¹ In contrast, newly developed weapon systems have so far been delivered only in small numbers. Still, in some areas newly-developed weapon systems are produced in quantities that allow the military to introduce new operational concepts. One such area is long-range missiles, where the Russian defence industry has been able to develop missiles and produce them in such quantities as to render it possible for the Armed Forces to explore operational concepts for stand-off warfare. Provided that corresponding long-range ISR systems can be developed, Russia will be able to introduce stand-off reconnaissance-strike concepts.

The emphasis on regime security also affects the manning of the Armed Forces. The Ministry of Defence is experiencing increasing competition from other power ministries and agencies that also recruit

contract personnel for their armed units. Manning a large Army and other power structures under current demographics remains a challenge.²²

Despite these challenges, the West should expect continuity in Russia regarding threat perception, strategic objectives, and the consequences for force modernization. The Russian threat perception has been entrenched in the past years, and Russia's aggressive foreign policy has instigated Western reactions. These are seen as a confirmation of the West's malign intent and a vindication of Russian policies. The threat perception seems to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Maintaining the policies of international sovereignty and regime security through control appears to have become the only option to Russia's political leadership. The vigor with which they are implemented may vary, but the strategic direction will most likely remain.²³

Similarly, the West can expect Moscow to rely on the Russian Armed Forces for 'heavy metal diplomacy' and strategic deterrence, for Special Forces Operations and stand-off strikes, as well as for large-scale conventional and nuclear warfare. The modernization will probably be selective and broadly rely on tweaking Soviet technology, but will allow Russian military power to continue to grow. In sum, the West is likely to see more 'force' than 'modernization' – due to Russian threat perceptions and security policy choices – but it will nonetheless be a force to reckon with. Quantity is a quality also in force development. Coupled with a regime willing to use it in its foreign policy, Russian force modernisation becomes a challenge also to Russia's neighbours.

²⁰ See also Susanne Oxenstierna, "The Western sanctions against Russia. How do they work?" in Steven Rosefield, ed., *Putin's Russia: Economic, Political and Military Foundations* (World Scientific, forthcoming 2018)

²¹ Tomas Malmlöf, "Russia's New Armament programme – Leaner and Meaner," 176.

²² Gudrun Persson, "Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective," 195.

²³ Ibid.

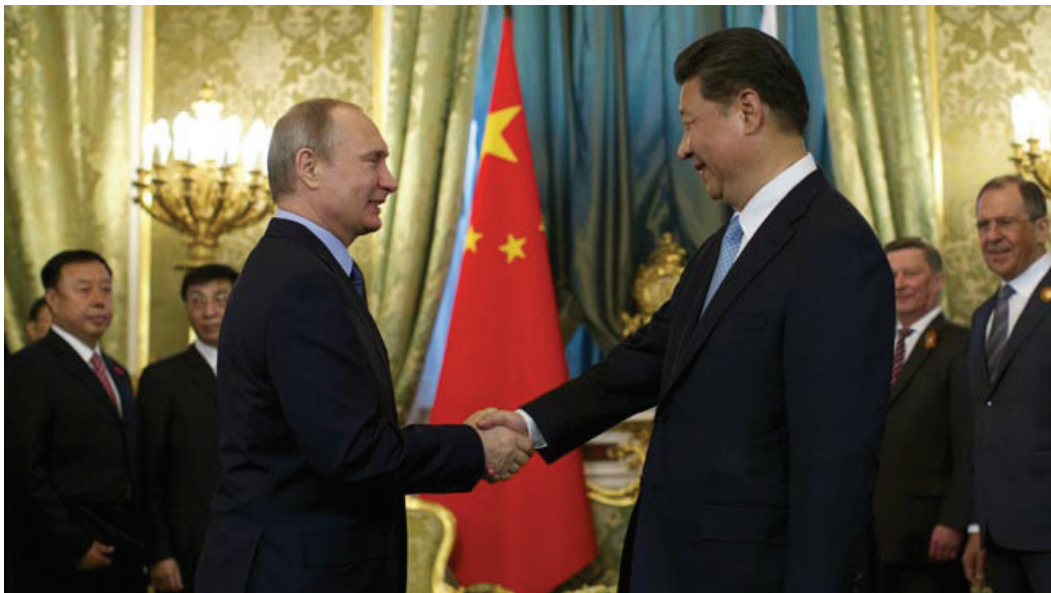


Figure 18: President Putin and President Xi. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Regarding the West's response to these likelihoods, actions by the United States or other Western powers will most likely not significantly affect Russia's security policy trajectory, since it flows from choice rather than necessity. Russia's leadership identified the West as its main military adversary years before the West recognized Russia as a potential opponent. Furthermore, a basic geopolitical or realist analysis would suggest that China is a more substantial threat to Russia. The People's Liberation Army is twice as large as Russia's Armed Forces and also undergoing extensive modernization; China borders Russia and has militarized territorial disputes with several of its other neighbors; and Russia has an abundance of carbon energy sources that Beijing may covet.

However, the Kremlin has chosen to designate China as a strategic partner rather than a potential adversary. Russian anti-western politics is primarily driven by domestic factors – such as the needs to secure the power of the current regime – not by Western actions. Consequently,

while being open to dialogue with Russia, the West should not expect it to be able to sway Russia from its antagonistic approach. Nor should the West refrain from actions it finds necessary to protect its interests for fear of driving Russia to further hostilities.

The West should not overestimate the ongoing Russian military modernization nor underestimate its force development. Moderately modernized Soviet-designed arms and equipment in large volumes reinforced with selective high-technology systems in smaller numbers have already resulted in a significantly improved Russian military power. It is therefore important to closely follow Russian force modernization to gauge Russia's current and future military capability. To paraphrase a famous quote: 'Russian modernization is never as strong as it looks; Russian force is never as weak as it looks.' Military force is an important part of Russian foreign policy. The West needs to continue reducing its vulnerability to Russian coercion by threats and actual use of military force. 



Figure 19: Russia military districts. Source: NATO.

Factors Influencing Russian Force Modernization

Charles Bartles

THE military that the Russian Federation inherited in the 1990s had a bloated command structure designed for the command and control of literally thousands of divisions, regiments, and battalions, with the vast majority of these units being ‘skeleton units’ manned by small cadres that would help flesh out the unit with conscripts and reservists in the event of a mass mobilization. This type of structure was ideal for fighting large-scale, state-on-state warfare like the Soviet Union experienced in World War II, but it

became apparent after the Cold War that Russia would most likely face a different type of conflict in the future. Beliefs about the changing nature of future war and the lessons learned from Russia’s post-Soviet military experience drove Russia to reform the military district system and transition from a division/regimental to a brigade structure. These reforms were intended to streamline command and control, in order to give the Russian military a command structure more capable of responding to regional and low-intensity threats.

One of the most high profile command and control changes Russia has made is the reform of the military district system. This reform did not just condense six military districts into four (later five), but also significantly changed command relationships, giving the military district commander operational control of most Ministry of Defense forces in their respective regions, somewhat similar to the Goldwater-Nichols reform in the United States.



Figure 20: Russian SS-26 Iskander missile system. Source: NATO.

The regimental/division structure that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union is a vestige of the Soviet conscript-based Army oriented to large-scale warfare, a structure that is notoriously officer heavy. Russia's civilian leadership, and some elements in the military leadership, believed the Armed Forces structure should emulate the more modular forces that were quelling the insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus during the early 2000s. The Russian leadership was also aware of the United States and other countries transitioning to a brigade structure.

In terms of command and control, and force projection, these reforms are important for a couple of key reasons. The first is that they are responsible for consolidating the division/regimental structure (8,000-10,000 personnel) into modular maneuver brigades of approximately 3,000-4,500 personnel, each capable of conducting

independent action and providing its own organic support. The second is that the transition to the brigade not only reduced a level of management, but was also instrumental in reducing the bloated officer corps. When the Russian Federation converted to the brigade structure, it also designated all units as 'permanent readiness units,' eliminating all cadre units and related cadre (mostly officer) positions.

Perhaps the strongest external factor that is driving Russian force modernization is the fielding of U.S. long-range, precision fires. Leading Russian military thinkers viewed the United States' routing of the Iraqis in Operation Desert Storm (1991) as the first signs of an emerging 'sixth generation warfare.'¹ Sixth generation warfare is characterized by the increasing use of precision guided munitions (PGMs) and the growing importance of the informational aspects of war (information / psychological

¹ Sixth generation warfare follows fifth generation warfare, which focused on the role of nuclear weapons. Slipchenko also believed that since the major powers (United States and Russia) could not be successful with nuclear first use, they would not be used, resulting in a nuclear stalemate.



Figure 21: Yakovlev Pchela-1T Russian drone.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

operations, C4ISR, Electronic warfare, cyber warfare, etc.). Usually when Russian security professionals are discussing ‘new generation warfare,’ this is the context in which they are thinking.²

Russian military leaders eventually came to believe that sixth generation warfare would be fully manifested with the emergence of ‘non-contact warfare,’ which can be roughly defined as a type of warfare that is conducted by long-range and distant means, such as advanced cruise missiles and long-range drones. Such warfare would require not only advanced new weapons, but also a sophisticated C4ISR system to provide targeting data for these weapons. In the Russian view, the United States’ ‘Prompt Global Strike’ concept is a prime example of ‘non-contact warfare.’³

Meanwhile, Russia has long been at work on the development of twin concepts for the detection and assured destruction

of high-value targets in near-real time. Its current iteration is referred to as the reconnaissance-fire system. This system is being implemented through the Strelets C4ISR system that allows servicemen to task tactical and operational-level fires by linking sensor, C2, and fire assets.⁴

Similarly, U.S. use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles has been of great interest in the Russian Federation, but Russia is taking a different path in its UAV development. While the United States has pioneered the use of UAVs as mobile firing platforms, Russia has been more interested in the ISR aspects of UAVs. In the Russian view, it is far better to use a UAV to accurately direct cheap artillery for an extended duration, than to have a UAV that just fires a missile or two and then needs to return to base.

Due to U.S./NATO airpower and concerns about sixth generation warfare, air defense and electronic warfare are high priorities for Russian development. Overlapping Russian air defense capabilities, such as the S-500 and A-235, are not only intended to destroy aircraft, but also cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and even low-earth orbit satellites. Electronic warfare capabilities can disrupt the satellite and terrestrial communications infrastructure and the precision navigation and timing capabilities that sixth generation warfare requires.

In addition to the international factors outlined above, there are a number of domestic developments that have shaped Russian military modernization as well. In 2016, the Russian Federation established the

² Dr. Jacob W. Kipp, “Russian Sixth Generation Warfare and Recent Developments,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor Online*, January 25, 2012, vol. 9, no. 17, jamestown.org/program/russian-sixth-generation-warfare-and-recent-developments. Accessed March 15, 2018.

³ Peter A. Mattsson, “Russian Military Thinking – A New Generation of Warfare,” *Journal on Baltic Security*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015. See also Charles K. Bartles “Russian Threat Perception and the Ballistic Missile Defense System,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2017: 152-169.

⁴ Dr. Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, “The Russian Reconnaissance Fire Complex Comes of Age,” pending publication.

National Guard of the Russian Federation (*Rosgvardiya*). This new independent agency reports directly to the Russian President. *Rosgvardiya* controls most of Russia's internally oriented militarized intelligence and security services. These include the Ministry of Internal Affairs - Internal Troops (MVD-VV), Special Rapid-Response Detachment (SOBR), the Special-Purpose Mobile Detachment (OMON), the MVD Prompt-Response and Aviation Forces' Special-Purpose Center, and aviation subunits. Estimates of the total personnel have varied between 200,000 and 300,000 uniformed personnel.⁵ This

At the same time, Russia has streamlined its ability to design and field new large end items such as tanks, armored personnel carriers, and infantry fighting vehicles, a process that takes substantially longer in the United States. It apparently takes about 5-10 years from the beginning of the Russian design process until serial production begins for most major Ground Forces/Airborne end items, if the initial prototype is deemed viable. (Air and naval systems take much longer.)

One of the reasons Russia has a much shorter design and production timeline compared

“... U.S. use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles has been of great interest in the Russian Federation...”

means that Russia's militarized intelligence and security services are now mostly consolidated under three main government bodies – the Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Federal Security Service (FSB), and *Rosgvardiya* – instead of being spread through a myriad of ministries, services, and agencies.

This change was likely due to shifting attitudes toward the nature of both internal and external sources of threat. Russia's Soviet legacy made stove-piped militarized intelligence and security agencies the norm, as the Soviets were leery of investing all military power in a single organization or ministry, due to fears of a coup. More recently, Moscow has been particularly concerned about foreign sponsored 'color revolutions,' so the formation of a single military command to put down an insurrection may have been an important factor in the creation of *Rosgvardiya*.⁶

to the United States is that Moscow relies on a very different arms development cycle. Capability development questions are settled in the Russian General Staff with inputs from the branch chiefs – this means that relative to the United States, there are far fewer bureaucratic hurdles. There also appears to be no bidding process, since the same manufacturers are consistently used. Russia's primary manufacturers of combat vehicles are UralVagonZavod (T-72, T-90, Armata) and KurganMachineZavod (BMP-1, BMP-2, BMP-3). These production lines may be kept 'warm' through the steady production of new combat vehicles and the refurbishment of old combat vehicles. Design teams are continuously employed, and kept together to start on the next system or upgrade as soon as their current project enters production. Manufacturers typically build a few prototypes, and if the prototype is unacceptable the manufacturer returns to the design phase. Innovations are

⁵ Aleksandr Igorev, "A Place in the Formation Has Been Designated for the Russian Guard: The President Has Defined the Missions of the New Service," *Kommersant Online*, April 12, 2016, www.kommersant.ru/doc/2961750. Accessed April 15, 2016.

⁶ Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review*, vol. 96, no. 1, Jan/Feb 2016: 30-38.

accepted or rejected at the prototype phase, and many designs make it no further than this phase.

If the prototype is acceptable, improvements are made and a test batch (approximately a battalion's worth) of vehicles is produced for field testing.⁷ This field testing takes a year or two, after which the product is further refined and put into full serial production. Rarely does a new system or an upgrade replace all previous systems. In this incremental, evolutionary approach – versus a revolutionary approach – a certain percentage is usually replaced and then the next iteration begins.

Another reason that Russia is able to reach serial production quickly is the emphasis on interoperability and modularity.⁸ Russia's unified design standards make many combinations of turrets and chassis for armored vehicles possible, despite being produced by different manufacturers. It also appears that cost (both production and operation/maintenance) is a key factor that is considered from the very beginning of development. Innovations that are deemed too costly are weeded out early, meaning that from the onset, the design must not only be combat effective, but also feasible in terms of cost.

Russia is pursuing an evolutionary strategy in terms of robotization. Instead of attempting to develop robotic combat vehicles from scratch, Russia is incrementally adding

robotic capabilities – such as autoloaders, unmanned turrets, and computerized steering – to existing systems. This allows the Russian military to reduce crew sizes, with the desired end state of eventually eliminating the entire crew for some combat vehicles. Robotics utilization is not limited to unmanned platforms in the Russian Federation. The Russian Armed Forces is also developing small automated turrets for placement on manned armored personnel carriers, armored cars, support vehicles, and even as secondary weapons on large systems such as self-propelled artillery pieces.

Despite these advantages in Russia's ability to more rapidly design, develop, and produce large weapons systems, President Putin's recent comments at a meeting of the Defense Ministry Board indicate that Russia will instead focus on equipping modestly priced platforms with better munitions. This development is somewhat unsurprising, as Russia has appeared to have had great success in Syria with using technologically advanced munitions on older and/or less technologically advanced platforms. Although Russia is adopting this "lower cost" strategy, Moscow will not stop the development and fielding of technologically advanced platforms, but will instead slow their development and field fewer systems.⁹ Whether Russia is able to field a fully modernized military has yet to be seen, but it appears at very least a framework for modernization has been laid, and is being implemented. ❧

⁷ Sergey Mikhaylov, "The Armed Forces Are on the Upswing," *Stoletiye Online*, October 7, 2014, www.stoletie.ru/obschestvo/armija_na_podjeme_129.htm. Accessed March 15, 2018.

⁸ Aleksandr Kurennoy and Aleksey Naryshkin, "Vyacheslav Khalitov, Deputy Director of the Uralvagonzavod Science and Production Corporation Open Joint-Stock Company for Specialized Technology," transcript of Arsenal radio program posted on *Ekho Moskv*y Online, January 26, 2015, m.echo.msk.ru/interview/detail.php?ID=1480668. Accessed 15 March 2018.

⁹ Charles K. Bartles, "Focus on Munitions, Instead of Platform Development," *OE Watch Online*, February 2018. See also Aleksey Ramm, Sergey Valchenko, and Dmitriy Strugovets, "Banking on Precision and High Efficiency," *Izvestiya Online*, December 25, 2017, iz.ru/687444/aleksei-ramm-sergei-valchenko-dmitrii-strugovets/stavka-na-vysokotochnoe-i-vysokoeffektivnoe. Accessed March 15, 2018. Finally, see "Expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board," Kremlin Website Press Release, December 22, 2017, en.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56472. Accessed March 15, 2018.

The Way Ahead in US-Russian Relations

John Tefft

PROFESSOR Angela Stent of Georgetown University wrote eloquently in her 2014 book *The Limits of Partnership* about the inability of the United States and Russia to find a true partnership in the post-Soviet world. Despite numerous attempts to “reset” the relationship, diverging interests on both sides have driven Russia and the United States apart rather than toward finding common ground.

have led to new sanctions. It has only gotten worse since I returned to the United States in late 2017.

In recent months, we have witnessed the poisoning of a retired Russian intelligence officer and his daughter in Salisbury, England and the unprecedented expulsion of 100 Russian intelligence officers by over 20 countries. I agree with my friend, former Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns, who has argued that President Putin likely overplayed his hand this time with the Salisbury attack.¹ I also agree with Tom Friedman, who argues that Putin has forsaken the long-term strategic interests of Russia, in the name of maintaining short-term stability.² As we all know though, stability without change or adjustment often leads ultimately to

“While mistakes have been made on both sides, I think the fundamental problem is that the Russians have not made up their minds...”

Today the relationship is as troubled as any time in my lifetime. My experience working on the U.S.-Russian or U.S.-Soviet relationship began in August 1983, when I became a staff member of the Office of Soviet Union Affairs in the U.S. State Department. Just over 30 years later, my tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Moscow began in 2014, after Russia had annexed Crimea by force and begun its operations in the Donbass. Sanctions were put in place. Russia was isolated and the relationship, already bad, got worse. My three years were difficult ones, with no improvement in our relations. Indeed, Russian cyber-attacks on the United States and other differences

instability. Russia needs domestic reform, and despite Russian rhetoric, Russia needs to have a good relationship with the West. It is still a society in transition, attempting to modernize, carve a place for itself in the modern world, and find its identity in the post-Soviet period.

While mistakes have been made on both sides, I think the fundamental problem is that the Russians have not made up their minds what kind of a relationship they want with us and our Western allies. More precisely, Russians want their country to be a great power, but the Russian approach has varied considerably. Let me outline

¹ William J. Burns, “Putin Has Overplayed His Hand,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2018, available at www.nytimes.com/2018/03/31/opinion/sunday/putin-trump-overplayed.html, accessed July 2, 2018.

² Thomas L. Friedman, “Is Putin a C.I.A. Agent?,” *New York Times*, April 3, 2018, available at www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/opinion/putin-cia-weakening-russia.html, accessed July 2, 2018.



Figure 22: President Putin at the 2007 Munich Security Conference. Source: Antje Wildgrube.

some of the key issues of difference that have brought us to this point and to discuss how we might address them if we are going to be able to get things back on track or at a minimum stabilize an increasingly unstable international situation.

First is the overarching geopolitical approach. I have always resisted calling the current period a “new cold war” or using words like “containment” that have specific meanings in another historical period. I have always favored a mix of recognizing our differences, firmly resisting Russian aggression and pressure, but keeping open the possibilities for productive engagement. My intellectual roots are in the 1970s and 80s when we and our European allies insisted that the Soviet Union address each of the three baskets of the CSCE Final Act – security (both nuclear and regional), economics and business, and human rights. Fundamental to each of these areas is a

respect for rule of law, and international norms governing behavior by nations – the cornerstones of the post-World War II international order.

While we were partially successful engaging with President Yeltsin’s administration, we have been far less successful with Putin’s. Particularly since 2007, and his speech at the Munich Security Conference, he has attempted to create a whole new paradigm for East-West relations. Invading sovereign nations in what Russians call the ‘Near Abroad’ in order to secure an imperial hold, using covert methods to destabilize the independent nascent democratic governments in East-Central Europe, and employing covert methods to kill his opponents with impunity are all part of his tool box. Rule of law has been tossed out the window. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity has been ignored repeatedly.

Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was correct in pressing Russia to address the problems in Ukraine if we were to get our relationship back on track. Rebuilding a successful relationship, we need to find some common ground, with Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity fundamental. Russia has to respect the rules of the game if we are to get back to building a Europe, whole, free, and at peace.

Dmitri Trenin recently wrote a thought-provoking article, in which he argued that the emergence of an independent Ukraine – as well as Belarus – is a natural process, something that Russia would be better off understanding and accepting as a fact.³ Instead, Russian actions in Donbass have essentially pushed Ukraine irrevocably

³ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia and Ukraine: From Brothers to Neighbors,” March 21, 2018, available at [carnegie.ru/commentary/75847](https://www.carnegie.ru/commentary/75847), accessed July 2, 2018.

away from Moscow and toward an embrace of the West. Russia should have foreseen this as a likely outcome of intervening so forcefully, posits Trenin.

Will the Russian leadership recognize this reality? Can they adapt their post-imperial policy to recognize the national aspirations of Ukraine and other nations of the former Soviet Union? I am skeptical. I don't have an easy solution, but I think we need to support the Minsk Group Normandy Channel negotiations, and by continuing U.S. engagement through the Surkov-Volker talks.

I also think we need to continue to be prepared to engage with Russia in discussing other regional hot spots. In the mid-1980s, U.S. regional Assistant Secretaries of State held talks with their Russian counterparts on most of the main regions and conflicts in the world. In some areas we have continued these talks. Former North Korea Coordinator Joe Yun held several rounds of talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov on dealing with North Korea during my tenure in Moscow, and we have had consultations on Afghanistan. In my view, if these talks are going to be more than just a pro forma exchange of views, there has to be greater consistency. We can't talk about increasing pressure on North Korea to force the denuclearization of the country with the Russian Foreign Ministry, while Russia keeps quietly trading with the North Korean regime and Russian spokesmen urge more understanding for Kim Jung Un. We can't talk about Afghanistan seriously, if Russia is covertly supplying weapons to the Taliban, as U.S. commanders in Afghanistan report.

Second, we have a lot to do when it comes to both nuclear arms control, but also in space and cyber. Russia refuses to acknowledge that it has violated the INF Treaty with the development of a new cruise missile – the



Figure 23: Russian SSC-8 cruise missile.
Source: Reuters.

SSC-8 – that exceeds the territorial limits of the Treaty. More broadly, despite significant efforts by the Obama Administration, Russia has not engaged seriously in arms control discussions to extend New START or deal with other strategic nuclear issues.

Russia continues to refuse to believe that the U.S. anti-ballistic missile program is designed to protect the United States and its allies from an attack from North Korea or Iran. Russian leaders are convinced that the U.S. anti-ballistic program is designed to wipe out the Russian deterrent or could be adapted to target the Russian leadership in a preemptive strike with low-trajectory weapons launched from bases in Poland and Romania. One of the casualties of Russia's cyber-attacks on the United States has been the stillborn talks on developing cyber weapons. Eventually the United States, Russia, Europe, and China are going to have to address the issues of cyber deterrence and preventing war in the cyber world and space.

Third, in terms of economics and business, I have always believed that American business in Russia has been a positive force for change. This is not just because we sell American products, supporting American jobs, or because American investment has been good for our firms. It is because I have found in my travels that American firms

in Russia have adhered for the most part to modern business practices and ethical standards. Many have become models in their regions. Additionally, many of the managers of American multinationals are now young Russians who have learned how to run their businesses successfully and ethically, all while operating in a very corrupt environment. They have, in short, learned how to become modern international businessmen and women. I look forward to the day when we can return to a more normal, open, and competitive economic relationship.

Fourth, in terms of human rights and values, I do not think we should compromise on our fundamental beliefs and values just because the Russian leadership rejects the western liberal value system. Inaction caused by fear of so-called ‘color revolutions’ as well




In the end, much of this is about the identity of Russia.

as reluctance to open up the economic system with a real court system and other reforms will not help Russia become the modern nation to which it aspires. I think that the Russian people want reform, and this includes many of those who support President Putin. However, many have resigned themselves to working with the current system because they see no prospect of an alternative or means of supporting an alternative.

I think we need to continue to hold up Western values as the most successful model for modern nations. I am convinced that the Western model in the broadest sense is what younger Russians aspire to. I believe most educated Russians want to be a part of a proud Russian nation, but one that is integrated with the West and not estranged from it. To achieve this, Russia will have to make serious changes.

Looking to the future, most Russian and American experts I talk to find it hard to foresee much change in U.S.-Russian relations. I would love to be surprised. Settling Ukraine will be a lynchpin. So too will be putting into place a clear understanding that future invasions of neighboring countries in the former Soviet Union must not happen. As Russians debate their future policies, they will need to recognize that the international community will not understand attempts to intervene in the independent nations of the former Soviet Union.

In the end, much of this is about the identity of Russia. The nation has still not come to any consensus on a true identity in the modern world, except that everyone wants Russia to be a great power. To be a great power today, you need not just

military prowess but a strong economy integrated into the international system. Part of the problem is that Russia can't agree on its past, so it is unclear how it can agree on the future of the nation. Another part of the problem is that Russia has to get over the national preoccupation with victimhood. The propaganda machine has to stop always blaming the United States when they are answering the question, ‘Kto Binovat?’ – who is to be blamed? I empathize with the Russian people for the damage caused by communism and the Soviet system, and I understand the mistakes that have been made by Russian leaders since 1991. However, it has been over 25 years since the end of the Soviet Union. Russians have to take responsibility for their own decisions – this has to be done if Russia is to become a modern nation working productively and peacefully along other nations. 

Biographical Notes

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ROD THORNTON is a professor in the Defence Studies Department at King's College London. Prior to academia, Thornton served as a sergeant in an infantry regiment of the British Army. He saw service in Germany, Cyprus, Canada, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia, and is the holder of a Queen's Gallantry Medal. On leaving the Army in 1988 he earned an undergraduate degree in Russian and Serbo-Croat. He then rejoined the Army for a year (1992-93) to serve as an interpreter in Bosnia. He became a civilian again and earned two master's degrees (MSocSc in Russian and East European Studies and an MA in Security Studies). He has studied at the following universities: Nottingham, Birmingham, Johns Hopkins, Sarajevo, and the Kiev Institute of Aeronautical Engineering. Thornton's doctorate is from

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AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT is a retired United States diplomat. He was a career Foreign Service Officer for more

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