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**Military Strategy of the Russian Federation in
Early 21st Century**

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

Diplomová práce mapuje proces změn vojenské strategie Ruské federace od jejího vzniku (konec roku 1991) do současnosti (květen 2016). Za použití longitudinální metody process tracing, autor pomocí teorie strategie a konceptu strategické kultury zkoumá, ve kterých oblastech ruské strategické kultury a vojenské strategie a došlo během sledovaného období ke změnám, a jaký měly tyto změny vliv na strategii uplatňovanou v ozbrojených konfliktech jichž se Ruská federace zúčastnila. Dalším sledovaným jevem je formování ideologického ukotvení revizionistické zahraniční a bezpečnostní politiky v hlavních strategických dokumentech. Jsou zkoumány následující faktory, které mají při utváření a implementaci výsledné strategie rozhodující význam: prezident a jeho administrativa, strategická kultura, strategické dokumenty, ozbrojené síly a vojenské operace.

Klíčová slova

Vojenská strategie, Ruská federace, zahraniční a bezpečnostní politika, strategická kultura

Abstract

Diploma thesis tracks a process of transformation of the military strategy of the Russian Federation since its establishment (end of 1991) up to now (May 2016). The author observes, using longitudinal method of Process Tracing and with help of strategic theory and concept of strategic culture, the author observes in which areas of the Russian strategic culture and military strategy occurred changes throughout the surveyed period of time and how the changes influenced strategy implemented in armed conflicts in which Russian Federation was involved. Another observed phenomenon is a formalisation of ideological anchoring of revisionist foreign and security policy in the key strategic documents. Following factors are identified as critical in formation and implementation of final strategy: Presidential administration, strategic culture, strategic documents, armed forces, and military operations.

Keywords

Military strategy, Russian federation, foreign and security policy, strategic culture

Rozsah práce: 144 966 znaků

Prohlášení

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.
2. Prohlašuji, že práce nebyla využita k získání jiného titulu.
3. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

V Praze dne

Štěpán Konopásek

Poděkování

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List of abbreviations

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CST	Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FPC	Foreign Policy Concept
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IR	International relations
MD	Military Doctrine
MIC	Military Industrial Complex
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Concept
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PGM	Precision guided munition
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RAF	Russian Armed Forces
RF	Russian Federation
SC	Strategic culture
SCO	Shangai Cooperation Organization
SLBM	Submarine launched ballistic missile
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA, US	United States of America
USSR	Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction

Introduction

“Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”
– Winston Churchill

Military is political - political is military: two sides of the same coin forged by strategy. Being a guiding principle to both political and military affairs, strategy indeed merits sufficient attention. Thorough analysis of strategy offers a valuable opportunity to better understand certain state's incentives to take various actions within an international community. Therefore, the analysis of the Russian strategy shall help to shed light on an enigmatic nature of Russia's foreign and security policy, as portrayed by Sir Winston Churchill in his timeless quote listed above.

In his 2005 annual state of the nation speech, the President of the Russian Federation (RF) Vladimir Putin called a disintegration of the USSR “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” leaving “tens of millions” of Russians outside the RF territory. President's statement voices several key features of Russian strategic thought that have been already shaping the strategy for more than two decades: loss of a great power status and strong notion of protection of Russians abroad. Moreover, the above-mentioned speech was delivered at the time when the RF regressed to patterns of strategic thought antagonistic to the West that persist up to now.

Therefore, principal questions to be answered by this thesis are following: what is contemporary Russian military strategy, what are its constituent parts, why and how has it developed into the present-day state, and how would its probable development in the near future look like? Aim of this thesis is to offer comprehensive analysis of the most significant strategic documents and strategic choices throughout the existence of the Russian Federation. Given the time-scale and content of the analysis, complexity of the strategy and its transformation in time is favored at the expense of provision of a more in-depth approach to the surveyed topic. Even so, the author strongly believes that sufficient attention paid to the processes of strategic reasoning shall provide the reader with valuable insight into a realm of Russian contemporary politico-military strategy. Solid knowledge of Russian strategy is valuable, especially *vis-à-vis* uncertainty of the West about what Russian strategic goals are in ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. It is the author's sincere hope that this diploma thesis shall provide a modest contribution to efforts aimed at bridging this perceptible gap.

Methodology

Nature of surveyed matter consists of data of a twofold nature: material (armed forces, military technology, documents) and ideational (strategy, culture, politics). Material objects can be best described as physically existing in the world. The objects of ideational nature are approached with the use of theoretical concepts. Consequently, the focal point of applied methodology lies in ontology – philosophical premises about the world we know and its various observable aspects. In a presented case, ontology involves premises related to social phenomenon of military strategy emanating from deeply rooted elements of Russian strategic culture. The research method is conceived as a holistic approach to observation of the above-mentioned phenomenon within a framework of a qualitative longitudinal single-case study. The time frame of the case study encompasses prominent strategic documents adopted from 1993 until 2015. As discussed further, “strategy is a process.”¹ Therefore, a method of process tracing is used to grasp the surveyed matter.

Process Tracing

Process tracing is a “fundamental tool of qualitative analysis, often invoked by scholars who carry out within-case analysis based on qualitative data, [typifying] a systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator; [thus it] can contribute decisively both to describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims.”² Attendant upon empiricist/positivist tradition, process tracing offers several advantageous characteristics that make it suitable for research in the field of strategy. First, it allows us to identify causal mechanisms (e.g., changes adopted by military as a result of previously approved strategic document). The causal mechanisms are understood as “a set of hypotheses that could be the explanation for some social phenomenon.”³ Second, the use of process tracing can “move us beyond unproductive ‘either/or’ meta-theoretical debates to empirical applications where *both* agents and structure matter.”⁴ Exactly this methodological problem arises when it comes to studying strategy. Both agents (strategic elites, armed forces) and structure (strategic culture, strategy) must be unavoidably and equally taken into account, especially with regard to their mutually constituted linkage. Thirdly, when conducting research, epistemological plurality is essential.

¹ GRAY, Colin: *Modern Strategy*, p. 30.

² COLLIER, David: *Understanding Process Tracing*, p. 823.

³ CHECKEL, Jeffrey T: *Process Tracing*, In: KLOTZ – PRAKASH: *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*, p. 115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Given the specific nature of the surveyed matter, it is necessary to employ “*both* positivist and post-positivist methodological lenses.”⁵ Above all, the method of process tracing “can fill the vast methodological space between positivism and post-structuralism.”⁶

After identification of the nature and advantages of process tracing, it is clarified how exactly this method works. “Process tracing identifies a causal chain that links independent and dependent variables. [P]rovides the how-we-come-to-know nuts and bolts for mechanism-based accounts of social change.”⁷ In sum, the method of process tracing “means to trace the operation of the causal mechanism(s) at work in a given situation. One carefully maps the process, exploring the extent to which it coincides with prior, theoretically derived expectations about the workings of the mechanism.”⁸ Furthermore, the method can be used for “drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena.”⁹ Process tracing is by nature “strong on questions of interactions” and “much weaker at establishing structural context” exploiting plethora of qualitative data.¹⁰ For instance, when we observe the impact of strategic documents upon changes in the RF military strategy, the cornerstone of research will be the qualitative data in the form of official key strategic documents as well as the resultant strategy implemented by armed forces.

However, a content analysis alone shall not be considered rigorous enough without two other implications. As noted before, to grasp the non-material data, both theory of strategy and concept of strategic culture is delineated and utilized in order to offer more profound insight into the matter. As David Collier suggests, “to start with a good narrative or with a timeline that lists the sequence of events.”¹¹ Features of his approach are embedded in the methodology. Finally, a critical assessment of Russian military strategy from the viewpoint of western scholarship is provided. The method of process tracing is one of the interconnected means how to meet the desired end of providing rigorous analysis of the contemporary Russian military strategy in its entirety.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁹ COLLIER: *Op. cit.*, p. 824.

¹⁰ CHECKEL: *Op. cit.*, p. 116. Suitable data may range from historical memoirs to documents. The latter are of key importance for the purpose of this thesis.

¹¹ COLLIER: *Op. cit.*, p. 828.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

The surveyed matter is structured through posing the following research questions. Is there an unequivocal, openly declared and regularly amended RF military strategy? What key factors enabled the transformation of the RF military strategy during the first fifteen years of the 21st century? Does the contemporary RF military strategy emanate from valid legal documents, hence somewhat predictable, or is it rather quirky, shrouded by ideology of revisionist nationalism? What factors and figures wield influence upon recent changes made in the RF military strategy? And which patterns of Russian strategy are the most probable ones to occur in the near future?

Arguably, the RF tends to act as a revisionist state disgruntled with the current status-quo. However, increasing Russian politico-military assertiveness may not be the result of outer incentives, as Russian strategic elites and some IR scholars might argue. Conversely, the Russian strategic environment may be affected by an ideological background built on a notion of nationalistic identity. In sum, Russian strategy could be influenced by a perilous revisionist ideology advocating superior position of the RF within the so-called “Russian world,” as well as political patronage over all Russians living within this indistinct area. Conceivable significance of this nationalistic ideology is analyzed and assessed with regard to resultant military strategy and relevant strategic choices. However, military strategy alone is unable to offer the deeper understanding of the essential grounds behind it. Therefore, the concept of strategic culture is employed to explain Russian culturally-based strategic reasoning. Derived from the above-mentioned research questions, the key hypotheses are presented below:

Russian military strategy went through significant changes.

Some major strategic choices deviate from valid strategic documents.

Increasing politico-military assertiveness exhibits revisionist security policy.

Future development of the Russian military strategy rests upon domestic politics.

Variables & Operationalization

The entire analysis is conducted from the constructivist viewpoint. Constructivist theory argues that norms shape the actors’ behavior and may take various forms; they can be either internationally recognized norms of conduct (e.g. UN Charter) or historically entrenched ways of thought on a level of polity (e.g. Constitution). The norms also affect the use of force on both international and national levels. In the diploma thesis, the level of analysis of Russian

politico-military sphere is called *Strategic environment* and it is divided into three distinct layers:

Strategic culture: background, entrenched ways of strategic thought

Strategic doctrines: prescriptive strategic documents derived from strategic thought

Strategic choices: key strategic decisions, implementation of strategy

At the same time, three layers act as independent variables exerting influence on the resulting dependent variable: *Military strategy*. In other words, the thesis hypothesizes that the final Russian military strategy is formulated by impingement of all these three layers, altogether creating the whole strategic environment.

First, theories of strategy and strategic culture are delineated, providing theoretical anchoring of the following analysis. Second, relevant strategic documents are assessed with regard to their content, as well as to important strategic choices made during their period of validity. Third, key strategic choices are analyzed in respect to supposed revisionist motivation of the decisions. Finally, overall assessment of the causes of development of the RF military strategy is provided, including a short-term prediction until 2020.

If there is a clear causal link to be found between a certain strategic choice and a valid strategic document, then it is argued that RF military strategy is more predictable and unequivocal, thereby less challenging for other actors to understand, follow, and predict. If such a link is absent, then it is argued that the RF military strategy tends to be the opposite. The more the political goals based on notions of revisionism and nationalism are promoted through strategic documents, the more significant will be the threat of spillover of such precarious tendency into the final military strategy; threatening other actors in the close vicinity of RF and ultimately the West.

1. Theory of Military Strategy

Strategy, the widespread term often indiscriminately used by many, thereby somewhat notorious for its vague connotation, has not always been conceived as broadly as now. For centuries, strategy inherently belonged to the military sphere. Hence “the term ‘strategy’ originally referred to what we now know as ‘military strategy.’ It is derived from the ancient

Greek word στρατηγία [strategia], which referred to generalship.”¹² As explained further, theory of strategy has developed as self-contained discipline dealing with utilization of military means for the political purposes of the state. Likewise, it is used by the author for analysis of the Russian strategy. First, a brief outline of the discipline is provided, followed up with strategic thought of contemporary scholarship. Ultimately, the analytical potential of Colin Gray’s work is introduced as a suitable tool for analysis.

1.1 Evolution of the discipline

How the strategic thought has developed into the present-day state? Which theorists of strategy contributed to the development of the discipline? Which theories were the most influential ones and their elements persist to be valid up to now?

1.1.1 From Sun Tzu to Clausewitz

Since the times of the ancient China, work of a military mastermind, General Sun Tzu,¹³ is notoriously known among scholars and general public. Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* is rightfully considered to be a cornerstone of the strategic thought. Classic assertions that the “[w]arfare is the greatest affair of state, the basis of life and death, the Way (Tao) to survival or extinction,”¹⁴ and “one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements,”¹⁵ are paramount when one reflects upon any kind of strategic activity. Significant contribution of Sun Tzu persists to be a foundation of principles of strategic thought up to this day.

In Ancient Greece, authors like Thucydides¹⁶ contributed to further development of strategic theory. In his work *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides laid foundation of modern historiography. By doing so, he enriched the strategic theory with an important element of history. Another example of works of ancient time’s strategist is *The Gallic Wars* by Julius Caesar.¹⁷ In his description of battles, negotiations, but also terrain and people, a gifted commander had recorded priceless testimony of genuine Roman warfare and strategic thought. For forthcoming centuries, theory of strategy as a discipline was unkempt. During medieval period, strategy shrunk into a matter of operations on a lowest levels of command.

¹² BOWDISH, Randall G: *Military Strategy: Theory and Concepts*, p. 2.

¹³ Sun Tzu (544-496 BC) was a Chinese general, strategist and philosopher.

¹⁴ TZU, Sun: *Art of War*, p. 129.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁶ Thucydides (460-400 BC) was an Athenian general, historian and philosopher.

¹⁷ Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) was a Roman statesman, general and writer.

Among a few exemptions¹⁸ stands out the *Prince* by Niccolo Macchiavelli.¹⁹ This ‘handbook of statecraft’ represents then rare intersection of political and military spheres. Advent of Age of Enlightenment altered an unfortunate tendency forever. Because of innovations in fortification engineering, especially in Italy and later France, cradles of star forts,²⁰ strategy turned into an exclusively scientific discipline. In short, on the one side of equation stood the offensive means to be confronted with geometrically designed defense structures on the other. The work of the then strategist represented work of a fortification architect. Such an apt person was supposed to counter the attackers with the brilliant utilization of engineering expertise, based on unwavering mathematical principles of geometry.

However, the era of Napoleonic Wars has altered the development of strategic theory once again. Strategy, for good, had turned away from the scientific field of fortification engineering back to the sphere of military command with the leading role of a commander’s genius. Such a revolutionary approach was introduced by General Carl von Clausewitz²¹ in his posthumously published opus magnum *On War*. Reflecting upon the Napoleon’s campaigns, Clausewitz defined the key imperatives of strategy presented below. A terse statement “[e]verything in strategy is very simple, but that doesn’t mean that everything is easy,”²² characterizes Clausewitz’s approach that newly introduced ‘friction’²³ as an inherent down-to-earth element of strategy. The merit of his theory lies in the concept of ‘Remarkable Trinity’. For the first time in history of strategic theory, Clausewitz rigorously operationalized military strategy with the use of three concepts (violence, chance, reason) related to three distinct social elements (people, army, government) exerting influence upon each other with the military operations in the centre.

Figure 1. Clausewitz’s Trinity.

¹⁸ For instance, a concept of Just War was elaborated by christian scholars Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

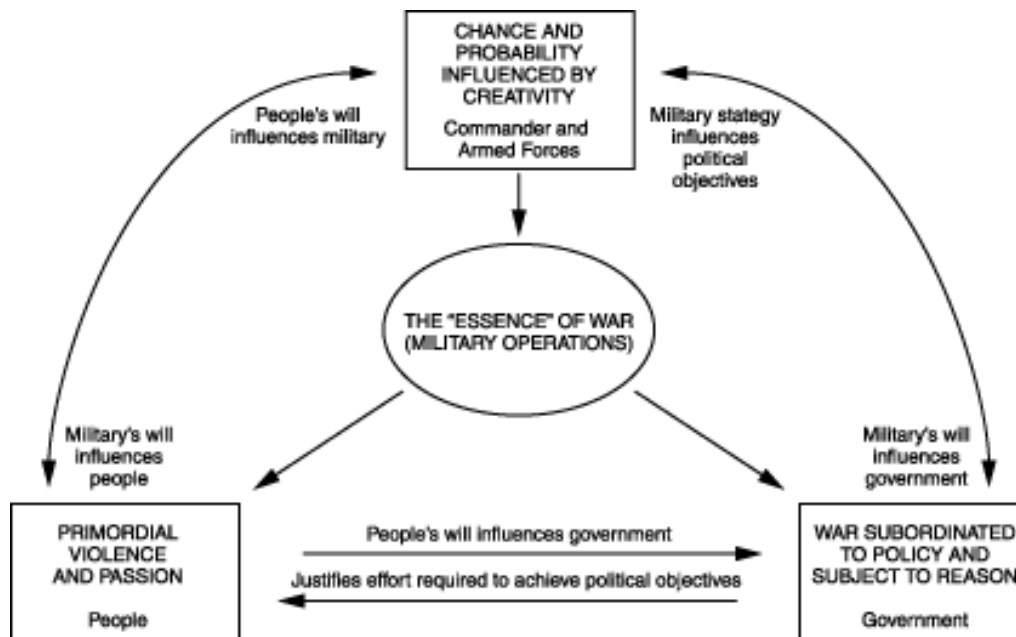
¹⁹ Niccolò di Bernardo dei Macchiavelli (1469-1527) was an Italian Renaissance historian, politician and writer.

²⁰ Built in a shape of star, bastion fortress consists of various geometrically defined defensive structures (ravelin, tenaille, hornwork, crownwork). Originally invented in the mid-15th century Italy, this specific system of fort construction spread all over Europe in form of distinct fortification schools (Italian, French, Dutch, Austrian...)

²¹ Carl Phillip Gottlieb von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian general and military theorist.

²² CLAUSEWITZ, Carl von: *On War*, p. 178.

²³ By friction Clausewitz meant any difficulties caused by the danger of war, its physical efforts and inevitable presence of unclear information known as a ‘Fog of War’.



Source: US Air Force, Air and Space Power Journal.

Clausewitz’s approach remains influential among many scholars, especially within the US and generally western strategic communities. Although criticized for many imperfections,²⁴ Clausewitz’s legacy lies in subjection of military means to political reason. His perception of war is often misinterpreted as a mere ‘continuation of policy by other means’. This may lead to a shallow interpretation of Clausewitz, whereas the correct understanding is slightly different: war as a ‘continuation of policy with *addition of* other means.’ This little but substantial difference is crucial for correct understanding of Clausewitz’s thought which is pointed much further than usually thought, assigning war its own purpose: compellence of enemy to do our will. Hence, from Clausewitz’s point of view, strategy is punctually “the use of engagement for the purpose of the war.”²⁵ Consequently, by definition of the *purpose* of war that needs to be directed rationally, Clausewitz demonstrated connection of strategy to policy.²⁶ Although such basic principle of strategy may be taken for granted from present point of view, it is one of the most significant Clausewitz’s contributions to the general theory of strategy. With his insistence that politics permeates all levels of military action,²⁷ Clausewitz defined strategy as an inherent part of political dimension. Although *On War* shows reader more about war than a strategy as we understand it now, Clausewitz laid down the solid foundations for modern strategic thinking.

²⁴ Especially its rhetorical difficulty, gaps and inconsistencies. See: MORAN, Daniel: *Strategic Theory and History of War*, p. 7.

²⁵ CLAUSEWITZ: *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

²⁶ See: BOWDISH: *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

²⁷ See: MORAN: *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

1.1.2 From Jomini to nuclear deterrence and beyond

Overshadowed by his well-known contemporary Carl von Clausewitz, legacy of Antoine-Henri Jomini²⁸ may not have been properly appreciated during his lifetime, as significance of Jomini's works largely exceeds the threshold of the 19th century as well. Both competitors shared several findings (i.e. strategy being matter of art than exact science, decisive point). Jomini's 'principles of war' were intended as universally applicable as well as broadly adaptable rules²⁹ according to which a rationally-directed army should prevail in the field of battle. As shown below, Jomini's theory is not too different from Clausewitz's, however, with the emphasis put on rational decision-making Jomini predicted future development better than his contemporary. Since then, permanent military staffs were created in many countries in order to rationally develop and execute the military strategy of increasingly numerous national armies. This innovation, typical for conflicts since the mid-19th century onwards, would not be feasible without Jomini's contribution.

Figure 2. Comparison of strategic theories of Jomini and Clausewitz.

Author	Essence of strategy	Target of strategy	Aim of strategy	Key factors
Clausewitz	offensive	Schwerpunkt	destruction through compellence of the enemy	psychology, politics
Jomini	offensive	Decisive point	destruction of the enemy	rational decision-making

Source: Compiled by the author.

Jomini and Clausewitz's strategic thought vastly influenced commanders of the American Civil War. At the US Military Academy at WestPoint, a lecturer and theoretician Alfred Mahan,³⁰ well versed in works of his European predecessors, conceptualized the 'sea power'. For the first time in history of strategy, the navies and naval engagements were considered to be part of the broader rationally directed military strategy of a state.

With a surge of importance of telegraph and railroad system in the second half of the 19th century, strategy of annihilation promoted by German general staff dominated the European military thought. In spite of decisive victories in 1864, 1866 and 1870 achieved with utilization of all aforementioned elements, they were not repeated in the Great War.

²⁸ Antoine-Henry, Baron Jomini (1779-1869) was a Swiss military theorist and general who served in armies of France and Russia during Napoleonic Wars.

²⁹ MORAN: *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) was an American admiral, geostrategist and historian.

Works of Helmuth von Moltke Sr.,³¹ Helmuth von Moltke Jr.³² and Alfred Schlieffen,³³ based on the strategy of annihilation, proved to be ineffective on the industrialized battlefield which buried swiftness of aggressive maneuvers into the tons of mud in debilitating trench warfare. Besides tiring war of attrition, the Great War witnessed advent of the air power that waited to be reflected by strategic theory. Among the first theoreticians who recognized the strategic potential of aerial warfare was Giulio Douhet.³⁴ He emphasized offensive use of aircrafts in battle. Strategic bombing should have had impact on the enemy morale, breaking his will to fight and thusly contribute to final victory. Moreover, Douhet stressed the importance of bombing of the ‘vital centers’ of the enemy that could even lead to an insurrection.

Epoch between the wars is interesting for other reasons than just the strategic conceptualization of aerial warfare. During this short period of time, several influential strategic concepts based on combined arms tactics of mutually collaborating motorized infantry and independently operating armored units evolved. In Germany, a strategy of swift deep penetration of enemy lines executed by concentrated highly mobile units, referred to as *Blitzkrieg*³⁵ (Lighting war), was promoted by Heinz Guderian.³⁶ In Great Britain, similar strategy of *Indirect Approach* was elaborated by Basil Liddell Hart.³⁷ In USSR, a strategy based on similar principles was introduced as the ‘Glubokaya operatsiya’ (Deep Battle), whose proponents were Mikhail Tukhachevsky³⁸ and Georgyi Zhukov.³⁹

Figure 3: Comparison of Blitzkrieg, Indirect Approach and Deep Battle.

Type	Essence of strategy	Target of strategy	Aim of strategy	Key factors
German Blitzkrieg	purely offensive	single breakthrough in narrow Schwerpunkt	quick victory	tanks, motorized infantry with aerial support
British Indirect Approach	offensive/defensive	disorganization of balance/supply lines	quick victory	minimum casualties, tanks, elastic defense
Soviet Deep Battle	offensive/defensive	divert enemy attention, multiple breakthroughs	quick victory	airborne units, tanks, aerial support

³¹ Helmuth Karl Bernard Graf von Moltke (1800-1891) was a German field marshal and a Chief of Staff.

³² Helmuth Johann Ludwig von Moltke (1848-1916) was a German general and a Chief of Staff.

³³ Alfred Graf von Schlieffen (1833-1914) was a German field marshal and a Chief of Staff.

³⁴ Giulio Douhet (1869-1930) was an Italian general and proponent of strategic bombing.

³⁵ Though rather complex of diverse strategies than a single coherent strategy, the term Blitzkrieg is used for the sake of simplification.

³⁶ Heinz Wilhelm Guderian (1888-1954) was a German general and tank warfare pioneer.

³⁷ Sir Basil Lidell Hart (1895-1970) was a British military theorist and historian.

³⁸ Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky (1893-1937) was a Soviet marshal and a Chief of Staff.

³⁹ Georgy Konstatninovich Zhukov (1896-1974) was a Soviet marshal and a Minister of Defence.

After the Second World War, strategy ceased to exist in an exclusively military-political sphere. On one hand, alongside the field of politics and military, strategic theory became an academic discipline due to the strong linkage to the newly introduced nuclear weapons. Strategic studies were established as a discipline in US academia as well as in government sponsored think-tanks such as RAND Corporation. On the other hand, theory of strategy became a powerful tool in hands of various liberation movements within a process of decolonization. Seen from this perspective, “[t]he second half of the twentieth century has seen a series of startling defeats handed to great powers by warriors whose strategic insight made up for their inferior weapons. Algeria, Vietnam, and Afghanistan are cases in point. Evidently, technology has not replaced strategy as the determining factor in military strategy.”⁴⁰ Consequently, rapid development on both sides of the continuum represented by two outer limits of ways of utilization of strategic theory witnessed development of many distinct ways of strategic thought. Although it is impossible to cover in short the development of the discipline of strategy in the last 60 years, only few examples listed below.

Figure 4: Comparison of twofold post-WW II development of strategy.

Way of utilization of strategy	Examples
Academic discipline/politico-military sphere	Containment, MAD, détente, C4ISTAR, Counterinsurgency, GWOT...
‘Vernacular discipline’/rebels, insurgents, terrorists’ sphere	Peoples’ War/Insurgency, Terrorism, Protracted conflict, Irregular/Guerilla/Asymmetric warfare...

Source: Compiled by the author.

1.1.3 Definition

Similarly to many security studies’ related fields, such as study of terrorism, no consensus exists among both practitioners and academia about a definition of strategy. This fact brings about serious difficulties. There are only two ways how to bridge such methodological gap: either to create yet another definition, or take over definition of others. At first we must ask ‘what strategy is’ or what way of social activity it represents. Second, when the nature of strategy is clarified, definitions explaining ‘what strategy does’ may follow.

⁴⁰ GRAY: *Strategic Culture as Context*, p. 61. Cited from: STRAUSS – OBER: *Anatomy of Error*, pp. 9-10.

Strategy, as Colin Gray asserts, is a “bridge that relates military power to political purpose; it is neither military power *per se* nor political purpose.”⁴¹ It is therefore the intersection of political and military dimensions which is crucial for proper understanding of strategy. From this intersection stems the use⁴² of *means* (military force) for a *reason* (political end) intended to achieve a strategic objective. In the broadest possible sense, strategy is a specific social activity which “consists of ends or objectives, ways or concepts, and means or resources.”⁴³ Thereby, a general meaning of strategy can be explained as follows: “[s]trategy is a special type of plan – not only does it connect the ends with the means needed to accomplish them, but it does so through the use of concepts that focus and identify the way in which the means are used.”⁴⁴ In sum, “strategy at any level consists of ends or objectives, ways or concepts, and means or resources [and] remains principally an art rather than science.”⁴⁵ From this formulation the inherently Clausewitzian/Jominian nature of ‘strategy as an art’ is apparent.

As a genuine problem solving process, strategy unavoidably “asks three basic questions: what is it I want to do, what do I have or what can I reasonably get that might help me do what I want to do, and what is the best way to use what I have to do what I want to do?”⁴⁶ In spite of countless definitions elaborated by countless authors, strategic functioning is rather of prosaic nature. According to the US Army Joint Chiefs of Staff definition based on resources, strategy stands for “the development and use of all *resources* in peace and war in support of national policies to secure victory.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, the definition of the US Department of Defense stresses the role of instruments within a strategy, being “[a] prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the *instruments* of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national and/or multinational objectives.”⁴⁸ Both definitions of functioning of strategy are perceived as equally important. As a result, both dimensions of *instruments* and *resources* are the focal points of the analysis.

⁴¹ GRAY: *Modern Strategy*, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴³ JABLONSKY, David: *Why is strategy difficult?* In: BARTHOLOMEES: *Theory of War and Strategy*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ BOWDISH: *Op. cit.*, p. 281.

⁴⁵ JABLONSKY, David: *Why is strategy difficult?*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ BARTHOLOMEES, James Boone Jr: *A Survey of War and Strategy*. In: BARTHOLOMEES: *Theory of War and Strategy*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ BOWDISH: *Op. cit.*, p. 272.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

1.2 Gray's cluster-based approach

Aforementioned dimensions are further developed by utilization of a concept of clusters elaborated by Colin Gray. The cornerstone of Gray's approach lays in a division of strategy into seventeen 'principal dimensions' that cluster around three categories encompassing "most of what contributes to the making and execution of strategy."⁴⁹ Three categories are following: 'People and Politics,' 'Preparation for war,' and 'War Proper'. They include wide variety of factors wielding influence upon open-ended fields of instruments and resources. As a starting point of the analysis, three most relevant dimensions of each category are selected.

People and Politics

People – individuals in politico-military command

Culture – specific assumptions, habits, traditions, methods of operation

Politics – superior dimension generating strategic goals

Preparation for war

Military Administration – armed forces' recruitment, training, armament

Strategic Theory and Doctrine – goals, tasks, tools; 'what to think and do'

Technology – level of advancement and/or modernity of military armament

War Proper

Military Operations – execution of strategy by military personnel

Command – quality of military and political leadership

Friction, Chance, Uncertainty – ever-present factors of any strategy

Analytical value of Gray's approach lies in its universality. Elaborated as a general theory of strategy, it "lends itself to application to any conflict in strategic history – explains the nature of the subject and suggests how the subject work[s]."⁵⁰ In other words, by precise delimitation of nature of strategy, Gray unveiled the indeterminate 'fog of strategy' (paraphrase of Clausewitz's 'fog of war') which had been surrounding this somewhat vaguely defined semi-art semi-scientific discipline ever since. Just as his 19th century predecessors, Colin Gray put stress on political objective of the war. He even stated that strategic performance of the state can be harmed by vague policy with ephemeral objectives or constraints upon military. It is the interconnection of all strategic levels – operational, tactical,

⁴⁹ GRAY: *Modern Strategy*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

and strategic – what makes strategy the only and most effective tool to fulfill the first duty of the polity: provision of security.⁵¹

2. Theory of Strategic Culture

Since the Second World War, a general theory of strategy has been under more or less permanent and/or prominent influences; however, from the 1970s onwards it has been largely influenced by a concept of strategic culture (SC). Development of the SC paradigm is presented below, followed by the introduction of thought of two rival prominent authors. Their approaches are utilized in the empirical analysis of the RF strategy.

2.1 Development of the paradigm

The birth of the SC theory is related to the accession of culturalist/behavioral approaches in international relations (IR) theory during the late 1960s and early 1970s, in opposition to (neo) realist tradition. The SC authors can be chronologically divided into three distinct generations, each bearing its own specific ideational features. The first generation laid foundation of the SC tradition, the second attempted to amend the work of their predecessors, and the third has been revising the whole concept up to now. All three generations differ from each other in proposed methods and SC definitions.

2.1.1 First generation

The basis of the first generation was established by early 1970s Jack Snyder's work on Soviet nuclear deterrence policy and its difference from American one. Snyder was the first among SC scholars to recognize the utility of application of culturalist approach upon study of strategy. He exploited the previously elaborated concept of political culture, asserting "that each country had its own way to interpret, analyze and react to international events."⁵² Among other first generation scholars is Colin Gray. The first generation stressed the importance of historical experience, role of political culture and geography. It was criticized from follow-up authors⁵³ for amorphous definition, instability, and narrow determinism. Notion of the first

⁵¹ GRAY: *Op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

⁵² MARGARAS, Vassilis: *Strategic Culture: a reliable tool of analysis for EU security developments?*, p. 1.

⁵³ See, e.g.: JOHNSTON, Alastair I: *Thinking about Strategic Culture*.

generation SC concept was intended to bridge “the epistemological divide between both cause and effect. [U]nderstand rather than explain the behavior of states.”⁵⁴

Figure 5. Comparison of the First generation authors.

Author	Definition of SC	Aspects emphasized
Jack Snyder	Sum of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, ideational patterns	Habitual behavior shared by members of a national strategic community
Colin Gray	Modes of thought and action with respect to force	Relative states’ rationality derived from perception of the national historical experience

Source: compiled by the author.

2.1.2 Second generation

Group of authors labeled as the second generation evolved during mid-1980s, in connection with the widening of the scientific scope from the initial focus on nuclear deterrence strategy to variety of other security-related fields and issues.⁵⁵ The second generation of authors stressed the scientific quality of their approaches based on testable hypotheses in opposition to the first generation. The SC was newly grasped as an independent variable whose consistency over time determined its own coherence.⁵⁶ As an independent variable, SC was defined in contrast to dependent variable of political culture. In spite of its rigor, the second generation was criticized for an unclear relationship between SC (symbolic discourse) and real-world states’ behavior. Although of instrumental nature, SC was still a product of historical experience.⁵⁷

Figure 6. Comparison of the Second generation authors.

Author	Definition of SC	Aspects emphasized
Kerry Longhurst	Body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, held by a collective and arise gradually through a unique protracted historical process	Persistence, however, not static feature; can alter at critical junctures Importance of collective ideas and values about the use of force
Carnes Lord	The traditional practices and habits of thought by which military force is organized and employed by a society in the service of its political goals	Influence upon military force

⁵⁴ SCHMIDT, Peter – ZYLA, Benjamin: *European Security Policy: Strategic Culture in Operation?*, p. 486.

⁵⁵ MARGARAS: *Strategic Culture: a reliable tool of analysis for EU security developments?*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ SCHMIDT– ZYLA: *Op. cit.*, p. 487.

⁵⁷ JOHNSTON: *Thinking about the Strategic Culture*, p. 40.

Bradley S. Klein	Tool of political hegemony in strategic decision-making; legitimizing authority of those in charge of strategic decision-making	Self-preservation of authority
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Source: compiled by the author.

2.1.3 Third generation

Since early 1990s, the third generation of SC scholars has evolved within a broader constructivist stream of thought in international relations (IR) theory. In sum, this approach hypothesizes that identity formation and norms matter same as the history, traditions and culture. The third generation authors further elaborated their predecessors' contribution. Furthermore, they put emphasis on strategic decisions conceived as dependent variables. Likewise, the presented thesis builds up on the findings of the third generation. According to the third generation authors, sources of cultural values are less deeply rooted in history, and more clearly the product of recent practice and experience. Being of ideational nature, SC is grasped as an independent variable being manifested within military/political-military/organizational culture⁵⁸ in form of strategic decisions. Because of this, the third generation authors avoid determinism of the first generation that leaves state's behavior out of the independent variable category.

Valuable asset of the third generation lies in assumption about constructions of national identities among social actors in which plays society an integral part. As such, SC "is able to provide an insight into the 'reasons' for state actions."⁵⁹ The latest SC generation hypothesizes that "culture presents decision-makers with limited range of options/acts as a lens that alters the appearance and efficacy of different choices."⁶⁰ Elizabeth Kier even assumes that "political-military culture is a product of changing domestic political contexts varying as domestic politics varies."⁶¹ These assertions represent key standpoints of the analysis of the RF strategy.

2.1.4 Definition

Similarly to the theory of military strategy, a plethora of SC definitions exists in academia. Because of this, it is impossible to choose an 'all-time' one. Hence, the description of what academics involved in the study of SC framework do is deemed more helpful: "[they] attempt to create a framework which can give answers as to why certain policy options (and not

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁹ SCHMIDT – ZYLA: *Op. cit.*, p. 487. Cited from: FINNEMORE: *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

others) are pursued by states.”⁶² This definition facilitates insight to some deeply rooted aspects of the Russian strategic thought wielding influence upon overall strategy.

2.2 Rival approaches

Among the SC scholarship, works of Colin Gray and Alastair Iain Johnston are considered as the most relevant to the topic of this text. As works of both authors cannot be easily incorporated into any of the three generations (although Gray’s early work is mentioned in the first generation) as they incorporate multitude of aspects common to all of the three. Ultimately, in spite of mutual rivalry, their works are considered to be equally-matched guidelines for the analysis of the RF military strategy within the ideational framework of the third generation.

2.2.1 Gray’s encultured context

In his work on SC, Colin Gray stresses the importance of national historical experience. The perception of such specific experience is projected to the references to “modes of thought and action with respect to force.”⁶³ Hence, no universal rationality exists – “it is the history and experiences of each state that point to the rational/irrational political choices that each particular state will follow.”⁶⁴ As Gray explains, regarding SC, “we are claiming that there is a Russian way both of thinking about the threat or use of force for political purposes, and of acting strategically. In the latter regard, so this statement maintains, there is Russian ‘way of war’. ‘This Russian way’ is a distinctive product of Russia’s history and geography, as interpreted for guidance by Russians.”⁶⁵ Geography is of key importance for strategy, and Gray’s aphorism ‘geography is destiny – culture is destiny’ wholly applies to Russian specifics

According to a ‘master narrative’ promoted by Gray, security community is likely to think and behave in ways that are influenced by what it taught itself about itself and its relevant contexts. And that education rests primarily upon the interpretation of history and history’s geography.”⁶⁶ Moreover, due to encultured patterns, the strategic decision and consequent behavior will inevitably be a result of SC,⁶⁷ irrespective of number of factors affecting it. As a result, “different security communities think and behave somewhat

⁶² MARGARAS: *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Cited from: GRAY: *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

differently about strategic matters.”⁶⁸ Gray also asserts that SC is not a static phenomenon, “it can evolve, it can adapt and it can even change radically, if battered by traumatic shock.”⁶⁹

Culture, according to Gray, “should consist of assumptions and ideas that are strongly held. Its roots may not be very deep, and the plant might be a recent development,”⁷⁰ thusly in spite of some 25 years of existence, a distinctively ‘Russian’ SC exists. Colin Gray ascribes culture to war, when he evaluates culture as the “most important source of the moral factors that are central to the nature of war as well to the character of wars.”⁷¹ In contrast to Clausewitzian notion of physical destruction of the enemy, Gray views war, coercion, and deterrence as ‘intercultural struggles’ pointed at subordination of the enemy’s will to ours.⁷² As a result, particular culture is not a product of free and/or rational choice of a country, but rather a set of ‘cultural assumptions’. Gray even argues that not countries, but ‘their strategic cultures choose them’. As a highly important factor, grounded in historically formed assumptions, SC is “contributing to overall strategic effectiveness.”⁷³ However, it is not only SC shaping the events, as Gray argues, but also other factors such as chance, friction, fear, the fog of war and ‘sheer incompetence’.⁷⁴

In defense of the first generation theory against Alastair Iain Johnston’s criticism, Gray argued that SC “provides context for understanding, rather than explanatory causality for [strategic] behavior.”⁷⁵ In such context, “dimensions of strategy are expressed in behavior by people and institutions that both have internalized strategic culture and in part construct, interpret, and amend that culture.”⁷⁶ Strategic dimensions, being one of the key contributions of Colin Gray to general theory of strategy, “can be discussed in isolation, [but] all dimensions function synergistically to constitute the strategy whole.”⁷⁷ Interconnection of SC and patterns of strategic behavior is similar to relation of strategy, operations and tactics. “Just as all strategy has to be ‘done’ by operations which consist of tactical behavior, so all strategic, operational and tactical behavior is ‘done’ by people and organizations that have been encultured supranationally, nationally, or sub-nationally.”⁷⁸ Despite inability to be the ‘golden key’ to strategic understanding, SC “offers context, not reliable causality. [It can

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ GRAY: *Strategic Culture as Context*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

change] over time, albeit slowly, and strategic choices occasionally are made that contradict the dominant culture.”⁷⁹ To answer the vital and ‘cultural’ question ‘what does the observed behavior mean,’ Colin Gray elaborated six principles of understanding the nature and functioning of SC listed below.

Strategic behavior cannot be beyond culture.

Adversity cannot cancel culture.

Strategic culture is a guide to action.

Strategic culture expresses comparative advantage.

Strategic culture can be dysfunctional.

*Strategic cultures can be variously categorized.*⁸⁰

2.2.2 Johnston’s scientific symbolism

Alastair Iain Johnston defines SC as ‘an ideational milieu which limits behavior choices.’ In contrast to Gray, he emphasizes the role of ‘symbols’ and ‘ranked preferences’ when argues that SC “is an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argumentation, structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious. [...] Thus strategic culture as a ‘system of symbols’ comprises two parts: the first consists of basic assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment, that is, about the nature of the adversary and the threat it poses (zero-sum or variable sum) and about the efficacy of the use of force (about the ability to control outcomes and to eliminate threats, and the conditions under which applied force is useful). Together these comprise the central paradigm of strategic culture.”⁸¹ Additionally, Johnston criticized elements of all three generations’ concepts and offered his own ‘reconceptualization’.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Cited from: GRAY: *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, p. 35.

⁸⁰ Categorization encompasses:

Geography – physical characteristics of each distinctive geographical environment

Weapons and functions – distinct kinds of military specialists are differently culturally influenced

Simplicity-complexity – Russia/USSR is an exemplar of monochronic one-thing-at-a-time culture

Generation – distinct age groups are culturally influenced by different historic events

Grand strategy – a pattern of reliance upon one or several of the range of instruments (overt military power, diplomacy, espionage and covert action, positive and negative economic sanctions), is apt to characterise particular SC.

⁸¹ JOHNSTON: *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

According to Johnston's definition, SC is a "mindset, shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment."⁸² Parallel SCs can exist within a single polity; however, there is always a dominant one "whose holders are interested in preserving the status quo."⁸³ SC as the 'system of symbols' indicator encompasses basic assumptions about role of war in human affairs, nature of adversary, efficacy of the use of force, perception of the environment. SC as the 'system of ranked preferences' is related to (strategic) documents as a source of potential answers to the questions stemming from the 'system of symbols'. Existence and persistence of SC is conditioned by "a consistency in preference rankings across objects of analysis from formative historical periods up to the period under examination."⁸⁴ In this text's meaning it would be the SC of USSR that would endure the Union's disintegration and continue to last in following years. Therefore, in accordance with Johnston, the objects of analysis are key strategic documents and doctrines with regard to their preferences and evolution over time.

The greatest advantage of Johnston's approach lies in its falsifiability, testability and empirical referents embedded in observable objects (documents, doctrines) and their evolution or dissolution over time.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is not just about the importance of these objects, but the role of 'culture-bearing units' (strategists, military leaders, national security leaders, weapons, war plans, images of war and peace etc.) that merit the analyst's attention. Consequently, the key question 'where does the set of strategic assumptions come from' arises. The only way to answer it, according to Johnston, is to "show the influence of strategic culture-derived preference rankings on cause-effect assumptions held by decision-makers *before* a decision."⁸⁶ Thereby, a sufficient attention must be paid to the strategic environment and context shaped *prior* to certain strategic choice. Ultimately, how can be the resultant strategic behavior linked to SC? Johnston offers three following steps listed below.

Test for the presence of and congruence between the strategic preference rankings across the objects of analysis in the presumed formative time period.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Emphasis added.

Test for presence and congruence between the strategic preference rankings found in a sample of policy documents taken from the decision process in the period of interest, and between these documents and the original objects of analysis.

Test the effects of decision-makers preference rankings on politico-military behavior.

Johnston defines three ways of conceptualization of the relationship between SC and other exogenous independent variables. Of the three only the following conceptualization was chosen: SC perceived as a “consistent set of ranked preferences which persist across time and across strategic contexts; [in which] decision makers are sensitive to variation in structural/exogenous conditions in a culturally unique way.”⁸⁷ Three major purposes of use of symbols are listed below.

Autocommunication – reinforcement of the sense competence and legitimacy of decision-makers (pointed inwards)

Official language/discourse – creation of ideology which justifies the hegemony of strategic elites (security intellectuals, military policy makers, arms manufacturers)

Creation of in-group solidarity – accentuation of in-group and out-group differences creating zero-sum game perception (pointed at the would-be adversaries)

Johnston’s findings are to a large extent applicable upon SC of the RF. He assumes that, on one hand states sharing the in-group identification will tend to share SCs which exhibit hard *realpolitik* characteristic (RF) in opposition to states with weak-group identification would exhibit the *idealpolitik* on the other (the West). This statement assents to the influential theory of democratic peace stating that democracies do not fight each other, yet willingly fight non-democracies. Neither Johnston’s nor Gray’s approaches are perfect, however, elements of both are utilized in line with Gray’s recommendation based on “a creative accommodation of the two.”⁸⁸

Figure 7. Comparison of the rival approaches.

Author	Definition of SC	Aspects emphasized	Key question
Colin Gray	context for understanding of enclutred patterns of	history, geography, relative rationality, universal applicability	what does the observed behavior mean?

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸⁸ GRAY: *Strategic Culture as Context*, p. 69.

	strategic behavior		
Alastair Iain Johnston	ideational milieu which limits behavioral choices, system of symbols	falsifiability, testability, operationalization, role of symbols, ranked preferences	where does the set of strategic assumptions come from?

Source: compiled by the author.

3. Layers of the Russian military strategy

With help of the Gray's cluster approach and aforementioned conceptualizations of SC, an attempt to define patterns of distinctively 'Russian' strategy is made. As mentioned in an introductory chapter, Russian strategic environment is divided into three interconnected layers: strategic culture, strategic documents, and strategic choices; SC is the first to be subjected to analysis, followed by remaining elements.

3.1 Strategic culture

The concept of SC "may provide an explanatory framework for what can often seem to be irrational Russian foreign and security policy decisions. (...) Russia has a strategic culture that is deeply rooted in its history and geography, one that is fairly stable with respect to the prevailing threat perception and Russia's quest for great power status."⁸⁹ Although a loss of superpower status in connection with disintegration of the USSR affected Russian strategy, it did not alter the background SC which endured, though 'hibernated',⁹⁰ turbulences in early 1990s.

Being of inherently ideational nature, SC permeates the other two strategic layers. Deeply rooted in domains of history, geography, and (political) culture, from which a resultant narrative stems, an impact of SC is considered of high importance. How can such trend be proven? If the narrative stemming from the encultured patterns would be incorporated into strategic documents and/or manifested in decisions taken within crucial strategic choices; then the value of impact of SC upon strategy can be rated as positive. Bearers of the RF SC are: "military leadership; political elite, security services, experts, journalists, academics and ideologues of nationalist persuasion. Broad public and elites clearly believe in a strong Russia, and that military power has to be a part of that strength."⁹¹

⁸⁹ EITELHUBER, Norbert: *The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹¹ ERMARTH: Fritz W: *Russia's Strategic Culture: Past, Present, And... In Transition?*, p. 18.

3.1.1 History

Throughout the centuries, significance of interpretation of history and its impact upon Russian society has been high. History of the RF (some 25 years now) has not yet lasted long enough to produce, say, specifically ‘post-modern Russian way of historical thought’ regarding historical shaping of specific RF role and ideationally distinct meaning of Russian perception of events. On the other hand, in the recent Russian history, there have been two extreme ‘ideational reservoirs’ to borrow from. In sum, historically shaped ideologies of communism and nationalism whose potential has outlasted decades, if not centuries, assume a firm position within Russian politics.

First and foremost, it is referred to the period of communism during which the USSR had developed into the world’s leading superpower and competed with the USA in a struggle for domination over the other. The then leading Marxist-Leninist ‘sense of history’ stands in a clear opposition to various nationalistic sentiments referring to pre-Revolution Russian nationalist movements. Surprisingly, both conflicting approaches share one key notion, which is an indignation about the loss of a great power status, and considerable reduction of country’s territory. Therefore, as both ideologies would argue, redemption from such unsatisfactory condition would be a regression to history. Be it either communist or tsarist expansionism, protection of vaguely conceived ‘traditional values’ related to Orthodox Church as a genuine culture-bearing unit of social stability; both historic tendencies are permanent within the Russian historic reflection of modern history⁹² and the future prospects of position of RF in the world. If reflected by decision-makers and incorporated into strategic documents, these assumptions could ultimately influence real-world military strategy.

3.1.2 Geography

Since the beginning of the tsarist age, the expansion of Russian territory is beyond compare to any other empire in the world. Besides natural resources and geopolitical authority, enormous expansion brought about several important security-related issues that have persisted until the present day. First, the defense of the border of such a vast territory is hardly possible. Hence, in the strategic documents, RF has been striving for the legal recognition of its boundaries along with emphasis put on borders’ inviolability. Second, due to insufficiency of border defense, RF has always been overstating external threats. In many cases in history, vastness of Russian territory generating difficulties in its defense had been utilized by many invaders.

⁹² Of course, honorable exemptions exist, e. g. works of professor Zubov and his colleagues. See: two-volume publication ZUBOV, Andrei (ed.): *Russian History: 20th Century*.

Hence, since the end of Second World War, at the latest, the USSR had maintained a ‘buffer zone’ of vassal states around its border and has continued to do so since 1991. The most common term used for this indistinct buffer zone in strategic documents is ‘near abroad’.

3.1.2 Political culture

In a ‘super-presidential’ system of government, Russian President is endowed with superior political power. Due to deeply-rooted tsarist tradition exponentiated by 20th century communist dictatorship which exhibited personality cult, the role of President is unofficially linked with notion of all-powerful sovereign. Interestingly, this tradition was successfully picked up on by Vladimir Putin, after Boris Yeltsin’s rather standard terms in the 1990s. Since Putin’s first term, specific personal cult of ‘President’s heroism’ has been adeptly created and kept by both President and state-run propaganda. Since advent of Putin onwards, a political competition has been turned into a charade. Power has been concentrated in the hands of top officials of the political party ‘Yedinaya Rossiya’ (United Russia), unofficial but influential elite known as *Siloviki* linked to ‘power-ministries’, and oligarchs loyal to the President. Political opposition, either fictional or real, has been treated harshly; politically motivated murders are no exemptions.⁹³ Numerous nationalistic organizations, involving youth movement ‘Nashi’ (Ours), have evolved with more or less overt backing from ruling elite. Democracy remains to be facade, elections as well as opinion polls have been repeatedly manipulated. Individual rights and freedoms are being violated, peaceful protests suppressed and protesters arrested, freedom of speech and level of media independence are generally weak, if any at all.

3.1.3 Narrative

What would the narrative ensuing from the above-mentioned factors look like? In general, according to Lawrence Freedman, a narrative is “compelling story lines which can explain event convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn; [n]arratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events. They are strategic because they do not arise spontaneously but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current.”⁹⁴ The author argues that President Putin and the ruling elite exploit the ‘narrative of national grievance’ encompassing all of the three above-mentioned factors.

⁹³ For instance, murders of Anna Politkovskaya, Alexandr Litvinenko (both in 2006), Boris Nemtsov (2015).

⁹⁴ GRAY: *Out of the Wilderness*, p. 9. Cited from: FREEDMAN, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, p. 22.

This belief of ‘unjust decline of all Russians,’ allegedly inflicted by outer circumstances, is meant to persuade society in order to strengthen legitimacy of the government and provide it with cause for its assertive security policy. Campaign mobilizing society in the Putin’s regime favor exploits the ethnic Russian nationalism as well as the perception of the West as openly hostile towards RF perceived as threat to Russian security. This notion can be traced back since second Putin’s term in office. Frustration from the loss of superpower status was evident when President Putin evaluated the disintegration of the USSR as the ‘biggest catastrophe of the 20th century.’ The official line of alleged neglect of the RF interests by the West is supposed to confirm rightness of the narrative. Apparently, the train of thoughts may resemble tautology. Furthermore, through reference to indistinctly defined so-called ‘Russian world’ irrespective of borders, the norms of international law are in jeopardy.

3.2 Strategic documents

Three strategic documents possess fundamental importance to Russian national security: Foreign Policy Concept (hereinafter as “FPC” with the year when it came into effect), Military Doctrine (MD) and National Security Strategy/Concept (NSC) which is paramount over the two and represents Russia’s grand strategy.⁹⁵ With exemption of the 1990s, publication of these three strategic documents has been customary to every Presidential term. Hence, since first Putin’s term in office, every Russian President has had ‘his own’ strategy based on the aforementioned strategic documents. So far (i.e. 2016), four generations of strategic documents have been published. Naturally, since 1991, a plethora of other strategic documents related to foreign and security policy has been introduced; nevertheless, this analysis is intentionally limited to a development and transformation of only those perceived as most important to the overall RF military strategy.

In 1993, first FPC and MD were published, followed by first NSC in 1997. In 2000, second generation of documents emerged in the very first year of Putin’s first presidential term. Next generation of strategic documents followed during Dmitry Medvedev’s term: FPC 2008, NSC 2009, and MD 2010. Lastly, the latest versions of strategic documents were published during third term of Vladimir Putin: FPC 2013, MD 2014, and NSC 2015. As products of entrenched patterns of strategic thought, all of these documents shaped strategic decisions; thereby portraying an ideational guideline for resultant military strategy. Selected Russian strategic documents are by nature highly interconnected and all share notion of

⁹⁵ HAAS, Marcel de: *An analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian military doctrines 1990-2000*, p. 5.

defense inherent to military sphere. Although every Presidential administration⁹⁶ introduces more or less modified versions of previous documents amended according to own strategic priorities, considerable degree of continuity is noticeable.

In spite of “generic ‘strategic’ and empty bureaucratic language, [strategic documents] offer important insight into how Russia views an international environment.”⁹⁷ Since 1993, all of the three documents have had status of presidential decrees.⁹⁸ It means that they are elaborated exclusively by commission appointed by President without involvement of legislature. Status of Presidential decree is “lower than that of law, but higher than that of any other legal acts.”⁹⁹ Through adoption of these documents, President defines normative strategic principles that are binding on relevant state agencies.¹⁰⁰ As a “basic component of the state’s self-presentation or representation at home and abroad, doctrine should represent an elite consensus about threats, the character of contemporary war and the policies needed to confront those threats and challenges.”¹⁰¹

3.3 Strategic choices

Throughout the surveyed period time, RF made many strategic choices. Responsiveness to such challenges has been shaped by ideational framework provided by strategic documents and political actions of each presidential administration. Since disintegration of the USSR, President Yeltsin was confronted with an armed conflict in Chechnya, NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia and the first eastern enlargement of the Alliance.

First presidency of Vladimir Putin was characterized by response to a wave of terrorism,¹⁰² and insurgency in the North Caucasus, also known as the Second Chechen War. Putin’s second term in office was typified by increasing hostility toward the West caused by US unilateral actions such as 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and plans to build ballistic missile defense system in the Central Europe.

Putin’s successor Dmitry Medvedev intervened militarily in Georgia in 2008. Shortly afterwards, He announced ambitious plan of modernization of immensely outdated armed

⁹⁶ The only exemption from this rule is Putin’s second term (2004-2008) when second generation of documents adopted in 2000 remained valid without any replacements.

⁹⁷ MONAGHAN: *The New Russian Foreign Policy Concept: Evolving Continuity*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Struggle for power between President Yeltsin and the Parliament resulted into President’s victory over legislature. It provided President with extensive reinforcement of his powers, including creation of prominent strategic documents, embedded in the Constitution of 1993.

⁹⁹ MEZAYEV: *On the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia*.

¹⁰⁰ BLANK: *A New Russian Defense Doctrine?*, p. 154.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁰² 2002 Dubrovka Theater in Moscow, 2004 elementary school in Beslan, etc.

forces. Medvedev also introduced plan of the establishment of Euratlantic-Eurasian common security space on a treaty basis.

Third term of the President Putin has so far been characterized by annexation of Crimea, military involvement in armed conflicts in Eastern Ukraine and Syria. However, Russian state budget – including military expenditures – has been jeopardized by serious financial difficulties caused by considerable drop in world's oil and gas prices that lowered Russian revenues from their export. This crucial factor may induce alteration either in completion of the armed forces' modernization plans; or strategic ambitions, if not instigate political crisis leading to a changeover in the RF politics in the near future.

4. From initial turmoil beyond setback in Chechnya: 1993-2000

Shortly after disintegration of the USSR at the end of 1991, a successor state of Russia (former Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) strived to find a firm ground for implementation of its own foreign and security policy interests. This want was partly met already at the end of 1991, when Russia co-founded Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a comprehensive platform for cooperation among the countries of the former USSR. However, the hallmark of early 1990s seemed to be pervasive instability, chaos and disarray on the territory of the former superpower. In early 1990s, an alteration of strategic culture and resulting strategy occurred as presidential administration of Boris Yeltsin tended to avowedly open westernist foreign and security policy.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Yeltsin's policy of convergence with the West had very low support, if any at all, in domestic policy context.

Chasm between Presidential administration and Parliament resulted in constitutional crisis of 1993 when armed forces loyal to the President were called up against the rebelling Parliament and even shelled the building. It was a manifestation of discord between two different opinion streams: Atlanticist westernists against Eurasionist conservatives. This ideational conflict can be traced back to the 19th century groups of 'Slavyanophiles' and 'Zapadniki' (Westernists).¹⁰⁴ As a result, first post-Cold War strategic documents (MD and FPC 1993) were to a large extent result of a triumph of conservative Eurasianist ruling elite which replaced its previous short-lived Westernist counterpart. In early 1990s the RF faced

¹⁰³ See e.g., GALEOTTI, TICHÝ.

¹⁰⁴ GALEOTTI, Mark: *The Age of Anxiety: Security and Politics in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 197.

numerous crises; from civil war in Tajikistan over civil unrests in Georgia to civil war in Moldova. For the then Russian armed forces (RAF), the most important conflict was the clash over separation of Chechnya. Second half of the decade was characterized by a comeback of antagonistic attitude toward the West caused by eastern NATO enlargement and its military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. Finally, the state suffered from severe 1998 economic crisis and surge in violence (including acts of terrorism) at the end of the decade.

Presidency of Boris Yeltsin was unable to change post-Soviet strategic thought. Despite brief alteration of certain strategic principles,¹⁰⁵ elements of the old SC¹⁰⁶ remained alive among the political elites, nationalists, military and security services.¹⁰⁷ Due to specific US and NATO military actions, these “attitudinal elements of the old [SC] began a strong recovery among elites and publics, especially hostility to and perceptions of threat from the West, and resentment about loss of Russian status.”¹⁰⁸ Furthered by western criticism of RAF actions in Chechnya, NATO enlargement and introduction of its new Strategic concept;¹⁰⁹ a deterioration of relations between the West and the RF became a permanent characteristic of late 1990s security environment.

4.1 First conflict in Chechnya

The conflict in Chechnya proved how bad the overall quality of RAF was. The asymmetric conflict, opposed both by the Russian public as well as several military figures, led the Russian troops into dead end of a protracted war of attrition against highly motivated irregular forces familiar with the difficult terrain. Massive deployment of forces, including extensive use of armored units and air force, proved to match little efficiency on the battlefield. Due to severe lack of equipment, training and troops’ morale, RF had to agree with a ceasefire as a concession to Chechen separatists. Ended by 1996 Khasavyurt Accord and 1997 Moscow Peace Treaty, the status of Chechnya was restored to a pre-war state. Even though independence was not formally granted, establishment of bilateral Russo-Chechen relations on principles of international law meant *de facto independence* of the so-called Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

¹⁰⁵ I.e. RF as a ‘normal country’ should integrate with the West; USA perceived as a source of help, etc.

¹⁰⁶ I. e. resentment about the break-up of the USSR, threat from the West, reestablishment of RF international standing with a crucial role played by military power, etc.

¹⁰⁷ ERMARTH: *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ HAAS: *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

In Russian strategic documents, both separatism and local conflict were perceived as uppermost threats to national security. Therefore, the first conflict in Chechnya was referred to as struggle against separatism of internal character. Nonetheless, this way of thought was not acknowledged by the West, which condemned the brutality of Russian warfare. Hence, justification of conflict's internal nature was unsuccessful from several reasons. Since 1991, breakaway Chechnya was a de facto independent province, beyond effective control of federal authorities. Due to 'semi-independent' character of the state, larger numbers of RAF had to be deployed there, as could not be previously stationed there *en masse*; and the nature conflict was far from a mere 'police action', too. In sum, along with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the first conflict in Chechnya can be evaluated as yet another unsuccessful regional power projection. Apparently, a costly strategic setback aggravated already worsened Russian politico-military position in the world.

4.2 1993 Military Doctrine

As the very first military doctrine of the post-Soviet Russia, this document introduces some significant changes needed to be made in respect to the newly formed RAF. MD 1993 was approved in opposition to westernist worldview of early Yeltsin's administration. The Doctrine voices RF resolve in nuclear deterrence and protection of Russians living abroad,¹¹⁰ concentrates on security of CIS countries and puts stress on internationally binding treaties and institutions.¹¹¹ The document also regards "no state as enemy" and designates purpose of use of armed forces for self-defense. In conditions when "threat of direct aggression has considerably declined," still "danger of war does remain." Among the sources of military danger are listed local armed conflicts "in the immediate vicinity of the Russian borders" as well as "the suppression of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests" of the Russian citizens living abroad. Moreover, RF mentions other potential threats: "expansion of military blocs and alliances" (NATO), military buildup of troops on the border and presence of foreign troops "in the territory of neighboring states," however, it voices willingness for military cooperation with foreign countries.¹¹² Finally, any violent activities of separatists and nationalists aimed against territorial integrity are labeled as a threat. The document warns about growing likelihood of arising of local armed conflicts "in certain regions" that can

¹¹⁰ After disintegration of the USSR, ca. 25 million of Russian citizens remained living abroad, especially in areas of northern Kazakhstan, the Baltic States and eastern Ukraine.

¹¹¹ I. e. United Nations (UN) Charter, UN Security Council (UNSC), Geneva Conventions, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, NPT and CFE Treaties, etc.

¹¹² Namely CIS members and countries of Central and East Europe.

escalate into a large-scale war. Until 1996 RF planned a complete withdrawal of military troops stationed abroad along substantial reduction of RAF. By year 2000, the execution of complete reorganization of the armed forces' structure and switch to the mixed system of manpower acquisition (drafts and voluntary service under contract) is planned¹¹³ hand in hand with the long-term weapons and military hardware modernization programs.

4.3 1993 Foreign Policy Concept

According to FPC 1993, Russia views itself as a great power willing to play an active role in international context. Beginning in 1993, Russian foreign policy places greater emphasis on the protection of Russia's vital interests and less emphasis on openly pro-western policies. This trend reflects the dispute between the former liberal Westernists and strengthening conservative Eurasianists whose attitudes became ultimately shared by the President Yeltsin. The CIS countries thusly became a key foreign policy priority. FPC 1993 calls for strengthening of "unified military strategic space" on the CIS basis and protecting Russia's major interests there. It warns that a third state's military-political presence in the CIS space, or actions among the CIS states such as creation of an economic or religious bloc of Central Asian states, could negatively affect Russia's interests. In FPC 1993 RF clearly delimits its sphere of influence as a primary base for increasingly stronger Eurasianist policy. For the first time, CIS countries are explicitly considered a vital area (often labeled as the so-called 'near abroad') for Russian security and foreign interests. As influence of Eurasianist conservatives increased, CIS countries became a key RF foreign and security policy priority. During this period of time, the notion of near abroad was introduced as a buffer zone outside the RF borders and along the borders of the former USSR. The MD and FPC 1993 were intended as a platform for an all-inclusive NSC adopted in 1997.

4.4 1997 National Security Concept

Written as a comprehensive strategic document incorporating recourses of MD and FPC 1993, NSC 1997 includes renunciation of strategic and military parity with the USA, reaffirmation of collective security within the CIS, and support for reductions in nuclear arsenals and domestic military reforms. It also mentions "the formation of a multi-polar world" in which "danger of direct aggression against the Russian federation has decreased." Conversely,

¹¹³ Reduction of military personnel from 2.8 million to ca. 1.5-2 million, allocation of forces according to abilities and purpose into mobile forces deployable in 24 hours, other troops deployable in 48 hours and Strategic reserves. See: GALEOTTI: *The Age of Anxiety: Security and Politics in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*.

attempts of “a number of states to weaken Russia’s positions in the political, economic, and military spheres have increased.” Document explicitly voices threat represented by prospect of anticipated eastern expansion of NATO. RF depicts itself as “an influential European-Asian power” with national interests stretching from Europe to Asia-Pacific region, given by its “unique strategic position on the Eurasian continent”. Moreover, RF wants to be perceived as “one of the influential centers of the developing multi-polar world” striving for “equal partnership with the other great powers.” Statements like these became characteristic feature of Russian strategic documents along with “reaffirmed trust” in nuclear deterrence capabilities and the role of international institutions. Furthermore, NSC 1997 calls for necessary reforms of the vast armed forces captioned as “burdensome to the state”.

Despite the absence of a prospect of large-scale aggression in foreseeable future, RF perceives threat generated by “attempts of other states to counter Russia’s consolidation as an influential center of the multi-polar world.” Threats of local armed conflicts and groupings of armed forces in regions close to the Russian border are mentioned along with eastern NATO enlargement, considered as “the most real” dangers to the national security. Probably as a result of a troublesome conflict in Chechnya, critical remarks are made regarding the growing gap between political aims and their implementation in military policy, exacerbated by “inadequate financing” and “critically low” level of armed forces’ training. Although RF claims no interests in confrontation nor strives for hegemony or expansion, at the same time, a need for military presence “in certain strategically important regions of the world” is announced. Ultimately, RF demands “improvement of the formalization of the state border in international law” accompanied by collective security measures in context of CIS countries.

4.5 Key findings

Throughout the first eight years of existence, RF military strategy underwent the most significant changes in connection with temporary transformation of strategy. The initial openly pro-western cooperative orientation was since mid-1990s replaced by increasing depart towards opposing position to the West, especially the USA and NATO, due to several events perceived as harmful for Russian interests. Above all, NATO eastern enlargement and intervention in former Yugoslavia posed significant threats to RF. In its earliest strategic documents, RF claimed the creation of a “multi-polar world” one of which poles should a self-perceived great power constitute. Early preference of cooperation with the West gave way to strategic partnership within CIS countries as a part of Eurasianist strategic doctrine

hand in hand with growing opposition towards NATO, USA and the West in general. At the same time, RF was well-aware of serious deficiencies in its military capabilities, exponentiated by withdrawal from first conflict in Chechnya which meant significant failure in terms of possible regional power projection in the near future.

Despite setback in Chechnya, RF proved its great power ambitions by willingness to involve militarily within near abroad in CIS countries (i.e. in Georgia, Tajikistan, and Moldova) during disarray in early 1990s. Since then, the RF has been apprehensive about its open-ended borders, stressed its nuclear deterrent, need of equal dialogue and importance of the role of the international institutions, above all the UNSC. During this period of time, RF abandoned both conventional and nuclear ‘no-first-use’ declarations and NATO was no longer included in the list of military cooperation. Formulation of the key strategic assumptions about protection of Russians abroad and military reform were result of the altered geopolitical position that moved RF in the ‘frontline’,¹¹⁴ thusly accentuating enduring notion of Russia with fragile borders surrounded by enemies.

Figure 7. First generation of the strategic documents.

Document	Ranked preferences	Patterns of behavior
MD 1993	<i>threats:</i> separatism, nationalism, NATO expansion <i>measures:</i> limited nuclear deterrence, protection of Russians abroad, reorganization and modernization of RAF	initial inclination to the West replaced by Eurasianism antagonistic to it, self-defense, military cooperation
FPC 1993	near abroad, CIS as the unified military strategic space	active great power role, cooperation within the CIS, sensitivity to near abroad area
NSC 1997	<i>threats:</i> weakening of the RF position, NATO eastern expansion, local armed conflicts <i>measures:</i> CIS-based collective security, equal partnership, nuclear deterrence, military reforms, military presence in the world, formalization of the state border	dismissal of strategic parity, reduction of nuclear warheads, European-Asian power, center within multi-polar world, multilateral security, first conflict in Chechnya as a struggle against separatism

Source: compiled by the author.

¹¹⁴ HAAS: *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

5. Old-style antagonism replaces ephemeral cooperation: 2000-2008

When Vladimir Putin assumed the Presidential office in 2000, his administration introduced new versions of all of the previously mentioned strategic documents already during his first year in office. The updated documents were approved in a precarious time of the Second Chechen War and culmination of conflict over Kosovo. Russian security policy was confronted with not only highly internationalized conflict in Chechnya, but also an increase in terrorist activities from the late 1990s continuing in the beginning of a new century.¹¹⁵ Novelty of Putin's approach toward security policy lied in pragmatism manifested in economic and security cooperation with the West in joint effort to combat international terrorism, which became weighty especially after 2001 9/11 attacks on the USA. As a result, the Second Chechen War was officially labeled as a counterterrorist operation both from the government and the UN.

Putin's second term in office largely differed from the first one. Contrary to support to 2001 Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), RF strongly opposed 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), along with US plans to build missile defense system in Central Europe and another tier of NATO eastern enlargement (2004). Prospects of Alliance membership for Georgia and Ukraine were perceived as threat to Russian security as well. Although reaction to these events was fully voiced in the next generation of strategic documents adopted during Dmitry Medvedev's term in office, the effect of deteriorating attitude towards the West with notable strategic consequences has been observable ever since and to a large extent already present in the 2000 'strategic trio'.¹¹⁶ Throughout Putin's second term in office, Russian strategy was influenced by following factors: pragmatism, 'economization' of relations with the world, multilateralism, and use of energy as instrument of foreign and security policy.¹¹⁷ Victory in Chechnya reinforced trust in RAF and increase in defense spending;¹¹⁸ however,

¹¹⁵ Hostage-taking in Dubrovka theater and in Beslan school are well-known, however, since 1996 an upsurge of bombing attacks culminating in early 2000s occurred. See: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/attacks-in-moscow-1996-2011-1.1008425>

¹¹⁶ Namely aversion to ballistic missile defense system and to unilateral actions of NATO.

¹¹⁷ See: TICHÝ: *Zahraniční a bezpečnostní politika Vladimira Putina v letech 2000-2008 na pozadí bezpečnostní kultury Ruské federace.*

¹¹⁸ TICHÝ: *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

military reform remained mostly 'on paper' and was not implemented until 2008.¹¹⁹ RF depicted itself as 'normal', 'pragmatic great power' and 'sovereign democracy'.

5.1 Second conflict in Chechnya

Another war in Chechnya which broke out already in 1999 had several foundations laid already in the second half of the 1990s in the aftermath of the first conflict. First, Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which recently gained the de facto independence, was uncontrollably falling into chaos and violence without any central political authority capable of maintenance of law and order posing threat to neighboring federal districts. Second, when instability and violence spilled over from territory of Chechnya onto territory of Dagestan and Ingushetia, the last in a row of preconditions for intervention was met. Insurgency was defeated by swift military deployment in cooperation with local militia loyal to the federal government.

From the ideational viewpoint, RAF, still shaken from recent disgraceful defeat suffered from considerably weaker enemy, strived to prove valuable fighting force. For the federal government, second Chechen conflict became valuable opportunity to liquidate the separatist movement in Caucasus for good. The overall RF strategy differed from the first conflict on operational and tactical levels. Now the enemy was first exposed to the extensive shelling from air force, artillery and even ballistic missiles that ensured demotion of the general will to fight. Then the infantry would follow, divided into smaller independently operating units that were more suitable in close quarter combat against irregular enemy. Despite the unrestricted annihilation strategy employed by the RF forces, insurgents were able to counter it with guerilla warfare which led to a protracted low-intensity asymmetric warfare operation lasting up until 2009. Nevertheless, by defeat most of the insurgency in the North Caucasus already in 2000; the RF secured the full authority over its territory and borders - one of the long-term RF strategic goals voiced in the relevant documents.

5.2 2000 Foreign Policy Concept

FPC 2000 announces a need of "reevaluation of the overall situation around the RF", desire "to achieve firm and prestigious position in the world community" referring to the RF as a "great power" and "one of the most influential centers of the modern world". The 'new world order' in which a threat of a global nuclear armed conflict is perceived as reduced to a

¹¹⁹ In 2006, ratio of obsolete vs modern RAF arms was 80% vs 20%, contrary to NATO. Plan to reverse this poor state presented annual replacement of 5,5% obsolete arms for modern ones so that ratio of 70% modern vs 30% outdated ought to be reached in 2015. See: TICHÝ: *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

minimum is characterized by growth of Russian influence. Concept criticizes the US for its effort of power and economic domination toward unipolar system and unilateral actions (Kosovo) in an opposition to the Russian idea based on formation of the multi-polar modern world and collective security mechanisms. RF is depicted as a pragmatic, constructive, reliable partner, being “one of the largest Eurasian powers.”

Anew, the document stresses importance of international institutions (UNSC), proposes further reduction of nuclear arsenal of the RF and the US and warns against planned placement of the US ballistic missile defense system in Europe. The concepts of “humanitarian intervention” and “limited sovereignty” are explicitly mentioned and widely criticized as unacceptable unilateral actions bypassing the authority of UNSC. FPC 2000 stipulates fight against terrorism as the most important foreign policy goal. CIS member states should “in a due manner” take into account Russian interests and guarantee rights to the Russian compatriots living abroad. Potentiality of cooperation with NATO, whose guidelines “do not coincide” or even “contradict” Russian security interests, is conditioned by “its compliance with key clauses of this document.”¹²⁰ Expansion of NATO is criticized as well. In addition, the RF conditions cooperation with the Baltic States by respect for the rights of Russian-speaking population living there.

5.3 2000 Military Doctrine

Second Russian MD identifies four types of warfare: armed conflict (intrastate), local war (interstate, limited goals), regional war (intensified, significant goals), and global war (survival of state at stake). Noteworthy feature of this typology is that the use of nuclear weapons is newly associated with the last two types of the conflict. Now the RF could use nuclear weapons not only when the very existence of the state would be in danger,¹²¹ but also in a response to either WMD or conventional “large scale aggression” or to any WMD attack. The Russian perception of modern conflict is characterized with complexity given by use of state-of-the-art systems and special forces alongside irregular units, including terrorist methods of warfare, and defining border conflict as a special form of armed conflict.

Although a threat of a large-scale war (including nuclear one) is perceived as on decline, threats stemming from indirect operations and humanitarian intervention are seen as relevant. Additionally, RF perceives many other threats, such as neglecting of its “strengthening as one influential center in a multipolar world”, conflicts in vicinity to its

¹²⁰ Non-use of force, non-deployment of forces on territories of new NATO members.

¹²¹ As defined in NSC 1997.

borders, information operations and discrimination of Russians living abroad. Based on the present situation in RAF, MD 2000 calls for several reforms in military organization, such as implementation of sole command, creation of integrated command and control system, improvement of troops ensuring strategic deterrence. The document marks out security cooperation on a basis of Collective Security Treaty (CST) among CIS member states which should lead up to a single CST defense area.

5.4 2000 National Security Concept

NSC 2000 also refers to the formation of multipolar world: “Russia will help shape the ideology behind the rise of a multipolar world” depicting itself as “one of the world’s major countries” with “unique strategic location on the Eurasian continent.” Besides, the concept criticizes unilateral actions of the West under alleged US leadership. The RF remarkably connects international security and stability with own strength, when it claims that its weakening and ignoring “from the other countries” would undermine it. Anew, strengthening of Russian position “as a great power” within the multipolar world is considered priority. When it comes to threats, RF is threatened (inter alia) by a “loss of its leading world positions”, separatism, NATO’s eastward expansion, military buildups near the RF border and also terrorism. Threats to security in the “border sphere” pose “adjacent states’ economic, demographic and cultural-religious expansion into Russian territory.” Next, the NSC 2000 announces surge in the level and scope of military threats in contrast to unsatisfactory state of the military industrial complex (MIC). Therefore, the document calls for restructuring and conversion of the MIC. It goes even further, stating that level of RAF operational and combat training is “critically low”.

5.5 Key findings

All of the three strategic documents issued in 2000 mention period of transition characteristic both for the RF and the world. Rapid defeat of Chechen insurgents could be considered as the first successful large-scale military campaign of RAF. Russian army carried out fast and efficient military campaign. As a result, RF restored control over territory of Chechnya, however, at a heavy price of indiscriminate killing of many civilians as a part of unscrupulous strategy of annihilation widely criticized from the world community.

Putin’s administration announced a qualitatively new pragmatic approach towards security policy. Prioritization of fight against international terrorism and economic

cooperation gave a clear sign of a feasible platform of cooperation with the West. However, relations with the West were exacerbated by the RF negative attitude towards OIF, planned missile defense system in Europe and second eastern expansion of NATO. Russian strategy started to take ambiguous shape. While criticizing a block-based security (especially NATO) on one hand, RF strived for creation of a similar security bloc based on CST area of common defense. In terms of nuclear strategy, a shift toward less restricted terms of use of nuclear weapons was made. Despite previously announced modernization plans, overall quality of both nuclear and conventional was not significantly improved. Russia felt threatened by new methods of warfare (e.g. indirect and information operations), border conflicts as well as ‘expansion’ from neighboring states. In this period, persistent trend regarding protection of Russian citizens living abroad was set.

Figure 8. Second generation of the strategic documents.

Document	Ranked preferences	Patterns of behavior
FPC 2000	<i>threats:</i> US dominance, ballistic missile defense system in Europe, humanitarian intervention, limited sovereignty, unilateral actions <i>measures:</i> fight against terrorism, reduction of nuclear arsenal, multilateral cooperation	reevaluation of overall situation, center in a multipolar world, pragmatic Eurasian great power, conditional cooperation with NATO
MD 2000	<i>threats:</i> modern conflict complexity, humanitarian intervention, indirect operations, border conflicts, information operations, discrimination of Russians abroad <i>measures:</i> effective nuclear deterrence, establishment of a single CST defense area, military reform	center of multipolar world shaping its ideology, cooperation with CIS states within CST
NSC 2000	<i>threats:</i> unilateral actions of the West under US leadership, weakening of great power position, separatism, loss of great power position, NATO expansion, terrorism, adjacent states’ expansion, poor level of MIC and RAF <i>measures:</i> military reform, counterterrorism, counterespionage, protection of the cultural moral values	great power in a multipolar world, spiritual and moral education of the population, security cooperation with the West based on counterterrorism; second conflict in Chechnya as a struggle against international terrorism

Source: Compiled by the author.

6. Conflict with Georgia facilitates increase in capabilities: 2008-2012

Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev entailed extension of his predecessor's strategic footsteps. Medvedev's term is characterized by several conflicting lines, further developing and enhancing existing strategy. First and foremost, RF decided to intervene in armed conflict in Georgia. The conflict was over control of breakaway provinces South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It was the first military conflict on regional scale with independent country in near abroad. Fought in line with principles of conventional warfare, as non-linear methods played mainly supportive role, RAF operations resembled those recently practiced in Chechnya. Until Medvedev's term, little real energy was expended on modernization of RAF and MIC.¹²² Plans of extensive modernization were adopted at the time.¹²³

Second, as Medvedev's strategy laid in shift to features characteristic for militarism, at the same time, it stressed multilateralist approach in form of pan-Euratlantic/Eurasian common security area meant to redefine existing security architecture. This 'Medvedev's initiative' was met with rejection in the West. In ideational sphere, tradition of Eurasianism was revived, prioritizing the role of security cooperation within CIS, CSTO, and SCO more than before. During this period of time, perception of a threat to Russian national security posed by the West was accepted in the broad public.¹²⁴

6.1 Russo-Georgian Conflict

Grounds of intervention in Georgia reflected one of the prominent clauses omnipresent in the strategic documents: protection of Russians abroad. This time, RF utilized 'Kosovo scenario' to justify the use of force against a sovereign country on humanitarian grounds: a cessation of violence against a group of people - 'holders of Russian passports' in Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This argument enabled RF to consider them 'Russians abroad'. Likewise, the official line explaining Russian military intervention was protection of Russians threatened by Georgian army. Deployment of RAF into South Ossetia was swift, as practiced within an extensive military exercise 'Kavkaz 2008'. Despite the overwhelming superiority of

¹²² In 2008, only 20% of the military units were in permanent readiness status.

¹²³ Discontinuation of mass mobilization of reservists, forming 15-20 swiftly deployable units of professional soldiers (*NATO Research Paper 105*, p. 5), reduction of numbers of officers, ministerial and HQ staff positions, number of MBTs, establishment of category of professional NCOs, preferring nuclear weapons over conventional arms. See: HAAS: *Military Reform in Russia: Success or Failure?*

¹²⁴ According to 2009 opinion polls, 41% perceived NATO as 'serious military threat' (compared to 21% in 2003), 39% were in favor of building a security alliance to counterweight NATO (21% in 2005). See: LAUG, Christoph: *The Russian population on Military Threats and the State of the Armed Forces*.

the federal army assisted by local militias, Georgian army did not surrender and slowed down advance of enemy columns using hit-and-run tactics. Brief but intensive conflict in Georgia revealed serious deficiencies in RAF capabilities of conducting efficient operations, especially in communication and coordination of various military branches.

The newness of the conflict was represented by coordinated utilization of following features of non-linear warfare:¹²⁵ deployment of the so-called *Kontraktniki* - unmarked infantrymen (often referred to as “tank riders”), in fact volunteers, fighting along regular military units; cooperation local militia loyal to federal forces;¹²⁶ coordinated attacks on Georgian ICT infrastructure along with operations of intelligence services and special forces. In ideational sphere, as voiced in FPC 2008 below, the conflict represented unraveling of RF long-term opposition to Georgia’s approaching to the structures of the West (especially NATO), perceived as a threat to Russian security. Interestingly, even though the regime of President Saakashvili was labeled as the proponent of such aspirations, RF did not venture to overthrow him in favor of the pro-Russian one. The conflict was ended by EU-sponsored ceasefire meaning *de facto independence* of both breakaway provinces recognized by the RF as the so-called ‘independent republics’.

6.2 2008 Foreign Policy Concept

Despite borrowing many starting-points from previous strategic documents, FPC 2008 differs in several elements. RF is again depicted as “the largest EuroAsian power,” “one of the influential centers in the modern world” having “greater responsibility for global developments” and possessing “real capacity to play a well-deserved role globally” in context when “overall situation around Russia requires reassessment.” FPC 2008 is characterized by comeback of civilizationist ideational framework, stressing the importance and exceptionality of distinct Russian civilization and culture. Global competition is illustrated as a struggle between different value systems. This fact is buttressed by the growing importance of “religious factor” in IR. Although the threat of full-scale war (both conventional and nuclear) “has been diminished”, RF perceives threat in “containing Russia” pursued by the “historic West”. The “geopolitical area around Russia” is perceived to be threatened by unilateral actions exacerbating “tensions in intercivilizational relations”. Contrary to this assumption stands the role of UN which lies in “developing full-fledged intercivilizational dialogue”.

¹²⁵ Many of these components would be rediscovered in Crimea in 2014. See: JACOBS – LASCONJARIAS: *NATO’s Hybrid Flanks – Handling Unconventional Warfare in the South and the East*, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Both tactical elements were already practised in second conflict in Chechnya.

In yet unprecedented way, RF announces readiness to resort to unilateral action “in order to protect its national interests” when at the same time it “opposes unilateral actions in the field of strategic antimissile defense”. For the first time, an explicit reference to the “Russian world” is made.¹²⁷ It is perceived as a “partner” whose interests shall be protected by RF, suited to facilitate “expanding and strengthening the space of the Russian language and culture” including preservation of “ethnic and cultural identity” and “links with historic motherland”. Worthy of attention is a condemnation of “attempts to rewrite the history” or even to “revise the outcome of the World War Two”. Cooperation within CIS should be based on “common cultural and civilizational heritage”. Economic cooperation should be ensured by Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) and means of collective security guaranteed by CSTO. Relations with states that are not parties to the CIS (i.e. Georgia) are conditioned by their “eagerness to take into account Russia’s legitimate interests”. The plan of establishment of pan-Eurasian collective and cooperative security architecture stretching ‘from Vancouver to Vladivostok’ is introduced along with claim of Russian readiness to ensure the “civilizational compatibility of Europe”. Regardless of pan-Eurasian common security plans, lingering negative stance is expressed toward eastern expansion of NATO, concretely possibility of admission of Ukraine and Georgia.

6.3 2009 National Security Concept

In 2009, NSC with prospect to 2020 was adopted. The document continues in similar spirit of civilizational attitude presented earlier in FPC 2008. RF is presented as a state able to become the “world leader” and country that overcome crises of various kinds with an “authentically Russian ideals and spirituality being born” with regard to “historical memory”. NSC 2009 rates orientation of Euro-Atlantic region toward NATO as threat to international security. Anew, it criticizes planned placement of ballistic missile defense system in Europe. Cooperation with CIS member states is prioritized hand in hand with commitments to CSTO alliance. The reinforcement of the potential of SCO is also considered as strategic priority. Cooperative relations with NATO are conditioned by “the preparedness of the alliance to recognize Russia’s legal interests”. Besides the placement of missile defense system in Europe, the development of high-precision, informational and other hi-tech means (i.e. strategic non-nuclear arms) is listed among threats. To counter them, RAF should be

¹²⁷ Russian world is defined as a ‘multimillion Russian diaspora’.

transformed into a “qualitatively new profile”.¹²⁸ The effectiveness of the defense of the Russians living abroad should be improved as well. Moreover, NSC 2009 justifies the presence of RAF in “conflict zones” by need to maintain “strategic stability and equitable strategic partnership”.¹²⁹ RF also announces an unprecedented aim to take “all necessary efforts” to maintain parity with the US in the sphere of strategic weapons. Culturally, RF feels threatened by intensified attempts “to revise perspectives on Russia’s history, its role and place in world history.

6.4 2010 Military Doctrine

MD 2010 formulates threats and dangers to Russian security similarly to NSC 2009 with addition that military dangers (conflictual situations/relations that can turn into threat) are viewed as intensifying. These are: regional conflicts, global use of force of NATO and placement of missile defense system in Europe along with “attempts to destabilize the situation in states” formulated as “interference in their internal affairs”. Additionally, RF is concerned about the use of force on territories of “contiguous states” and military exercises carried out there. MD 2010 notices the growing importance of the information warfare in modern conflict characterized by combination of military and non-military means. As a result, the cooperation with CIS and CSO states should be intensified and collective security of CSTO should be strengthened. Call for expansion of “circle of partner states” is expressed as well. Prevention of conflict should be ensured by a threat of nuclear retaliatory strike in case of massive conventional attack on RF or its allies. Anew, protection of Russian citizens abroad “from armed attack” should be ensured. Following modernization programs are announced: improvement of training and equipment, development of means for information warfare, and development of high-precision weapons.

6.5 Key Findings

Throughout Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency, several distinct features in overall Russian strategy were introduced. The position of RF within the world community was perceived as already established, firm and influential one. Strong emphasis was put on civilizationist approach in terms of explanation of contemporary strategic issues, including references to

¹²⁸ Comprehensive modernization plan includes: maintenance of strategic nuclear forces, overall improvement of military organization, increase in number of divisions at constant readiness, etc.

¹²⁹ This could be read as an pretence at codification of Russian military presence abroad, especially in regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia that still belong to Georgia.

culture, values, history and memory. Reference to the so-called ‘Russian world’ was used to refer to Russian Diaspora. Furthermore, eventuality of unilateral action aimed at protection of state interests was announced for the first time. Claim that modern conflicts cannot be solved with the use of force in FPC 2008 clearly contradicts the deployment of RF armed forces to Georgia. The President Medvedev’s initiative of establishment of the sole collective security mechanism on a treaty basis for entire pan-Eurasian area remained without effect. NATO is perceived as a threat to Russian security, especially planned placement of missile defense system in Europe along with prospect of further expansion eastwards.

Newly, RF decided to maintain parity with the US in strategic weapons along with development of high-precisions weapons (although criticized at other states) and means of information warfare that are considered characteristic feature of modern conflict. Emphasis is put on protection of Russians abroad, which is used for justification of Russian military intervention in Georgia in summer 2008. The conflict with Georgia represents ‘watershed with the past’ in terms of necessity to transform RAF “from the large-scale conflict-oriented mobilization army to fully filled, sophisticated equipped and well-trained permanent ready forces, aimed at regional power projection.”¹³⁰ Interestingly, the Russian population perceived Russo-Georgian conflict not as a conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, but as a proxy war.¹³¹ Regardless of this attitude, conflict with Georgia “cannot in any terms be interpreted as the return of Russia as a global power.”¹³² It is rather a projection of regional significance facilitated by a clear numerical superiority of RAF over Georgian army.

Figure 9. Third generation of the strategic documents.

Document	Ranked preferences	Patterns of behavior
FPC 2008	<i>threats:</i> containment of the RF, unilateral actions in near abroad, ballistic missile system, revision of history <i>measures:</i> UN-sponsored intercivilizational dialogue, economic cooperation based on EAEC, security cooperation based on CSTO	largest Eurasian power as a center in multipolar world entitled to play global role, responsibility for global developments, intercivilizational struggle of different value systems, unilateral protection of interests, partnership with Russian world promoting Russian culture and values, common cultural and civilizational heritage of CIS states, opposition to historic West, plan of common

¹³⁰ HAAS: *Military Reform in Russia: Success or Failure?*, p. 1.

¹³¹ The fear of being the object of the United States’ geopolitical ambitions is broadly shared by the Russian population. 49 percent say the escalation of the Georgian conflict was the fault of the United States because it wanted to gain control of Russia’s neighbors, 74 percent of the population see Georgia as the victim of US geopolitical ambitions, and 70 per cent hold the opinion that Russia did everything possible to avoid the escalation. See: EITELHUBER: *Op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

¹³² EITELHUBER: *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

		security based on civilizational compatibility of Europe, non-CIS cooperation conditioned by respect to Russian interests
NSC 2009	<i>threats:</i> NATO, missile defense system, hi-tech weapon systems, strategic conventional arms, information warfare <i>measures:</i> cooperation within CIS, commitment to CSTO, increased role of CSO, military reform	position of world leader with own ideals, spirituality, historical memory; cooperation with NATO conditioned by respect to Russian interests, maintenance unconditional parity with the USA in strategic weapons, intervention in Georgia as a protection of Russians abroad
MD 2010	<i>threats:</i> regional conflicts, NATO out-of-area operations, missile defense system, intrusion on internal affairs, military exercises and use of force in near abroad <i>measures:</i> strengthening of cooperation within CIS, CSO, CSTO, effective nuclear deterrence, development of ICT and PGM	modern conflict characterized by growing importance of the information warfare and combination of military and non-military means

Source: Compiled by the author.

7. Known unknowns? Hybrid hysteria around conflict in Ukraine: 2013-2015

In February 2014 RF occupied Ukrainian region of Crimea and consequently annexed the peninsula violating norms of international law. Concurrently, RAF evoked an armed conflict in Ukraine’s industrial region of Donbas, directly neighboring Russian territory, where were established self-proclaimed ‘peoples’ republics’ of Donetsk and Luhansk. RF provided militants operating on behalf of aforementioned quasi states with necessary resources, including military personnel and equipment. Since then a concept of the so-called ‘hybrid warfare’ has been revived to describe RAF military actions in Ukraine. The author asserts that this approach to analysis of contemporary Russian strategy might be very simplifying, if not plainly misleading. In truth, the non-linear operations are not entirely new as often wrongly conceived. Their most important new feature would be the orchestration of multitude of actions aimed at subversion of state authority along with swift pace of operations characterized by aggressive advance exploiting means of information warfare and moment of surprise against a feeble opponent. Among the new features is utilization of potential of the local population in effective combination of the military and non-military means. Even though

the combination of military and non-military means is as old as the history of war, hardly anyone expected RAF to be able to carry out large-scale non-linear operations, especially with regard to previous conflicts in which RAF mostly relied on methods of conventional warfare based on traditional deployment of overwhelming force.

7.1 Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

In fall 2013, a constitutional crisis resulting into violent clashes occurred in Ukraine. As said earlier, the RF exploited this enfeeblement of state authority to occupy Crimea at the end of February 2014. In spite of initial denial of military presence, troops with no insignia turned out to be RAF special forces. In a series of coordinated operations they managed to secure the peninsula and replace the local government structures with figures loyal to RF. Anew, RF later justified operations with need to protect Russians abroad. By exploiting local grievances and disloyalty, RF turned majority of local population in its favor and this attitude materialized in sequential referendum adding yet another reason intended to justify the military intervention and subsequent annexation. Deployment of forces within Crimea campaign was considerably eased because of permanent Russian military presence in Sevastopol naval base, status of forces arrangements in Crimea, and additional agreements on transit of troops in Ukraine, constituting unique operational conditions¹³³ along with formation of local pro-Russian militia and sizeable popular support. Although the focal point of Crimean operations laid in non-linear warfare, occupation was completed by a traditional military invasion, “using Russia’s airborne, marines and motor rifle brigades.”¹³⁴ Military occupation would hardly be sustainable without deployment of regular units.

Contrary to Crimea, covert non-linear military operations carried out in the Donbas were met with little success. After initial paralysis, Ukrainian army reacted with proclamation of regime of ‘counterterrorist operation’ and countered Russian backed militants from Donbas self-proclaimed quasi states with force. Separatists’ forces were almost defeated in a series of successful Ukrainian counterattacks in summer 2014. At that point, RAF directly intervened with regular troops on behalf of weakened separatists. Setback of the non-linear warfare in Donbas was likely caused by “apparent failure to rally sufficient pro-Russian forces to sustain an entirely indigenous uprising.”¹³⁵ Since then, the conflict remains limited by Minsk

¹³³ KOFMAN, Michael – ROJANSKY, Matthew: *A Closer look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War’*, p. 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Agreements, however, yet still unresolved due to sustained Russian military presence and support of separatist forces in Donbas.

7.2 2013 Foreign Policy Concept

The latest FPC envisages foundations of RF foreign and security policy based on its stable and strong position in the world, promoting (inter alia) protection and “consolidation” of Russians living abroad. The document asserts that IR “become increasingly complex and unpredictable” and as such go through a “transition” leading to “creation of a polycentric system”. The political and economical dominance of the West “continues to diminish”, while making place for the East. This tendency causes change of balance of power; a competition that takes place “on a civilizational level”. Anew, any unilateral measures taken outside UNSC are denounced as illegal. Moreover, the concepts “aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian populations” are explicitly criticized.¹³⁶ Consequently, the concept of soft-power is acknowledged as “indispensable component” for achieving foreign policy objectives that can be used as a tool of pressure exerted upon sovereign states in order to interfere in their internal affairs to achieve their political destabilization. Such potential is also ascribed to “human rights concepts”. As a result, RF should improve its “application of soft power”.

FPC 2013 declares a “special responsibility” of the RF in maintenance of global security. Any “unilateral arbitrary actions” related to the use of force (explicitly mentioning R2P) and military interventions are perceived as a violation of international law whose rule ought to be strengthened. Accordingly, any modern conflicts cannot be resolved through the use of force. Anew, fight against international terrorism is highly prioritized. Similarly to previous documents, Russian Diaspora should be protected and upheld together with efforts to promote “cultural and humanitarian relations between Slavic peoples”. Security is meant to be achieved by means of information, either by strengthening the role of international Russian media or by counteracting any information threats. An establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is regarded as vital economic goal and the CSTO continues to play a key security role in the post-Soviet space and as such should be transformed into universal international organization. The need for settlement of conflicts in Naghorny Karabakh and Transdnestria regions is mentioned together with improvement of relations with Ukraine. Regarding Georgia, “normalization of relations” (conditioned by Georgian willingness)

¹³⁶ This statement can be read as reflection on NATO *Operation Unified Protector* in Lybia.

should be achieved along with Russian assistance to the formation of the so-called “Republic of Abkhazia” and “Republic of South Ossetia”. FPC 2013 conditions mutual cooperation with “NATO’s adherence to international law” and opposes its further expansion toward the Russian border.

7.3 2014 Military Doctrine

The latest MD newly introduces threat stemming from a trend of “shifting the threats to the information space and the internal sphere”. Anew, low probability of a large-scale war contrasts an increase in “number of areas” related to military risks. These include increase in power of NATO and its global role, politico-military pressure exerted on the RF, deployment of troops on territories close to RF and its allies; missile defense system and Global Strike concept together with strategic high-precision weapon systems. The use of ICT means for military purposes is voiced again alongside activities of private military companies and armed groups operating in proximity to Russian territory. Scope of threats presented in MD 2014 range from overthrow of governments to subversive operations aimed at “undermining historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions related to the defense of the Motherland.” Above all, a threat of “the protest potential of the population” combined with special operations and utilization of non-military methods is emphasized. Likewise, any operations of indirect and asymmetric nature are mentioned as highly important to national security.

Threats should be countered by characteristic call for strengthening cooperation within CIS, CSTO and SCO organizations as well as through “strengthening of military patriotic education” of Russians. Similarly to FPC 2013, the so-called “Republic of Abkhazia” and “Republic of South Ossetia” are mentioned as partners for defense and security cooperation. RAF deployment to and presence in foreign countries is justified through protection of state interests that newly include Arctic region. The document also codifies participation of RAF in enforcement of state-of-emergency and martial law regimes. MD 2014 provides that if requested by another state, the RF will repel or prevent an armed attack aimed against such state. Efficiency of MIC should be improved together with “military-patriotic education of citizens”. The document defines plans for development of new means of warfare, such as information capacities or new types of high-precision weapons, UAVs and “robotic strike complexes”.

7.4 2015 National Security Concept

The latest NSC is somewhat unsystematic provided that it replaced its 2009 counterpart designated as valid until 2020. Hence, the NSC 2015 accentuates strategic custom of every President's administration to adopt own strategic documents derived from set strategic goals. The document rates position of RF in the modern world as an established one able to resolve "important international problems". Overall self-evaluation is predominantly positive, welcoming revival of "traditional spiritual and moral values" and "proper attitude toward Russia's history". Russian position is opposed by the US and its allies "seeking to retain dominance in world affairs". Again, "a new polycentric model of the world order" is being shaped in context of global and regional instability as the role of force is not on decline, endorsed by NATO entailing 'classical' security threat.¹³⁷ Regional security system based on NATO and the EU is perceived as inefficient due to increase in migration flows from a region of Middle East and North Africa. The US and the EU are even blamed for support of coup d'état in Ukraine and the subsequent armed conflict. Means of ICT, manipulation of public and "falsifying history" are labeled as "some countries'" tools of achieving of political objectives as well as grounds of surge in "global information confrontation". As a result, RF rules out "costly confrontation" thusly pursuing "an open, rational and pragmatic foreign policy". In a cultural sphere, "traditional Russian spiritual moral values"¹³⁸ are meant to be promoted. Security in the field of culture should be further safeguarded by ensuring Russian "cultural sovereignty" embedded in protection of society against "external expansion of ideologies, values, destructive information and psychological impacts" by means of "a system of spiritual-moral and patriotic education of citizens". Last but not least, preservation of a status of the world's leading power is deemed vital.

7.5 Key findings

According to currently valid strategic documents, RF presents itself as a consolidated global power that has already reached most of its strategic goals. The civilizationalist worldview is taken over from previous documents. Soft power and utilization of non-military and ICT means are explicitly acknowledged as an important tools of foreign and security policy.

¹³⁷ Planned placement of ballistic missile defence system in Europe, Global Strike concept, further expansion, out-of-area operations, etc.

¹³⁸ For the first time, an official definition of such values is provided. They include: priority of the spiritual over the material, protection of human life and of human rights and freedoms, the family, creative labor, service to the homeland, the norms of morals and morality, humanism, charity, fairness, mutual assistance, collectivism. Their erosion is considered as a threat.

Political potential of cultural influence is also highly rated, encompassing plans for establishment of ‘special education’ of citizens. For the very first time, Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are explicitly referred to as parties for security and economic cooperation. This act emphasizes strategic significance RF ascribes to both breakaway regions. Existing difference between declared and real strategy is further exacerbated by statements about normalization of relations with Georgia and Ukraine that contradict the present state of affairs. Particularly with regard to Ukraine: statement that modern conflict cannot be resolved by the use of force contradicts military operations being carried out there and annexation of Crimea. Furthermore, operations in Ukraine entail Russian greatest strategic fears: subversion of state authority, utilization of irregular units and peoples’ protest potential along with non-linear and non-military means of warfare. Considerable ambiguity of current strategy is also apparent in condemnation of the use of force, utilization of ICT and non-military means of warfare on one hand, contradicting calls for development of soft-power potential, non-military and ICT means of warfare with the use hi-tech weaponry on the other. Besides well-known global (counterterrorism, nuclear deterrence) and regional strategic priorities (CIS, CSTO, SCO, EEU), priority to Arctic area where RF has been increasingly active is newly added.

Overall, present-day Russian strategy represents considerable shift towards confrontation. Generated by measures taken as component of ‘counter-color revolutions strategy’, the trend set already during Medvedev’s and second Putin’s terms is further extended. This confrontational approach creates interesting strategic paradox: RF pursues the very same strategy whose elements are listed among the most feared threats to its security. According to amount of attention given to countering possibility of emergence of a ‘Maidan scenario’ in Russia, the regime presumably feels vulnerable to social protest,¹³⁹ as legitimacy is largely based on economic success that is being thwarted due to impact of Western sanctions and the low oil price. Additionally, the contemporary strategy can be seen from a different viewpoint, stating that the problem lies in different ‘Russian’ understanding to established strategic concepts.¹⁴⁰ For instance, security concepts like *soft power*¹⁴¹ or

¹³⁹ MONAGHAN: *Op. cit.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ The soft power concept encompasses use of a range of tools, including non-governmental ones, to co-opt – rather than coerce – others to achieve desired goals. See: MONAGHAN: *The New Russian Foreign Policy Concept: Evolving Continuity*. Emphasis added.

indivisibility of security,¹⁴² listed in the latest documents, seem to be understood differently in RF in clear contrast to the West. Therefore, a different Russian interpretation conceives soft power rather as ‘soft strength’ “more in the context of an information campaign promoting Russian culture and language and countering ‘soft’ attacks on the country.”¹⁴³ Likewise, indivisibility of security is understood as “the connection between political and legally binding security agreements.”¹⁴⁴ Despite the fact that ‘strategic language’ RF uses may look same as one used in the West, different interpretation proves the opposite.

Russian shift towards utilization of non-linear warfare can also be grasped as an “attempt to catch up conceptually to the realities of the modern war.”¹⁴⁵ Consequently, use of non-linear methods of warfare should rather be viewed as a set of flexible operational requisites than a coherent, sole, and universally replicable military doctrine. Therefore, as requirement of old-fashioned military intervention in Donbas proves, simple repetition of universally applicable ‘hybrid war scenario’ is highly disputable and depends upon series of factors beyond attacker’s control. Finally, more important than utilization of non-linear warfare would be a qualitative rise in Russian conventional weapons. The author deems state of strategic conventional weapon systems¹⁴⁶ the most crucial indicator of RAF strength and real capability of power projection wielding influence on the RF strategic ambitions.

In a long-term, the RF not only regards ‘color’ or ‘Arab Spring’ revolutions as threat to national security, but also “as externally instigated processes and sees itself as a target of western regime-change plans.”¹⁴⁷ As Russian uncertainty about stability of regimes facing political upheaval grows, development of modern armed forces with hi-tech conventional arms capable of special operations entail a real-world global capacity to effectively tackle the above-mentioned processes. This very policy represents Russian intervention in Syria, as elaborated in final chapter, could become scenario characteristic feature of the RF foreign and security policy in the near future.

Figure 10. Fourth generation strategic documents.

Document	Ranked preferences	Patterns of behavior
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¹⁴² The concept of indivisibility of security formulates comprehensive understanding of security in its three dimensions (economic, political-military, human), recognizing that regional security is embedded in wider global environment and that security within states is as important as security among states. See: Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ MONAGHAN: *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ KOFMAN – ROJANSKY: *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Long-range bombers, ballistic missiles with conventional warheads, cruise missiles, hi-tech weapon systems, PGMs, etc.

¹⁴⁷ KLEIN, Margarete: *Russia’s New Military Doctrine*, p. 2.

FPC 2013	<p><i>threats:</i> unilateral actions, political subversions, soft power, R2P, NATO expansion</p> <p><i>measures:</i> protection of Russians, abroad, improvement of the soft power, strengthening of international law, non-use of force, struggle against international terrorism, establishment of EEU, global role for CSTO</p>	<p>stable position in a complex and unpredictable polycentric world, dominance focus shifts from the West to the East within civilizational struggle, special responsibility for global security, conditioned cooperation with NATO and Georgia, promotion of relation between Slavic peoples</p>
MD 2014	<p><i>threats:</i> NATO missile defense and global capabilities, ICT, private military companies, subversion of state authority, non-military, indirect and special forces operations; asymmetric warfare, protests</p> <p><i>measures:</i> RAF to enforce state-of-emergency and martial law regimes, military-patriotic education of citizens, provision of military aid on request, improvement of MIC, development of state-of-the art weaponry</p>	<p>threats of internal and informational nature, politico-military pressure from abroad, key priority ascribed to cooperation with separatist provinces in Georgia and assertion of interests in the Arctic</p>
NSC 2015	<p><i>threats:</i> NATO, US dominance, global and regional instability, global informational confrontation</p> <p><i>measures:</i> pragmatic foreign policy, promotion of traditional values, cultural sovereignty, military-patriotic education</p>	<p>established position in the polycentric world, revival of key civilizationist elements, intervention in Ukraine as protection of Russians abroad, inefficient security system of NATO and EU and their intrusion on Ukraine</p>

Source: Compiled by the author.

8. After Syria? Towards an enigmatic future: 2015-2020

Though the future cannot be predicted and as such inherently remains obscure; when it comes to strategy, several facts can already be derived from the current situation. First, growth in the RF ambitions generated assertiveness which is unlikely to diminish. Increased strategic ambitions embedded in interventions in Georgia and Ukraine have newly materialized into involvement in Syrian civil war. In the latter case, RAF carried out operations consistent with global power projection. Rapid increase in both military presence on the ground and combat sorties of air force left no doubt that RAF not only possesses means of global power

projection, but also operational conventional weapon systems of strategic importance. This weaponry entails potential of ‘non-nuclear deterrence’.

However, a focus on development of strategic conventional arms within a ‘non-nuclear deterrence policy’ in the near future is disputed. First, it requires enormous amount of resources and qualitatively improved MIC, none of that is currently at the RF disposal in quantity, and alteration of the present state is rather unlikely to occur in a short-term. Second, RF seems to put more emphasis on nuclear deterrence capabilities, sapping the crucial resources from the defense budget. Inability to give up on prioritization of nuclear weapons within military-strategic planning, RAF will continue to be trapped in an armament ‘vicious circle’ characterized by the aforementioned elements generating impossibility to acquire modern conventional capabilities built up on state-of-the-art weapon systems comparable to those in the West. Additionally, mindset of the Russian strategic elites who continue to perceive nuclear weapons as ‘backbone’ of the country’s deterrence against the West, will not change promptly either. According to NATO, the estimated Russian strategic nuclear forces by 2020 will include 220-250 ICBMs, 44-60 SLBMs, and up to 50 nuclear bombers - totaling 400 delivery vehicles able to carry up to 1,100 nuclear warheads.¹⁴⁸ Upkeep of such an impressive nuclear arsenal will present considerable challenge to defense spending, hampering modernization programs and development of modern conventional arms. As a result, “[a]round 2020, although disposing of more sophisticated armed forces, Moscow military will still to a large extent be inferior to the West, both in number of troops as in quality of weapons.”¹⁴⁹ Even so, level of RAF conventional capabilities that enabled somewhat unexpected power projection in Syria, should not be underestimated, neither now or in the future.

8.1 Intervention in Syria

Decision to intervene on behalf of Bashar al-Assad’s regime started to be implemented in fall of 2015. The intervention was carried out in line with Syrian government’s request and provision of MD 2014 about military assistance to a state that would ask for it. Military operations of RAF were mainly limited to aerial campaign and actions of special forces. For the first time, certain types of strategic bombers¹⁵⁰ were employed in combat in a unique way: sorties of these bombers, often equipped with PGMs, were designed as long-range missions

¹⁴⁸ SINOVETS, Polina – RENZ, Bettina: Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions., p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ ROUSSEAU, Richard: Russia’s Revised Military doctrine.

¹⁵⁰ I. e. Tupolevs Tu-95MS ‘Bear’, and Tu-160 ‘Blackjack’.

with take offs from and landings on air bases in RF. Not only such ambitious venture resembles US bomber sorties over former Yugoslavia at the end of 1990s, it can also be read as testing ground for contemporary hi-tech strategic weapon systems and related PGMs necessary for global power projection. The same applies to ship-launched cruise missiles fired from Caspian Sea. Therefore, Russian intervention in Syria confirms qualitative increase in deployability and effectiveness of personnel and weapon systems, and both in conventional and special operations capacities. As a result of intervention, previously weakened Syrian regime gained firm ground and even seized initiative in prolonged civil war. Russian gain clearly rests on its inseparable political involvement in conflict resolution in Syria entailing reinforcement of its international standing.

8.2 Economic constraints

In conjunction with drop in world oil prices, western economic sanctions, and depreciation of the ruble, productivity of Russian economy has been constantly declining in recent years. This trend has impacted defense budget and thusly modernization and acquisition programs. Budget of current state armament program ‘GPV-2020’ for 2011-2020 periods has shrunk from \$600 billion to \$340 billion,¹⁵¹ slowing down overall process of rebuilding capacities of RAF and MIC. Since foundation of RF up to now, there has been a dual-track approach to military modernization: troops’ combat readiness along with modernization of nuclear weapons. Consequently, the expenses on nuclear deterrent delay modernization of conventional arms already constrained due to widespread corruption.¹⁵² Although RF somewhat “lags behind in developing new conventional defensive and offensive capabilities,”¹⁵³ it is apparently capable of power projection on both regional (Georgia, Ukraine) and global (Syria) scale. Regardless of ambitious modernization and military build-up plans, an overall quality and deployability of RAF will remain undermined by poor economic situation without prospects of improvement in the near future.

8.3 Scenarios of probable development

Scenario analogous to recent intervention in Syria is likely to reoccur, either on demand of local government or in form of unilateral action (as in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine). Conversely, as the success of non-linear operations depends primarily upon political

¹⁵¹ ROUSSEAU: *Op. cit.*

¹⁵² More than 20% of military budget always vanishes due to corruption. See: ROUSSEAU: *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ KLEIN: *Russia’s New Military Doctrine.*

instability, probability of repetition of 'Crimea scenario' will remain low. Countries with significant Russian minorities located in near abroad, such as Baltic States, Belarus or Kazakhstan, have so far exhibited solid regime stability. Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova represent the other side of the continuum, as conflicts incurred there will not be resolved anytime soon, either due to direct RF involvement or its prospect of Russian veto in case of any UN-sponsored settlements that would be perceived as circumvention of RF interests. Another scenario would be a proxy conflict between third states with Russian support granted to one of the belligerents. To a limited extent, this scenario applies to the ongoing conflict over enclave of Naghorny Karabakh, in which RF supports Armenia against Azerbaijan backed by Turkey.

An increasing strategic importance ascribed to the Arctic may indicate likelihood of emergence of conflict over this region rich in raw materials. The conflict may not necessarily result in classic military engagement. According to RAF 'Mission and objectives', one of the four dimensions within whose frameworks armed forces operate, entails "mounting other-than-war enforcement operations" outside the RF territory.¹⁵⁴ For instance, an initial stage of the Russian control over the Arctic area could be carried out as 'scientific mission' or a voyage of exploration that may in fact become a deniable covert special operation able to secure foothold in the area for further advance backed by a full-spectrum military intervention in case of failure. Another scenario, this time harmful for Russia itself, could be brought about by rapid surge in political instability that would result in internal conflict leading to overthrow of Russian government or even disintegration of the federal state. Probability of this scenario is already increased due to persisting economic decline incidental to regime legitimacy. Ultimately, an anti-Western pattern along with growing assertiveness that would materialize in increased involvement abroad is likely to persist - if not even grow - in the near future.

Conclusions

After the RF carried out interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria; various policy makers, security officials, journalists and scholars alike identified contemporary Russian military strategy as threat to international security. Numerous opinions and analyses warned against Russia's growing military power, particularly referring to a threat posed by allegedly new ways of non-linear warfare. Final conclusions resulting from the analysis suggest largely

¹⁵⁴ *Mission and objectives of the Russian Armed Forces*. See: <http://eng.mil.ru/en/mission/tasks.htm>

complex nature of contemporary Russian strategy and somewhat more profound ways of understanding of its elements. As some of the concluding remarks may challenge a simplifying logic mentioned above, others are in line with patterns of a broadly-based ‘strategic mainstream’.

Since the disintegration of the USSR and establishment of RF in 1991, key national foreign and security policy goals have been formulated and declared in three leading strategic documents: Foreign Policy Concept, Military Doctrine, and National Security Concept. Therefore, the guiding principles of Russian strategy are available to broad public either at home or abroad, and can be considered as openly declared. Amendment of the documents largely depends on concrete foreign and security policy goals of each presidential administration, as the 1993 Constitution endowed Russian President with exclusive right to formulate the given strategic documents without participation of legislative bodies.

In early 1990s, during first years of Boris Yeltsin’s term, alteration in Russian strategy occurred and strategic culture was seemingly changed as well. However, in the second half of the decade, in parallel with the first conflict in Chechnya, patterns of the previous ‘Soviet’ strategic culture resurfaced, replacing a brief period of cooperative orientation toward the West. Such revived mindset was ultimately accepted by the President Yeltsin during his second term in office. This regression occurred as a reaction to incentives from abroad: NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia and the first eastern enlargement of the Alliance. A trend of reactive foreign and security policy was set at the time and persists to be acted upon up to now. In contrast to this antagonistic pattern, a necessity to tackle the surge in terrorists’ actions in the late 1990s and early 21st century along with the highly internationalized Second Chechen War facilitated a brief period of cooperation with the West oriented to counterterrorism. Vladimir Putin’s first term in office was characterized by a pragmatic approach to strategic issues, but it again gave way to antagonistic patterns of strategic thought that materialized in full force during Putin’s second term. The RF continued to respond to foreign incentives (e.g., OIF, second NATO eastern expansion, planned missile defense system, etc.) with even stronger regression to antagonistic position, including measures ensuring more effective nuclear deterrence. At the same time, the RF resorted to a strengthening of security cooperation among CIS states on a CST basis, which led to a foundation of the CSTO in 2002. In early 2000s, first notions of ideologically based strategic goals appeared in strategic documents (i.e. spiritual and moral education of the population, protection of distinct ‘Russian’ moral and spiritual values). With advent of Dmitry Medvedev’s administration, more emphasis was put on civilizationist patterns. As a result,

protection of Russians abroad was used as the cause for intervention in Georgia accompanied by a broadly-based resentment towards the West which has continued to grow ever since. In spite of regional power projection, the intervention in Georgia revealed substantial shortcomings in RAF capabilities. Consequently, the President Medvedev announced ambitious military reforms. Improvement of overall military capabilities materialized in non-linear operations in Ukraine during third Vladimir Putin's term. Whereas operations in Crimea exhibited efficiency of non-linear warfare, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine proved the contrary, as the direct RAF intervention was necessary to avert separatists' defeat. Current intervention in Syria represents a qualitative watershed within a framework of 'counter-color revolutions strategy', entailing RAF global power projection capability. Similar scenario to intervention in Syria is likely to reoccur in the near future, either on the global or regional (in near abroad) scale.

Throughout the surveyed period of time, RF ascribed utmost importance to nuclear deterrence, border security, protection of Russians abroad, and counterterrorism. Comprehensive politico-military strategy has emanated from valid documents, excepting interventions in Georgia and Ukraine. Despite the justifications based on protection of Russians abroad, the use of force clearly contradicts the provisions of most of the documents. Furthermore, in both above mentioned interventions, the RF acted upon principle it has strongly criticized: preference of use of force in unilateral action over multilateral UN-sponsored peaceful settlement. At this point, a difference of the resultant strategy from the strategic documents is the highest, indicating the lowest level of strategic predictability. Apparently, an illegal annexation of Crimea represents the most significant discrepancy between declared and implemented strategy, violating related international agreements and norms of international law. Another important finding is the strategic paradox stemming from non-linear warfare. In short, RAF carried out the very same operations that Russian government perceives as threat to own national security. Although a coherent nationalistic ideology openly promoting revisionist strategic patterns is absent in the documents (as nationalism is even listed among the threats several times), an emphasis put on military and patriotic education of citizens, protection of moral and spiritual values, 'consolidation' or protection of Russian diaspora – Russian world – abroad, suggests that these somewhat odd provisions are intended to disseminate uncertainty about real strategic behavior particularly within indistinctly defined area of near abroad.

Growing Russian foreign and military policy assertiveness has been facilitated by military reforms and increased defense spending. Ideational background provided by

entrenched patterns of Russian strategic reasoning facilitated development from a regional power lagging behind others into an assertive great power with global ambitions of a self-appointed ‘deputy sheriff’ within a framework of multipolar world. On the other hand, feasibility of Russian strategic ambitions remains undermined by serious economic constraints exacerbating current regime’s fears about its vulnerability to social upheaval analogous to ‘color revolutions’ or ‘Arab Spring’. Repeated violations of adjacent states’ territorial integrity and internationally binding treaties deprive RF of strategic credibility. Moreover, an intentionally promoted ambiguity generates a long-term lack of accountability that further undermines Russian position in the world.

Enhanced principle of nuclear deterrence proves how insecure is present-day Russian status in the world. In spite of having several types of modern nuclear weapons at its disposal,¹⁵⁵ most of the nuclear arsenal is obsolete and costly modernization consumes vast part of the resources usable elsewhere. Even though the modern conflicts require hi-tech conventional weaponry, pace of the modernization of RAF capabilities remains slowed by a number of factors. Nonetheless, the intervention in Syria proved that despite financial constraints and preference of nuclear over conventional arms, RAF owns capabilities necessary for utilization of modern weaponry on the global scale. Regardless of constantly stable patterns of Russian strategic culture, neither nuclear weapons nor nationalistic ideology, but the ‘smart’ conventional capabilities along with an upcoming replacement of government will certainly become a bench mark for real-world power of the RF in the near future.

¹⁵⁵ I. e. ICBM Topol-M, SLBM Bulava.

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Summary

This diploma thesis explores comprehensive development and transformation of the politico-military strategy of the Russian federation since 1991 up to early 2016. The thesis follows a general hypothesis that the strategic culture wields influence on shaping of the resultant strategy, which is observable through analysis of the key strategic documents as well as important strategic choices made during the surveyed period of time. Therefore, longitudinal method of process tracing was selected along with application of theory of strategy and concept of strategic culture.

Results of the research confirmed that entrenched assumptions stemming from specific strategic culture tend to persist regardless of outer incentives. Russian fairly stable culturally-based ranked preferences and patterns of behavior, as elaborated by Alastair Iain Johnston and Colin Gray, prove that although the RF military strategy went through significant changes throughout its entire existence, strategic culture remains almost unaltered. As several strategic choices deviate from valid strategic documents (i.e. military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine), the correlation between proclaimed patterns of strategic behavior and resultant strategy may become weak. This ambiguity generates strategic unpredictability, aggravating Russian position in the world. Notions of ‘near abroad’ area and ‘Russian world’ further worsen this state of affairs. Such strategic ambiguity facilitated the revisionist security policy which materialized in annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbas. Nevertheless, non-linear ‘hybrid’ warfare cannot be considered as universally applicable.

Intervention in Syria proved significant improvement in overall armed forces’ capabilities. However, modernization of armed forces remains undermined by lack of resources and emphasis put on nuclear deterrence. As the scenario similar to intervention in Syria either is probable to reoccur in the near future, the decision to intervene and form of operations will depend on number of factors; ranging from foreign and security policy goals of the next presidential administration and defense spending, to military reform and condition of armed forces and military industrial complex alike. Drawing upon the conclusions, the military strategy of the RF is likely to exhibit persistent patterns (i.e. antagonism to the West) built on historically entrenched notions stemming from reactive strategic reasoning buttressed with internal insecurity about its own vulnerability to unexpected political upheaval similar to ‘color revolutions’ or ‘Arab Spring’. Therefore, Russian strategy will probably entail increasingly global ambitions, either on unilateral or multilateral platform, as the assertiveness materialized in the interventions and declared strategy in key documents suggest.

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**Military Strategy of the Russian Federation in Early
21st Century**

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Ročník: **2.**

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Vedoucí práce: **PhDr. et JUDr. Tomáš Karásek, PhD.**

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Motivation for research & Case selection

Contemporary military strategy of the Russian Federation (RF) has been heatedly discussed by scholars, policy makers and journalists, however, often without sufficient attention paid to its long-term context. Contrary to the research focused on recent US military strategy, there has not been adequate effort reflecting transformation of the RF military strategy in its complete picture. Therefore, the thesis sheds light on the RF military strategy as a comprehensive social phenomenon (dating back to 1992/93) with emphasis put on period since 2000 up to now (2015) including short-term prognosis to 2020.

The goals of the Russian military strategy in early 21st century have been influenced by President Vladimir Putin's tenacious effort focused on regaining long-lost superpower status. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russian armed forces fought in several formative armed conflicts: Chechen Wars (1994-1996; 1999-2009), Russo-Georgian War (2008), and War in Ukraine (2014-present). Since 2000, RF defense budget, third largest in the world, has been on the rise and postulated growth in the future. It appears that, however, even such grandiose plan may be affected by present tumble of national economy. At any rate, recently introduced massive military modernization program, enabled by increased defense spending, stepped up the level of the overall armed forces' standard. Modernization process reflects latest military doctrines hand in hand with improved armament, technology, and training.

Moreover, perceived as a revanchist state, the RF is disgruntled with the current status-quo, continuously building up its military capabilities and alliances (e.g. CSTO). Russian revisionism, buttressed with nationalistic ideology, may influence current strategic elites playing crucial role in the formulation of the long-term strategic goals. When transferred to military strategy, ideologically motivated political goals could pose security risk to the West and other countries in the region, depicted as enemies of the RF. From this viewpoint, it is argued that such behavior is clearly not a reaction to any incentives from the West (as the realist theory may argue), but it might rather be guided by an ideologically based nationalistic doctrine, intently promoted by strategic elites. Consequent politico-military doctrine would be formulated as generally antagonistic towards the West, or to any countries friendly to it. In other words, the RF may need artificially constructed opponents to build its own identity, stemming from pervasive ideology hostile to the West or former Soviet countries striving for the West (Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltics). It is self-evident that such ominous development, which may affect general strategy of the RF, could deteriorate into security threat of a global importance to the above-mentioned group of countries.

Despite the fact that the RF strategic culture remained relatively unchanged since the disintegration of the USSR, military strategies and doctrines underwent significant transformation. Given these circumstances, a comprehensive understanding of evolution and transformation of the RF military strategy in the last two decades is essential for profound assessment of the contemporary Russian strategic environment, as well as for predictions of its further development in the near future. Selected case can contribute to better knowledge of the root causes of contemporary military strategy, its specifics and evolution, which can be utilized by policy makers and military planners mainly in the West.

Research questions & Hypotheses

What are the main reasons for the transformation of the RF military strategy during the first fifteen years of the 21st century? Is the RF contemporary military strategy emanating from valid legal documents, thus considered somewhat predictable; or is it rather quirky, shrouded in a notion of a so-called “Russian world” based on ideology of revanchist nationalism? What factors wield influence on changes made in the RF military strategy? What short-term development of the RF strategic goals is the most probable?

As said earlier, the RF is perceived as a revanchist state which is disgruntled with the current status-quo. Its increasing politico-military assertiveness may not be result of outer incentives from the West, as Russian strategic elites and some realists might argue. On the contrary, Russian strategic environment may be affected by ideological background built on nationalistic identity. In other words, it could be influenced by revanchist ideology which advocates supremacy of the RF in the so-called “Russian world”, patronage of all Russians living within this indistinct area, defined in opposition to the antagonistic West. The significance of this nationalistic ideology will be analyzed and assessed with regard to military strategy and vital strategic choices. Derived from the above-mentioned research questions, there are several hypotheses below:

- 1) Russian military strategy went through significant changes due to formative armed conflicts during late 1990s and in the last fifteen years.
- 2) Some key Russian strategic decisions differ from valid strategic documents. Magnitude of difference indicates predictability of strategy and its goals.
- 3) Increasing politico-military assertiveness has been caused by following factors: military buildup, enabled by continuously growing defense budget; and revanchist political goals, fuelled by nationalistic ideology.

4) Future development of the causes and goals of the RF military strategy rests upon domestic politics and prospects of its changeability.

Methodology & Theory

Research design is conceived as a qualitative longitudinal single-case study. Qualitative data is closely examined with a method of process-tracing. The process of cardinal strategic decisions taken during specified time according to either declared strategic documents or as a product of ideology based on revanchist nationalism (e.g. notion of the so-called “Russian world”). The method of process-tracing is understood as follows:

“[P]rocess tracing is a useful tool for testing theories. Researchers must examine a number of histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other similar sources pertaining to their specific case in order to determine whether a proposed theoretical hypothesis is evident in the sequence of a case (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 6). Looking at these sources in terms of the sequence and structure of events can serve as evidence that a given stimulus caused a certain response in a case. Process tracing aims to ascertain the causal process linking an independent variable(s) to the outcome of a dependent variable, particularly in small-n studies. This method is particularly useful for looking at deviant cases and determining the specific factors that lead them to diverge from expected trends. While process tracing may not be able to exclude all but one theory in a given case, it can narrow the range of possible explanations and can disprove claims that a single variable is necessary or sufficient to produce an outcome.”¹⁵⁶

The observed process is taking place within relatively unchanged strategic culture. Level of importance of each of the two aspects (strategic documents, ideology) is observed with outcomes of finally taken strategic decisions. Although both can be somewhat interrelated, assessment of strategic documents’ importance is austere. If there’s a clear causal link of certain strategic choice to a written document (e.g. principle of defense of territorial integrity and the First Chechen War), then applied military strategy is based on this particular document and hence highly predictable. If there’s not a causal link to any strategic documents, then it must be proved that decision taken by strategic elites is derived from different authority which outweighed the power of valid strategic documents. If the power of such authority is related to nationalistic ideology, then the strategic behavior may tend to

¹⁵⁶ Available from: <http://govthesis.site.wesleyan.edu/research/methods-and-analysis/analyzing-qualitative-data/process-tracing/>

become highly unpredictable, thereby posing threat to other countries in the region (Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Baltics etc.) or the West in general.

Theoretical starting-point for research of surveyed social reality emanates from theory of strategic culture formulated by Alastair Iain Johnston in his article *Thinking about Strategic Culture*. “Question whether declared and operational doctrines are different,”¹⁵⁷ formulated by Johnston, is essential for the analysis of a selected case study. Furthermore, Johnston’s definition of strategic culture is used:

“Strategic culture is an integrated ”system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious.”¹⁵⁸

Although Johnston’s work is highly relevant for the theoretical background, writings of Colin S. Gray possess valuable insight applicable for research done on matters of Russian military strategy. Gray’s elaboration of strategic dimensions into three clusters, formulated in his article *Strategic culture as a context: the first generation of theory strikes back*, offers well suited methodological and theoretical instrument for analysis of the matter. Gray’s three clusters, even without use of all of their numerous subcategories, facilitate analysis of strategic culture, providing “context for understanding, rather than explanatory causality for behavior.”¹⁵⁹ The use of Johnston’s and Gray’s concepts provide sufficient framework for analysis of the strategic culture. This background knowledge is essential for the comprehensive understanding of the RF military strategy and its context.

Variables & Operationalization

Strategic environment of the RF is divided into three distinct layers: strategic culture, strategic documents, and strategic choices. These three layers are at the same time independent variables exerting influence on resulting dependent variable: military strategy. In other words, the thesis hypothesizes that the overall military strategy of the RF has been affected by all these three layers, altogether creating the whole strategic environment.

Firstly, strategic culture must be delineated in order to prove its relative stability during studied period of time. By utilizing Johnston’s theoretical posture and Gray’s concept of clusters, ideational framework for the other two layers is provided. Secondly, relevant

¹⁵⁷ JOHNSTON: *Thinking about Strategic Culture*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 46.

¹⁵⁹ GRAY: *Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back*, p. 1.

strategic documents are assessed with regard to the key strategic choices made during their period of validity. Thirdly, key strategic choices are analyzed with regard to supposed ideological motivation of the decisions taken by strategic elites. Lastly, overall assessment of the causes of development of the RF military strategy is provided, including prediction for the next five years (until 2020).

If there is a clear causal link to be found between certain strategic choice and valid strategic document, then it is argued that RF military strategy is more predictable, unequivocal, thereby less challenging for other actors. If there is no such link to be found, then it is argued that the RF military strategy tends to be the opposite. The more the political goals derived from nationalistic ideology are transferred to the military strategy, the bigger will be the threat to other actors in the close vicinity and to the West.

Thesis outline

Introduction

1. Delimitation of military strategy

1.1 Current state of research

1.2 Research design & methodology

2. Strategic turmoil of the 1990s

2.1 Lasting legacy of the USSR

2.1 Lessons learned from the First Chechen War

3. Strategic development in early 21st century

3.1 From the Second Chechen War to the Russo-Georgian War (2000–2008)

3.2 From the Russo-Georgian War to the War in Ukraine (2008–2013)

4. The War in Ukraine and beyond (2013–2020)

4.1 Current military strategy of the Russian Federation

4.2 Forecast of likely development until 2020

Conclusions& Recommendations

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