

**National Defence University**

Department of Warfare

Series 2: Research Reports No. 11

# Russian Concept of Deterrence in Contemporary and Classic Perspective

Pentti Forsström (ed.)

A dark blue silhouette of a city skyline, featuring several prominent buildings and spires, set against a white background. The skyline is positioned above the text 'Finnish National Defence University'.

Finnish National Defence University

**Russia Seminar 2021**

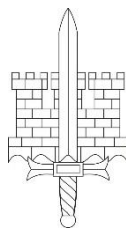
A red silhouette of a map, likely representing the Baltic region, positioned below the text 'Russia Seminar 2021'.

MAANPUOLUSTUSKORKEAKOULU  
SOTATAIDON LAITOS  
JULKAISUSARJA 2: TUTKIMUSSELOSTEITA NRO 11

NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF WARFARE  
SERIES 2: RESEARCH REPORTS NO. 11

# **RUSSIAN CONCEPT OF DETERRENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AND CLASSIC PERSPECTIVE**

PENTTI FORSSTRÖM (ed.)



NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF WARFARE  
HELSINKI 2021

Pentti Forsström (ed.): *Russian concept of deterrence in contemporary and classic perspective*  
Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu  
Sotataidon laitos  
Julkaisusarja 2: Tutkimusselosteita nro 11  
National Defence University  
Department of Warfare  
Series 2: Research Reports No. 11

**Editor:**

Pentti Forsström

**Writers:**

Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, Pentti Forsström, Stephan De Spiegeleire et al, Gudrun Persson, Rod Thornton (with Marina Miron), Lester W. Grau, Anya Fink and Daivis Petraitis

Recent publications in PDF format: <http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/73990>

Cover image: FNDU

Pictures and illustrations: Authors

© FNDU & Authors

**ISBN 978-951-25-3249-0 (pbk.)**

**ISBN 978-951-25-3250-6 (pdf)**

**ISSN 2343-5275 (print)**

**ISSN 2343-5283 (web)**

**Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu – Sotataidon laitos**

**National Defence University – Department of Warfare**



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 International License. To view a copy of the CC BY-NC 4.0 license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.en>

PunaMusta Oy  
Joensuu 2021  
Finland



# CONTENTS

<i>Pentti Forsström</i>	
1. INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN DETERRENCE – PREVENTING OR PREPARING FOR WAR .....	1
<i>Kristin Ven Bruusgaard</i>	
2. RUSSIAN STRATEGIC DETERRENCE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY .....	11
<i>Pentti Forsström</i>	
3. ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUSSIAN CONCEPT OF DETERRENCE	21
<i>Stephan De Spiegeleire</i>	
4. ON METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RESEARCH OF DETERRENCE .....	31
<i>Gudrun Persson</i>	
5. RUSSIAN VIEWS ON FUTURE WAR – THE LEGACY OF A. E. SNESAREV ....	37
<i>Rod Thornton and Marina Miron</i>	
6. THE ROLE OF “AKTIVNOST” TODAY IN RUSSIAN MILITARY-STRATEGIC THINKING AND THE CRUCIAL TARGET OF THE “PROTEST POTENTIAL OF THE POPULATION” .....	45
<i>Lester W. Grau</i>	
7. CONTINUITIES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT, MILITARY REFORM, MILITARY STRATEGY AND ALEKSANDR A. SVETCHIN.....	63
<i>Anya Fink</i>	
8. RUSSIAN MILITARY-ANALYTICAL THINKING ON “DAMAGE” .....	77
<i>Edward Geist</i>	
9. BEFORE SDERZHIVANIE: SOVIET NUCLEAR STRATEGY AND ITS LEGACY.....	87
<i>Dāvis Petraitis</i>	
10. CENTRALIZED MILITARY APPROACH (RUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF) AS A RECENT MILITARY PHILOSOPHY.....	95
<i>Stephan De Spiegeleire</i>	
11. DISSECTING RUSSIAN DELIBERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS OF DETERRENCE .....	105
<i>Michael Kofman</i>	
12. THE OGARGOV PERIOD: SOVIET ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN VIEWS ON DETERRENCE .....	113
<i>Clint Reach</i>	
13. RUSSIAN VIEWS ON COFM (ASSESSED CORRELATION OF FORCES AND MEANS) .....	117
CONTRIBUTORS .....	123



# 1

## INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN DETERRENCE – PREVENTING OR PREPARING FOR WAR

Pentti Forsström

This publication consists primarily of articles presented in the annual Russia Seminar 2021 organised by the Department of warfare of the Finnish National Defence University (FNDU). The focus of the seminar was on the concept of "deterrence" - one of two main functions of the Russian military power while the other being the use of military power. The objective of deterrence is to influence to consciousness of the adversary. Furthermore, the main emphasis was on the military aspects and prerequisites of preventing a war.<sup>1</sup>

In this introductory chapter I will briefly discuss the Russian concept of preventing war aimed at serving as the context for deterrence. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of military activity with the objective to define the position of deterrence in it. Then I will discuss the military strategy and the and the role of deterrence as one of its functions. In the end of this chapter, I will briefly introduce the structure of this report.

One has to notice that there are other considerable elements of deterrence which are not core subjects of the Russian Ministry of Defence. The goals for this activity are of often mentioned as follows: 1) to acquire additional forces or friendly partners (states), 2) to reduce the military threats or potential threats by a variety of means (including governmental agreements or cooperation), 3) to reduce the possibilities of the potential aggressor by different means such as sanctions and, 4) to exercise non-proliferation.<sup>2</sup> These objectives are directly connected to the military-political goal of creating favourable conditions in case of a potential conflict. These other aspects and policies aimed at preventing a war remain a subject of further studies.

The prevention of war and military conflict by military means has been a subject of public debate for more than 15 years despite being topical even in the past. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union till the beginning of 2000s, Russia regarded its arsenal of strategic nuclear weapons as a sufficient instrument of war and conflict prevention. It became an indisputable basis of preventing a major war or conflict because the anticipated military collision between the Soviet Union (Warsaw Pact) and the United States (NATO) did not occur<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive concept of conflict prevention as a doctrinal document or plan does not necessarily exist in the Russian state administration.

<sup>2</sup> In details: Лутовинов В.И. (2009): Развитие и использование невоенных мер для укрепления военной безопасности Российской Федерации. Военная мысль № 5, 2009, р. 2–12. Lutovinov uses as basis for classification of non-military means the fact that in these cases no military or armed power is used. Lutovinov though emphasizes that the non-military means are not resultative unless supported by military power.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Буренок В.М., Ачасов О.Б. (2007): Неядерное сдерживание. Военная мысль № 12, 2007, р. 12.

As early as in 1992, the Defence minister Pavel Gratchov stated as a doctrinal view that no country would be regarded as an enemy but rather as a partner if the country's policies are aimed at conflict prevention. Although the Russian approach was to prevent wars and conflicts, there were still sources for military threats which caused two emergent challenges to be solved: Firstly, how to prevent a war and, secondly, how to maintain readiness in order to repel an aggressor.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Gratchov referred only to strategic nuclear weapons being the most important preemptive factor for preventing a war with nuclear weapons or a large-scale conventional war.<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of the aforementioned debate meant essentially the birth of the field of research in question.<sup>6</sup> For example, Russia's nuclear potential did not prevent the internal conflict in the Northern Caucasus during the late 1990s, nor did it prevent the use of force in the Balkans and in the Middle East<sup>7</sup>. Also, the lack of comprehensive concept of war prevention had been a matter of concern among the Russian scientific community for a long period of time<sup>8</sup>. This will be discussed in details later on.

There were a few options presented to solve the challenge of preventing a war. For example, the concepts of first and limited strike were introduced both as rapid and rather technical solutions to guarantee Russia's security in a potential conflict. The first strike option was meant to be applied in the early stages of the conflict, while the option of limited strike was planned to be used within a theatre of operations<sup>9</sup>.

The chief of the main operational directorate of the Armed forces' General Staff, Lieutenant-General A.S. Rukchin wrote in 2000 about the change in the role and status of nuclear weapons. The reason for this according to Rukchin is the fact that concerning nuclear strategy, there is an ongoing transition towards *"limited use of non-strategic nuclear weapons and their role is proportionally strengthening in a situation where the amount of nuclear weapon is reducing"*. Furthermore, concerning the objective of the deterrence Rukchin claimed that *"the adversary must be convinced not only that Russia has sufficient nuclear*

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.12. Gratchov used the indefinite notion of "strategic forces". See also: Буренок В.М., Ачасов О.Б. (2007): Неядерное сдерживание. Военная мысль № 12, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpts of Gratchov's speech «Новая военная политика России» in the thinktank Royal United Services Institute in July 1992. Вестник военной информации, 1.8.1992.

<sup>6</sup> Even in 2003 the president of the Academy of the Military Sciences, Army General Mahmut Garejev spoke about preventing threats, limitation and neutralization of them and didn't use the terms deterrence or strategic deterrence. Махмут Гареев (2003): Угрозы и войны XXI века. Красная звезда 14.2.2003.

<sup>7</sup> According to Andrei Kokochin "the nuclear deterrence is not a panacea to safeguard the national security, one cannot manage or neutralize the whole spectrum of Russia's military-political threats". "The nuclear capabilities can not compensate the economic or political weakness of Russia". Кокошин А.А. (1999): Ядерное сдерживание и национальная безопасность России. Мировая экономика и международные отношения № 7, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Останков В.И. (2005): Геополитические проблемы и возможности их решения в контексте обеспечения безопасности России. Военная мысль № 1/2005, p. 7. See also Белозёров В.К. (2005): Превентивная политика и военная сила. Военно-промышленный курьер № 49 (116) за 28 декабря 2005 года. Address: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/2885> (accessed 29.7.2016). Even 4 years after this the conceptual basis was called for. See: Тагиров, Р.Г., Печатнов Ю.А., Буренок В.М. (2009): К вопросу об определении уровней последствий при решении задачи силового стратегического сдерживания. Вестник Академии военных наук № 1/2009. According to Tagirov et al. the theory of deterrence was developed later than the actual weapons. The same applies to the new conventional PGM and weaponsystems with which the deterrence task can be fulfilled, but the theoretical principles of use need further elaboration and definition.

<sup>9</sup> Крейдин С.В. (2000): Проблемы ядерного сдерживания: боевая устойчивость ядерного потенциала. Военная мысль № 4, 2000, p. 73.

*potential and the determination to use it if the national interests are threatened, but also that the use will be effective”.*<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, Army general Valery Manilov expressed in 2003 an option for large-scale war preparations where the capabilities are based on quantitative parity. Alternatively, his other option was to concentrate on conflict prevention and to maintain the required minimum and sufficient deterrence potential while leaning on qualitative parity. The latter alternative was feasible only if the nuclear arsenal will be renewed and reinforced with conventional forces’ capabilities to prevent an aggression.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of research results and official decisions was accompanied by the unbalanced use on the notion of ”deterrence”.<sup>12</sup> The notion of ”prevention of war and a conflict” was often equated to ”nuclear deterrence” without differentiating between them. Also, the same unbalanced use of the concept applied to the notions ”strategic deterrence” and ”nuclear deterrence” which were regarded as having an equal meaning. This disfunction in the application of terminology has been significantly reducing since 2010<sup>13</sup>.

### **Deterrence as a part of military activity**

One result of the terminological development is the introduction of the term “military activity” as the hypernym, which can be interpreted as an enlarged version of “voynnoe delo”.<sup>14</sup> The concept of military activity means a specific action to 1) produce and develop equipment for armed fight and state’s military might (power) and 2) to be used when needed in order to achieve particular national objectives or objectives of a certain social group. Military activity as an action is conducted by individuals which belong either functionally or organisationally to states’ militarized organisation.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, military activity is the hypernym for all the subactivities of a military organisation both in peace time and during the times of war. It seems that the concept has been specifically introduced in order to emphasize the total activity of the militarized organisation and not only the range of activities of the armed forces.

Military activity as a system contains three elements: 1) the source (subject), 2) the means of activity and 3) the object (target). The structure of the system as a whole contains two opposite parties, the internal structures of which are identical and symmetric and consist of the source and means of the opposing party as the object of the activity. Hence, the existence of military power means that there is also an opponent

---

<sup>10</sup> Рукшин А.С. (2000): Ядерное сдерживание: совершенствование системы управления ядерными силами. Военная мысль № 6, 2000, р. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Манилов В.Л. (2003): Вектор военной политики. Красная звезда 27.6.2003.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2000 it was common view that the nuclear deterrence was in a ”conceptual vacuum”. Крейдлин С.В. (2000): Проблемы ядерного сдерживания: боевая устойчивость ядерного потенциала. Военная мысль № 4, 2000, р. 71.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of non-nuclear deterrence (неядерное сдерживание) was officially introduced for the first time in the military doctrine of 2014. See: Военная доктрина РФ. Российская газета - Федеральный выпуск № 6570 (298). (<http://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>) . See also: Палагаев В.И., Алферов В.В. (2015): О неядерном сдерживании, его роли и месте в системе стратегического сдерживания. Военная мысль № 7, 2015.

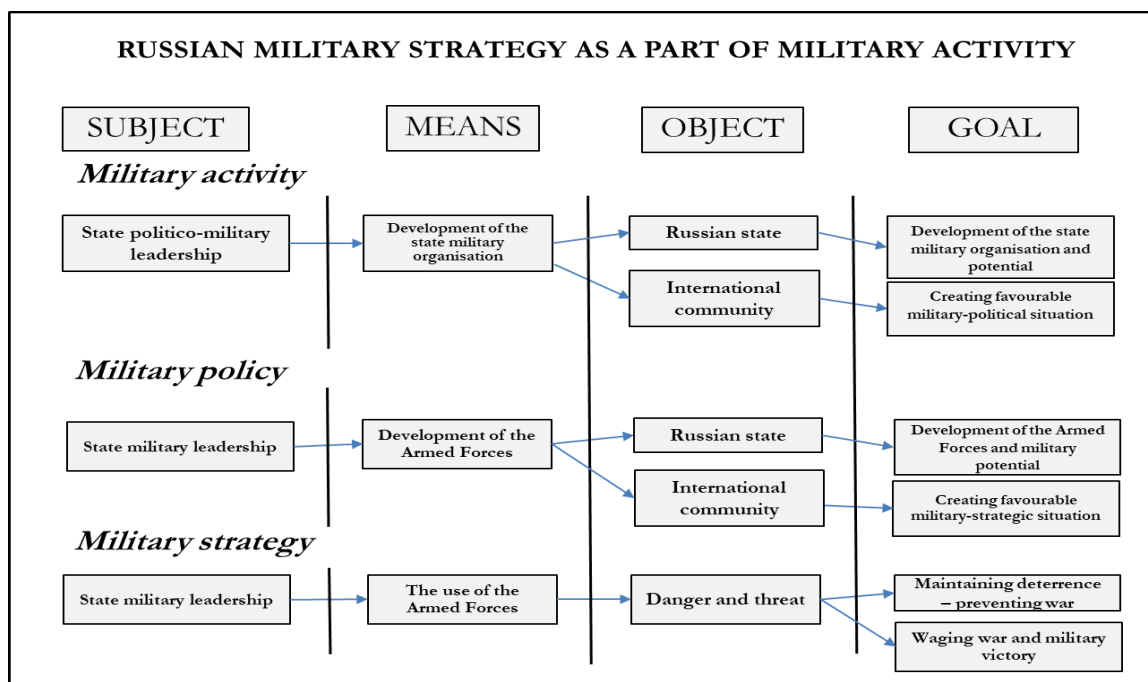
<sup>14</sup> [https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details\\_rvsn.htm?id=4325@morfdictionary](https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details_rvsn.htm?id=4325@morfdictionary) (19.11.2021).

<sup>15</sup> Военный энциклопедический словарь, entry: «ВОЕННАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ», <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=4325@morfdictionary> (8.5.2015)



to the other subject of military activity, which can be considered as the “potential adversary”.

The concept of military activity is a considerably extensive concept in terms of time. This aforementioned is explained by the fact that the activity has been functionally changed, because the concept of prevention is added to the military activity. In this respect, the Russian concept of military activity has enlarged from purely theoretical and practical activity of the armed forces to the activity covering also all militarized formations of the so-called power ministries (“siloviki”) alongside with the ministry of defence.<sup>16</sup> The functional transition towards the responsibilities of peacetime, as well as from the war preparations towards prevention, has extended the goal-setting of the states’ military organisation and their respective tasks. The following picture presents the author’s interpretation of the structure of the military activity and the status of the deterrence in it:



**Picture 1:** Author’s interpretation of the status of deterrence as part of the military activity and military strategy.

According to the presented interpretation, the nexus of the Russian military activity is the activity of the high politico-military leadership, which aims to create and develop the states’ military organisation and its potential. The activity is focused on Russia as a state and its elements as well as on the environment surrounding Russia. In terms of Russia’s environment, the goal is to create a favourable military-political situation for Russia.

Military policy can be defined as the activity of the high military leadership which has its focus on Russia as a state and its elements in order to create (develop) military might (power). The Armed Forces as a part of the military policy might also focus on the creation of favourable military-strategic and (partly) military-political situation around Russia’s territorial sphere.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Function of the military strategy – the deterrence

According to the Soviet encyclopedia of 1986, military strategy was defined as “*structural element of the art of war and its’ highest level comprising the preparations of the state and the armed forces to war and the planning and execution of strategic operations and a war. In the field of theory military strategy is researching the character and principles of war, means of its waging, developing theoretical basis for planning, training and executing of strategic operations. As a practical activity military strategy is 1) defining the strategic tasks of the armed forces and instruments and capabilities needed to execute them, 2) consisting of the actions aimed at preparation the armed forces, the theaters of war, the state’s economy, and nation for war, 3) planning the strategic operations, 4) the organisation of the deployment of the armed forces and and their management during a war and 5) conducting intelligence of the war-fighting capabilities of a propable enemy.*”<sup>17</sup>

In terms of the art of war, the definition mentioned above draws a rather clear line between war and peace, as if it would be an “on-off” -situation. However, it would be overtly simplistic and also misleading to discuss about military strategy solely as offensive or defensive forms of action, because the strategy can be both depending on the situation.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the question of military strategy is about means to achieve the objectives.

In the military encyclopedia of 2007, the military strategy was defined as “*a structural element of art of war and it’s highest level, which comprises the theory and practice of military activity, including the prevention of war, the preparation of the state and the nation to war and the preparation of the armed forces to intercept an aggression, and the planning and execution of strategic operations and a war-fighting.*”<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the essence of the military strategy has been substantially changed and extended to peacetime activities. The core tasks of the strategy increased with the task of prevention of war.

Despite of the changes, the basic definition and contents of military strategy have mainly remained unchanged compared to the predecessor<sup>20</sup>. The division of military strategy to theory and practice has prevailed as the two dimensions for military science and thought. In theory, the nucleus is about peace and war, threats, development and structure of the armed forces, development of military technology, and planning of operations and so on. On the other hand, this knowledge has been realised by the conscious activity of a human being. The military and the political-military leaderships’ activity introduces the theoretical results in practice.

A permanent feature of military strategy is that the definition is made through the tasks. In this regard, it is obvious that the tasks of military strategy reflect the political grounds and, moreover, the phase of development of the society. In the Soviet times, policy defined the “truths” which were not subject to research. Therefore, the Soviet

---

<sup>17</sup> Военный энциклопедический словарь, Издание второе, Военное издательство, Москва, 1986, p. 711. The same definition can be found in Золотарев В.А. (под ред.) (2000b): История военной стратегии России. Кучково поле, Полиграфресурсы. Москва.

<sup>18</sup> In historical analysis also “the flexible combination” of defence and offence has been mentioned. See: Золотарев В.А. (под ред.) (2000b): История военной стратегии России. Кучково поле, Полиграфресурсы. Москва, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Военный энциклопедический словарь, Военное издательство, Москва, 2007, s. 699. The wording of the definition is the same as in Черныш А.Я., Лисовой В.М., Попов В.В.: Основы военной науки и военной стратегии. Военная академия Генерального штаба ВС РФ, кафедра стратегии. Москва 2005, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> See: Золотарев В.А. (под ред.): История военной стратегии России. Кучково поле, Полиграфресурсы. Москва 2000. p. 15.

ideology dictated that in the art of war, the focus was put on strategic defence (at least in theory). Also, in terms of acts of war, the emphasis was on defence and counterattack<sup>21</sup>. The research object was undoubtedly a large-scale war<sup>22</sup>.

The Russian definition of military strategy is in this sense more general and more abstract, even though the tasks are more or less the same. In this regard, the definition of military strategy has been reformalised to a more complex and non-specific. The change in particular is in the functional amendment of avoidance and prevention of war. A war is not, therefore, seen as an inevitable reality as it was in the Soviet times.

This described change reflects the development of the political basis and, in fact, that Russian policy is not based on an ideology as it was during the Soviet times. In addition, the change in the military strategy also reflects a change in endeavour to achieve political goals which are not feasible solely with military preparations or other similar means. Hence, by applying the more developed strategy, the Russian military activity is more abstract and proportionately plays a lesser role compared to the Soviet times.

The essence of the Soviet art of war was that in an event of a probable war, the entirety of forms, means, and resources would be used and consumed. The development of the nuclear weapon led ultimately to the idea that in a war with nuclear weapons, there will not be winners. Nuclear weapon was regarded as a type of a weapon that if used in a conflict, a probable counter-reaction (retaliatory strike) would occur. Hence, due to the fear of a retaliatory strike and from the cost-efficiency point of view, more focus was placed on nuclear deterrence<sup>23</sup>. This principle is in force also today, including the principle of using all resources and means to maintain the Russian security as it is declared in the military doctrines.

The Russian definition of military strategy brings the war preparations during the peacetime and also the prevention of war. This refers to the fact that war is not inevitable and necessary phase in achieving the political goals as it used to be in the Soviet times.

This is a fundamental change in the core of military strategy as there is a possibility of maintaining the peace and avoiding the war itself. On the other hand, this means to some extent that in the conflict prevention, activities during peacetime also other than military ones must be emphasized. The change also created a contradiction inside the military policy. The ultimate goal for military policy and for military activity is to maintain the military security through military might (power). However, for this end, the development and augmentation of military power and its capabilities is needed without neglecting the fact that military power is used in order to prevent a war. Therefore, the development of military power should consider the fact that it is used in a contrary manner to the original purpose<sup>24</sup>. This can be interpreted that the functions of military power has increased and also the scope of purpose (use) has widened.

---

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=14383@morfDictionary> (27.4.2015).

<sup>22</sup> The speech of Army General Yuri Baluyevsky in *Красная звезда* 11.12.2007.

<sup>23</sup> About the definition of "сдерживание", see *Толковый словарь Ефремовой*. Т. Ф. Ефремова. 2000, Москва.

<sup>24</sup> That is, the military power should form a deterrence which prevents the adversary to use military force.

Military strategy is respectively the activity of the high military command to impose an impact with the use of military power against the threats and dangers facing Russia. This impact can be achieved by using deterrence, where the consideration is in the prevention of threats and dangers. The other form of impact is the use of military power where the focus is on neutralizing the emergent threat and restoring the conditions into a state where the Russian security is not threatened.

The change in the content of military art reflects the fact that in the military science the emphasis was transferred towards the direction of preventive measures. In Russian military science, the prevention of war is defined as “*a system of political, juridical, economic, military, and other actions to solve objective contradictions (conflicts) and to timely neutralize subjective factors, before these can turn into reasons for war or armed conflict*”<sup>25</sup>. On the highest level in the conceptual hierarchy of the prevention of war is the strategic deterrence to which the military-political deterrence and the deterrent by other forms of political activity are subordinated.

The prevention of war is multidimensional by its nature and a hypernym in the hierarchy of objectives. To achieve these objectives, the means applied include not only the military actions but also many other forms of international interaction. The prevention is an objective for military actions based on the military might (power) and for other activities of non-military nature. Russia's ultimate goal is national security, which is reflected also from the definition. This expresses the system-theoretic and holistic approach to national security, requiring active measures in different spheres of politics to advance the security.

From the very beginning, the activity is based on military activity and especially on the military might (power). In this regard, the other side of the coin is that the activity aimed at conflict prevention is simultaneously preparations for war or at least creating favourable conditions for Russia. This is emphasized by the fact that the red line between peace and war is gradually fading away.

### **The structure of this report**

The of this report includes almost all presentations presented in the third Russia Seminar 2021 held on 26 January and 2 February 2021. The purpose of the seminar was to increase the discussion on Russia's military and Security policy. The topic of the seminar was Russia's concept of deterrence (po sderzhivaniye), which has undergone changes within the past years. Due to the nature of Russian military thought, there are some continuities and principles stemming from the history.

In the seminar, the Russian concept of deterrence was discussed not only from the conceptual point of view but also methodologically while not forgetting the historical perspective. All the presentations given and discussions during the panels can be found on the National Defence University's Youtube-channel<sup>26</sup>. The panel discussions are mainly transcribed after each presentation.

---

<sup>25</sup> Военная энциклопедия, Том 6, Воениздат, Москва, 2002, p. 577. See also <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=9311@morfdictionary>. Also: Серебряников В.В. (2008): Предотвращение войн: теория и практика. Военная мысль № 12/2008, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PURKPOeskBk>

The writers of the articles have extensive knowledge and experience in the field of research on Russia's political and military sphere. What shall be mentioned is that the compilation of articles is not comprehensive but provides with a solid starting point for studying the emergence, structural development, and application of contemporary concept of deterrence. In this regard, the publication and articles offer profound knowledge to interpret and understand Russian policy and especially the military activity in the sphere of deterrence.

The biographies of the writers are presented in the end of this publication.

In the article "*Russian strategic deterrence and European security*" by **Kristin ven Bruusgard** analyzes the emergence of the concept of deterrence and its development in Russian context especially after the Cold War. Ven Bruusgard answers to the question of what is strategic deterrence concept today? Secondly, she elaborates the application of strategy during peacetime, in a tense international situation and during conflict. Ven Bruusgard in the end of her article brings up an important argument: "*Russia's range of tools to influence.... is growing and it is developing an advanced concept.... for employing such tools...*". This argument is a real challenge for further Russia research in terms of a comprehensive approach.

In the article "*On the development of the Russian concept of deterrence*", **Pentti Forsström** examines the structural change of the concept of deterrence. He argues that strategic deterrence is at least considered as a functional entity – a multifunctional set of tools - which is orchestrated by the Russian politico-military leadership. New military technologies and capabilities will eventually change the concept and contents of deterrence.

In the article "*Russian views on future war – the legacy of A.E. Snerev*" by **Gudrun Persson** answers to the question if Snerev's thoughts on war and the development of a military doctrine can provide with answers on today's development of Russian military strategy? Persson approaches the question by examining Snerev's main thoughts on war, strategy and military doctrine while assessing his position in the current military theoretical debate.

In the article "*The role of "Aktivnost" today in Russian military strategic thinking and the crucial target of the protest potential of the population*" by **Rod Thornton and (Marina Miron)** consider how the Soviet principle of *aktivnost'* is being employed today by the Russian military as it attempts to focus both on the societal structures and on the military efficacy of certain of its Western state adversaries. Pressure is being constantly applied, mostly through the application of sub-threshold warfare activities. The article chapter highlights the Russian focus on one particular target of *aktivnost'* – the 'protest potential of the population' within Western states.

In the article "*Continuities of Russian military thought, military reform, military strategy and A.A. Svetchin*", **Lester W. Grau** examines the question of the imposition of a new system in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the impact of new types of weapons. According to Grau, the Russian state is in the need of a new strategic doctrine to determine their supporting operational art. In this respect, Svetchin's works are also examined by the Russian military leadership. However the issues of strategic defence and operational art in 6<sup>th</sup> generation warfare are not easy to be answered.

In the article “*Russian military-analytical thinking on damage*”, **Anya Fink** presents a deep analysis of the relevant terminology. Afterwards, Fink examines the questions of the evolution of “unacceptable damage” and the emergence of “deterrent damage”. The article then continues by presenting Russian military-analytical debates about the evolution of damage notions. In her article, Fink argues that the work in Russia continues to extend knowledge on the role of non-military means and development of information warfare concepts.

In the article “*Centralized military approach (Russian General Staff) as a recent military philosophy*”, **Daivis Petraitis** studies the question of the Prussian General staff philosophy, principles, and its development in the Russian military. He also gives knowledge of the General staff service and visions on the military and state governing using the principles of military (General Staff).



## 2

### RUSSIAN STRATEGIC DETERRENCE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Kristin Ven Bruusgaard

Russia has developed a dynamic and unique concept of “strategic deterrence” in the post-Cold War era. It builds on Soviet concepts of deterrence but also accounts for modern threats and the updated set of tools that the Russian state has available to influence a potential adversary. This paper discusses the emergence of this Russian concept of strategic deterrence and reflects on Russian theoretical debates regarding the application of strategic deterrent tools across peacetime, crisis and war. Subsequently, it discusses whether and how dynamic the concept is through examining some examples of recent Russian behavior. It also discusses the implications of the Russian deterrence concept for contemporary peacetime relations and for wartime dynamics in Europe.

#### Deterrence in the Russian context

The concept of deterrence is about influencing the intentions of the adversary. Since the dawn of nuclear weapons, deterrence has become very tightly associated with nuclear deterrence. Theories and deliberations about deterrent strategy, as we know it, heavily influenced by Western (US) strategists who debated the implications of the nuclear revolution on state security policy – in the 1950s, 60s, 70s onwards.<sup>1</sup>

In the Russian context – the term deterrence was employed as an organizing principle for defense policy only after the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Before this, the deterrent term (*sderzhivaniye*) was associated primarily with describing Western policy. The Soviet term that could be compared to the Western “deterrence” term would be war prevention. The concept of war prevention entailed a clear distribution of labor, where the Soviet political leadership was responsible for creating the political conditions to prevent war, and where the Soviet military leadership was responsible for creating the optimal conditions for prevailing in war if deterrence failed.<sup>3</sup> This was a different notion than with Western deterrence policy, essentially a military policy aimed at achieving both the political and military goal of deterring or preventing wars.

But from 1993 onwards, Russian strategists started adapting the term deterrence in their deliberations on the provision of state security for the new Russian state. For the first time, the 1993 main provisions of the Military doctrine of the Russian

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "The Stickiness of Strategy: From Soviet to Russian Nuclear Doctrine," in *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War*, ed. Fritz Bartles Nuno Monteiro ((Forthcoming): Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> David Holloway, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 33.



Federation used the term deterrence to describe the main purpose of Russian nuclear weapons policy: “to eliminate the danger of war by deterring aggression”.<sup>4</sup>

The first Gulf War demonstrated the start of Revolution in Military Affairs that Soviet strategists had theorized about since the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this technological progress of Western militaries Russian military planners started debating the implications of conventional precision strike for their nuclear retaliatory capability.<sup>6</sup> They became concerned that conventional counter-force capabilities could, with time, constitute a significant threat to Russian deterrent potential. From this point onwards, Russia started explicitly promising nuclear retaliation in the face of conventional aggression; that is, nuclear first use.

This was the starting point for an intense and sustained debate in Russian military and security policy circles across several decades about the requirements of deterrence. It would entail debates on what capabilities would be necessary to influence the calculations of an adversary and debates about what threats could be deterred by way of such capabilities.

By the 1990s, Russian strategists deemed Russian conventional forces as insufficient to influence the conventional intentions of an adversary. This concern intensified significantly because of the 1999 Kosovo bombing. That NATO operation demonstrated two things to the Russian leadership. First, that Western conventional precision strike munitions and their means of delivery were improving fast, and that the Russians were severely lagging. Second, that NATO was willing to make use of this strategic tool, without a UNSC mandate, to unseat regimes.<sup>7</sup> This political development was perhaps as concerning in Moscow as the military-technological one. The idea that the NATO Alliance would one day wake up and think about a conventional bombing assault on Moscow produced a significant strategic problem for the Russians.

Russian military planners never lived through the period of rosy relations in the post-Cold War period that some Western countries entertained. In the West, deterrence and nuclear deterrence hit the backburner and security policy debates were fully reoriented toward counterinsurgency and capacity building. The Russians were dealing with this as well – but the strategic challenge of deterring a conventionally superior adversary never receded from the minds of the Russian General Staff. In military periodicals, debates on the requirements of deterrence have persisted across the entire post-Cold War period.

From around 2005 onwards, we see a gradual emergence of a more complex strategic deterrence concept that includes also non-nuclear deterrence.<sup>8</sup> Many Russian theorists and leaders were uncomfortable with an increased emphasis on early nuclear use in conflict. Nuclear threats were not credible to deter the increasingly complex and

---

<sup>4</sup> "Osnovnye položeniya voennoy doktriny Rossiiskoy Federatsii," *Krasnaia Zvezda* 19 November (1993).

<sup>5</sup> Roger N. McDermott & Tor Bukkvoll, "Tools of Future Wars - Russia is Entering the Precision-Strike Regime," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>6</sup> A. G. Savelyev, *Političeskie i voenno-strategičeskie aspekty dogovor SNV-1 i SNV-2* (Moskva: Rossiiskaya Akademiya Nauk Institut Mirovoi Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Alexei G. Arbatov, *The transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (2000).

<sup>8</sup> ""Strategičeskoye sderzhivanie" - Novaya koncepsiya voennoi bezopasnosti Rossii," *Regnum* 2008, <http://regnum.ru/news/polit/1065985.html>.

non-conventional threats Russia could be facing such as for example the threat of color revolution or smaller scale conventional aggression.<sup>9</sup> Additional capabilities would be needed to credibly deter a broader range of threats, including conventional, or non-nuclear deterrent tools.

In terms of official communication, the “strategic deterrence” concept first appeared in the 2010 military doctrine. It specified that also conventional weapons could serve the purpose of strategic deterrence. As Russia since 2010 has expanded the tools and capabilities that could serve to influence a potential adversary, strategic deterrence has become an organizing principle for state defense policy, also beyond the nuclear realm.<sup>10</sup> It now serves as a useful tool to make sense of how Russia makes use of non-nuclear and non-military tools of influence against potential military adversaries.

### **What is the “Russian strategic deterrence” concept today?**

Today, Strategic Deterrence is defined, in the Russian official military encyclopedia, available on the Russian MoD website, as

*A system of forceful and non-forceful measures carried out in a consistent way by one state to restrain another state from any possible coercive actions that would inflict strategic damage on the (first) state. Strategic deterrence should be carried out continuously, in both peacetime and war, and not only for preventing coercive actions, but also for keeping the target state contained and for preventing the escalation (de-escalation) of military conflict.<sup>11</sup>*

In other words, this is a system of measures, military, and non-military, that deter, restrain, and influence potential adversaries – across the conflict continuum – from peacetime, through periods of increased tension, and to war.

This Russian term means something different from what Western observers traditionally mean when they use the word deterrence. Western observers tend to use the term to describe the prevention or avoidance of conflict – it works until it fails, and conflict breaks out. Russian theorists mean this as well as the application of military force or use of other forceful measures – to influence conflict or war outcomes. Western analysts use the term intra-war deterrence or restoration of deterrence to talk about the prevention of nuclear escalation. Russian analysts, in particular military analysts, talk about employing nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence.

Today, the Russian strategic deterrence concept involves the range of capabilities that the Russian state has at its disposal to influence how adversaries think of the costs associated with a conflict with Russia. It includes, inter alia,

A) Nuclear capabilities – as a backbone of any credible deterrent.

---

<sup>9</sup> M.A. Gareev, "Kakoy byt' voyennoy doktrine Rossii," *Krasnaya Zvezda* No 12, 26 January (2007). V. V. Matvichuk, A. L. Khryapin, "Sistema Strategicheskogo Sderzhivaniya v Novikh Usloviyakh," *Voyennaya Mysl'* No.1 January (2010); Y. S. Sirotinin, "Sderzhivanie agressii v kontekste novoy Voyennoy Doktrine RF," *Voennaia Mysl'* 5 (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Russian Strategic Deterrence," *Survival* 58, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>11</sup> "Voенно-Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'," //encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/list.htm entry on “strategicheskoye sderzhivaniye”

- B) Conventional capabilities such as precision strike, air/missile defense capabilities.
- C) Non-conventional capabilities such as cyber capabilities, the range of tools of the Russian concept of information confrontation, and novel and emerging technologies.

The range of other tools available to the Russian state and that can serve to influence its environment, including diplomatic, economic, informational, ideological, and scientific tools.

The Russian strategic deterrence concept has now evolved to capitalize on the relationship between these different types of capabilities. Most thoroughly theorized is perhaps the relationship between nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence,<sup>12</sup> where one foundational idea is that the credibility of nuclear deterrence increases with the expansion conventional deterrent capabilities. In turn, those expanded options for dealing with the range of crises in turn rest on a fundament or basis of nuclear deterrence, without which there would be no deterrent effect.<sup>13</sup> These in turn make more credible the threat to ultimately use nuclear weapons in crises or conflict that are so severe that they threaten the very existence of the state.

### **Russian strategic deterrence in peacetime**

In peacetime, the official purpose of strategic deterrent action is to prevent aggression and prevent threats against the peace, as well as to prevent threats against the vital interests of Russia. In this context, we can talk about different but also overlapping tasks of Russian capabilities: nuclear weapons, conventional weapons and non-conventional capabilities that are also part of this non-deterrent capability fold.

Nuclear weapons deter nuclear aggression against Russia, also in peacetime. Several of the new strategic capabilities Russia is pursuing is with the explicit purpose of ensuring Russian secure strike capability. Examples are the *Avangard*, the *Status-6* and the *Burevestnik*. These capabilities all contribute to a Russian capacity to survive any potential first strike and overcome any defensive hurdle that may stand in the way of effecting a retaliatory strike.

Russian nuclear weapons also serve to deter large-scale conventional aggression. Russia still believes it could be vulnerable to the superior conventional technology of an adversary and so still promises nuclear first use in the event of such large-scale aggression that threatens the existence of the state.<sup>14</sup>

Non-nuclear deterrent means, including conventional military capabilities, also influence the potential adversary, according to Russian theorists. They demonstrate the potential costs of smaller-scale conventional aggression or non-conventional aggression against Russia. Russia uses a range means for conveying this, including

---

<sup>12</sup> A. A. Kokoshin, *O sisteme neyadernogo (predyadenogo) sderzhivaniya v oboronnoy politike Rossii* (Moscow: Isdatelstvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> A.A. Protasov A. E. Sterlin, S.V. Kreidin, "Sovremennye transformatsii konseptsii i silovykh instrumentov strategicheskogo sderzhivaniya," *Voennaya Mysl'* 8 (2019).

<sup>14</sup> Kremlin, *Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v oblasti yadernogo sderzhivaniya*, (Moscow: Prezident Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2020).

intelligence-information activities, demonstration of military presence and force, measures to ensure economic security, and the like.

Russia also uses non-coercive means, such as political, diplomatic, legal, economic, ideological, scientific, and informational means, to prevent the development of or escalation of conflict. We see many examples of this Russian use of non-nuclear deterrent capabilities to influence its environment in peacetime.<sup>15</sup> At least, it is fair to say that European countries perception of the costs associated with a conflict with Russia has changed because of Russian actions in recent years.

### **Russian strategic deterrence in periods of increased tension**

In a crisis and given the range of capabilities and tools that Russia makes use of in peacetime to influence potential adversaries, it seems obvious that an increase in hostilities or a crisis will produce an intensification of Russian efforts.

We already see, in peacetime, the active demonstration of Russian military capabilities. The level of military activity we see may be an indication that this is not, for them, a peaceful period, but rather one of increased hostilities. This is a term that Russian theorists use actively about the transition between peace and war. That is not to say that a transition to war is inevitable – but that several of the traits of the current situation may, to Russian observers, resemble that of a crisis or conflict situation.

The Russian deterrence concept demonstrates another important clarification. Peace and war have not become the same in Russian doctrine, as some suggest. It is rather that there is a perceived dynamic to the international environment; where distinguishing the one from the other may become more complicated as all actors make use of a range of tools to influence the adversary. The perceived intensity of conflict impacts the tools used.

In periods of increased tension, Russia makes use of non-conventional capabilities to shape the information environment and to signal coercive capability. Depending on the severity of the crisis, Russia could carry out coercive but perhaps non-military action. We have of course seen examples of a range of cyber-attacks already, including recently against Norway.<sup>16</sup> Depending on the severity of the crisis and Russia's stakes in it, a range of measures could be taken to produce non-kinetic or kinetic effect to produce coercive effect on an adversary.

### **Russian strategic deterrence in war**

This, in turn, could move us across what we would term a threshold to conflict or war. The purpose of Russian strategic deterrence in war is,

---

<sup>15</sup> See for example Martin Kragh & Sebastian Åsberg, "Russia's strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures: the Swedish case," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1273830>.

<sup>16</sup> Etterretningstjenesten/ Norwegian Intelligence Service, "Fokus 2021 Etterretningstjenestens vurdering av aktuelle sikkerhetsutfordringer/ NIS Assessment of current security challenges (in Norwegian)," (2021), <https://www.forsvaret.no/aktuelt-og-presse/publikasjoner/fokus>.

*To prevent escalation, de-escalation, or the rapid termination of conflict on terms acceptable to Russia, before the massive use of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction and the eruption of large-scale war.<sup>17</sup>*

In such conditions, official Russian documents also spell out the range of activities that are available to Russia for influencing the adversary, including moving troops from a peace to war footing, threatening to or carrying out limited military strikes (including nuclear strikes).

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate tool for inflicting unacceptable damage on an adversary. Their employment would demonstrate a Russian willingness to escalate and to incur the costs of risking further escalation. It would not necessarily convey the confidence that nuclear weapons use would not be risky: as some Western analysts allude to.<sup>18</sup> The expansion of the deterrent concept to include non-nuclear deterrence is one explicit way of seeking to “increase the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons”.<sup>19</sup>

Conventional weapons can also, according to Russian theorists, serve to inflict potentially unacceptable damage on a potential adversary. They theorize about the vulnerability of advanced societies to severe disruption – of a scale that might as easily be caused by conventional or non-conventional tools as by nuclear ones.<sup>20</sup> They also theorize about potential targets for such disruption, including non-populated targets, economic targets, industrial targets, as well as military targets.

### **The effect of Russian deterrence**

Deterrence as behavior is intended to impact an adversary – meaning that how the adversary interprets this behavior must be intrinsic to the concept. Deterrence should thus be responsive to the reaction of an adversary.

The Russian deterrence concept seeks to influence an adversary across the peace-conflict-war continuum, to prevent the emergence of armed conflict. Yet, one could argue that Russian deterrent behavior in recent years has produced precisely the opposite type of behavior to what Russia seeks from potential adversaries. Russia has warned against the concentration of NATO troops on its borders since before 2010. At that point, no one in NATO was deliberating placing troops in the Baltic states or Poland. And yet, because of a Russian operation in Ukraine designed to prevent the approximation of Ukraine to Western institutions such as NATO, an enhanced NATO presence on its border was precisely what Russia got. Russia warned against its encirclement of NATO, and yet is now facing the intensification of NATO presence and activity along its entire periphery, bar its eastern strategic direction.

The question becomes, then, whether Russian deterrent action is having the intended effect. On the one hand, one could argue yes: to the effect that European countries

---

<sup>17</sup> "Voenno-Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'." Entry on Strategicheskoye sderzhivaniye.

<sup>18</sup> Elbridge Colby, "If you want peace, prepare for nuclear war. A strategy for the new great power rivalry.," *Foreign Affairs* November/December, Special Issue: Do nuclear weapons matter? (2018).

<sup>19</sup> Vasilii Burenok, "Voyennaya bezopasnost' Rossii - Problemy i resheniya," *Vozdushno-Kosmicheskaya Oborona* 3 (2008).

<sup>20</sup> A. V. Radchuk, "Determination of levels of unacceptable damage to state economic system: A methodological approach," *Military Thought/Voennaia Mysl* 17, no. 3 (2008).

certainly have a changed perception of the costs associated with a war against Russia now as compared to 10 years ago. Russian military and non-military actions in recent years have, to say the least, made an impression on a Western policy audience: from fantastical nuclear systems to tactics that move below the threshold of armed conflict to the meddling in the political processes of other countries.

On the other hand, Russian actions are also triggering a severe security dilemma in Europe, producing a significant strengthening of deterrence and defense postures across countries facing a potential threat from a resurgent Russia, NATO as well as non-NATO states. Russian deterrent actions in peacetime are not producing the intended outcome.

These days, one could argue that there are some indications that Russia is seeking to rectify or adjust its deterrent posture. Although military signaling activity remains at high levels, if one is to believe NATO press releases about numbers of sorties, there is still a change in the nuclear signaling in strategic exercises. There is some evidence of restraint for example in the *Zapad 2017* exercise. The publication of the new nuclear deterrence strategy could be viewed in part as a transparency measure to dampen Western debate (misunderstanding) of Russian nuclear doctrine.<sup>21</sup> The suggested moratorium of the deployment of intermediate range missiles in Europe could also be pitched in this light, if one were to give the Russians the benefit of the doubt.

One could also question what outcomes Russian strategic deterrent action in war would produce. The concept is one for gradually increasing the pressure on an adversary across domains – presuming that this complex coercive language should be legible to an adversary. The use of non-conventional coercive tools remains largely untested, however. Russian theorists are simply hypothesizing about how advanced societies would succumb to economic pressure, for example. Although they may speculate about such outcomes, they can of course not predict any country's reaction to a nuclear strike.

The integrated concept of gradually increasing the pressure on an adversary with dual-capable systems is also potentially risky and flawed. The idea that the adversary should know and understand that a non-nuclear strike on some vital or less vital target is a warning or effort at coercion rather than the onset of a larger campaign is assuming a lot amid the fog of war. Furthermore, the assumption that the adversary will understand that what comes next will be nuclear is also presumptuous and could backfire – through inadvertent escalation or through enraging the adversary, triggering certain escalation.

### **Implications for Europe and European Security**

To conclude, the Russian strategic deterrence concept is one unlike Western concepts of deterrence, depicting the prevention of war. The Russian concept of strategic deterrence is a guiding principle for Russian conduct in peace, conflict, and war: their key idea of how an adversary may submit to Russian demands. The Russian concept entails what most Western observers would understand as deterrence, coercion, and outright war.

---

<sup>21</sup> Kremlin, Short Osnovy goudarstvennoy politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v oblasti yadernogo sderzhivaniya.

The Russian strategic deterrence concept raises several questions regarding the use and application of military force and other state tools of power to influence potential adversaries. It assumes a fair bit about how an adversary should understand Russian signals and red lines – in other ways than outright aggression. The security dynamic in Europe today demonstrates how Russian actions are not being interpreted in this way. The general notion across Europe is that Russia is engaged in an unprecedented level of military aggression and reckless activities that endanger peace and security. Most observers are not interpreting this as actions designed to preserve that peace and security, or to stabilize the military-political situation, as Russian theorists would describe it. It should be noted that this logic runs both ways: Russia also interprets much of NATO and non-NATO states deterrent action as signs of potential aggression.

The Russian strategic deterrence concept entails some good news, but mostly bad news. The good news is, as Dima Adamsky puts it, that it is a concept intended to contain and manage threats; not one oriented toward destroying societies, like some Soviet war concepts were.<sup>22</sup> The bad news is that it displays how a broad range of tools will be used for coercing any potential adversary of Russia, and that their application will be intensified as a conflict becomes more acute. It demonstrates the range of potential targets in the state or Alliance that comes into conflict with Russia: its state functions, economic capacity, social and political cohesion as well as its military capability. The latter will not necessarily be the first or even primary target.

The primary target is the political decision to sustaining the fight against Russia and to keep resisting. Russia's range of tools to influence those decisions are growing and it is developing an advanced concept for employing such tools in a systematic manner.

## Questions and answers

**Q:** Could you please dwell upon the defence sufficiency concept which underlies the Russian deterrence model, as per the Russian military strategists?

**KvB:** I haven't seen detailed debate on the requirements for defence sufficiency in recent years, but it is perhaps a topic which should be investigated in detail. My insight is that this debate stems from the latter period of the Soviet Union, when there was very active debate, basically on the requirements of the deterrence and whether the strategic nuclear forces could be reduced significantly to provide for a much smaller force that would suffice to deter potential adversaries. As far as I'm aware - I haven't seen the revitalisation of that debate, or maybe I'm perhaps not aware of it. In the chat I see that this came up in the latest version of "Vojennaja mysl" (issue of November 2020), which is very interesting, because the debate took place in the 1980s and was quite heated and involved a lot of different actors both from the civilian as well as from the military side. It produced a quite intensive debate among the military theorists how to calculate, what would be required from the defence sufficiency's

---

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Charap, "Strategic Sderzhivanie: Understanding Contemporary Russian Approaches to "Deterrence", *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies Security Insights* No. 62, September (2020). Citing Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2018).

standpoint. I'd be interested to see the revitalisation of that debate and what the potential consequences would be for the Russian force posture.

**Q:** This debate in the 1980s was linked with the debate on the fact that what kind of war the Soviet Union was preparing for, and this leads us to another question: what would be a definition of "peace time" that would have relevance today and what could be widely shared? Also, the speaker mentioned that there is an increasing understanding among the Russian writers that we are in transition to increase tension -I'd like to ask how widely it is shared the idea of increased tension?

**KvB:** I must clarify that I'm not saying that a lot of Russian theorists are explicitly stating that we are in a period of increased tension. I'd surmise that if you observe the types of tools that are being made use of now by the Russians across the range of tools, that they have available, one could speculate about whether this type of activity that we see from the Russian side, pertains to the type of activity that they perceive, should be part of what they define as a peaceful period or whether the level of activity that we currently see in fact indicates that we are moving up this sort of spectrum or continuum of conflict as they define it. I haven't seen any detailed definition of the term "peacetime" – I have just seen them using those terms peace, period of increased tension and conflict or war. I haven't questioned the term either how precise they define "peacetime", but it's certainly one where they theorize about how the application of or the use of several of these capabilities and methods is also applicable even in peacetime. So, I think that your question raised the issue of the difficulty of determining precisely in this conflict continuum where we may be.





### 3

## ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUSSIAN CONCEPT OF DETERRENCE

Pentti Forsström

The Russian concept of prevention of war is multidimensional and a hypernym, which consists of political, juridical, economic, and military means and actions of solving emerging disputes<sup>1</sup>. Prevention can be divided into a set of actions by military and other armed, or non-military means<sup>2</sup>. Despite of the fact that one of the goals for Russian military policy is to create favourable conditions in a defined area, this presentation will not examine non-military actions. Instead, the presentation concentrates on the development of the Russian concept of deterrence from the structural point of view. Furthermore, the focus is on deterrence based on military power.

In Russia, the discussion on the prevention of military conflict was in decline until the end of 1990's and even in the beginning of 2000. There was no comprehensive concept in this regard. One reason for the lack of concept was that the basic starting point was the confidence on undisputed sufficiency of the nuclear weapon arsenal. The argument was that these weapons prevented military collision between the Soviet Union and NATO<sup>3</sup>.

Another factor in terms of lack of concept was the radical decline of Russia's conventional military capabilities, which was compensated by relying on nuclear deterrence in protecting the military security<sup>4</sup>. However, these capabilities did not help in preventing the wars in Northern Caucasus in the middle of the 1990's. The third proclaimed factor includes the enlargement of NATO and the cessation of the ABM-treaty in 2002, which altered the military-strategic set-up<sup>5</sup>.

After the newly emerged strategic situation, there were suggestions on how to safeguard Russia's military security: for example, Russia should have included the principle of the first use of nuclear weapon in early phases of a possible military conflict, as well as the possibility of limited use of nuclear weapon in a specific theatre of war in its operational plans<sup>6</sup>.

The military strategic asymmetry, changes in arms control agreements, developments in the military political situation, and the breakout of internal armed conflicts initiated

---

<sup>1</sup> Военный энциклопедический словарь, Военное издательство, Москва, 2007, p. 571. See also: <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=9311@morfDictionary> (30.5.2016).

<sup>2</sup> Лутовинов В.И. (2009): Развитие и использование невоенных мер для укрепления военной безопасности Российской Федерации. Военная мысль № 5, 2009, p. 2–12.

<sup>3</sup> Буренок В.М., Ачасов О.Б. (2007): Неядерное сдерживание. Военная мысль № 12, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Рукшин А.С. (2000): Ядерное сдерживание: совершенствование системы управления ядерными силами. Военная мысль № 6, 2000, p. 6. Крейдин С.В. (2000): Проблемы ядерного сдерживания: боевая устойчивость ядерного потенциала. Военная мысль № 4, 2000, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Западинский А.Б.; Колесников Н.П.; Бондарев В.В. (1997): Национальная безопасность страны и военно-стратегическое равновесие. Военная мысль 3, 1997, p. 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> Крейдин С.В. (2000): Проблемы ядерного сдерживания: боевая устойчивость ядерного потенциала. Военная мысль № 4, 2000, p. 73.

the reconsideration of the function of the nuclear weapon and conclusions for its use. For example, Andrey Kokoshin wrote in 1999 that *“the nuclear deterrence is not a medicine for protecting the national security, nor can it control or neutralize the whole spectrum of military threats. Furthermore, with nuclear potential one cannot compensate economic or political weaknesses”*<sup>7</sup>.

In another example, general Rukshin (while serving as the 1. deputy of the chief of the main operational directorate of the General Staff) wrote in 2000 concerning the goals of the deterrence as follows: *“the adversary must be convinced not only of the fact that Russia’s does have adequate nuclear potential and determination to use it, if the national security is threatened but also the understanding that the use of it will be effective”*<sup>8</sup>.

According to Ruksin, the role of the nuclear weapon was changing in protecting the national security and the forms and means to use it was developing. Furthermore, there was a trend of transition towards *“the limited use of nuclear weapon and increase of proportional role of non-strategic nuclear weapon in the light of reduction of the strategic nuclear arsenal”*<sup>9</sup>. What has to be mentioned, however, is that during the early 2000s, there was a comprehensive revision of military planning was underway in Russia. The main emphasis during revision was the question of what comes to the military planning and relation between conventional and nuclear weapons.

The absence of results from scientific research and official decisions resulted in varying use of wordings<sup>10</sup>. For example, in 2003 the President of the Academy of military sciences Army-General Mahmut Gareyev wrote about prevention, delimitation, and neutralization of threats, but not specifically about the terms of deterrence or strategic deterrence<sup>11</sup>. The concept of prevention of war or military conflict was often equal to deterrence achieved through strategic nuclear weapon, hence meaning that the concept of strategic deterrence was equal to nuclear deterrence.

The theoretical definition was created after the theoretical grounds or the concept of practical activity<sup>12</sup>. This turbulence gradually diminished towards the year 2010. Also new concepts were introduced – for example in the military doctrine of 2014, this was the case with non-nuclear deterrence<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Кокошин А. А. (1999): Ядерное сдерживание и национальная безопасность России. Мировая экономика и международные отношения № 7, 1999, р. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Рукшин А.С. (2000): Ядерное сдерживание: совершенствование системы управления ядерными силами. Военная мысль № 6, 2000, р. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Крейдин С.В. (2000): Проблемы ядерного сдерживания: боевая устойчивость ядерного потенциала. Военная мысль № 4, 2000, с. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Махмут Гареев (2003): Угрозы и войны XXI века. Красная звезда 14.2.2003.

<sup>12</sup> Останков В.И. (2005): Геополитические проблемы и возможности их решения в контексте обеспечения безопасности России. Военная мысль № 1/2005, р. 7. See also: Белозёров В.К. (2005): Превентивная политика и военная сила. Военно-промышленный курьер № 49 (116) за 28 декабря 2005 года. Can be found: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/2885> (29.7.2016). See also: Ктс. Тагиров, Р.Г., Печатнов Ю.А., Буренок В.М. (2009): К вопросу об определении уровней последствий при решении задачи силового стратегического сдерживания. Вестник Академии военных наук № 1/2009.

<sup>13</sup> Военная доктрина РФ. Julkaistu Российская газета - Федеральный выпуск № 6570 (298) in <http://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html> (31.5.2016). See also: Палегаев В.И., Алферов В.В. (2015): О неядерном сдерживании, его роли и месте в системе стратегического сдерживания. Военная мысль № 7, 2015.

## Nuclear deterrence

The basic idea of the concept of nuclear deterrence is according to the Russian interpretation that military conflict can escalate to a large-scale war with nuclear weapons. Therefore, the strategic nuclear forces are one of the main cores of the military policy. By definition, nuclear deterrence is a system based on the use of military force meant to deter a possible aggression. It requires constant combat readiness of the forces and is conducted during peace and war all the way to massive use of nuclear weapons in a large-scale war.

Nevertheless, the principle of deterrence by punishment and principle of de-escalation with nuclear weapons are mutually contradictory by nature. When taken into consideration the function of the deterrence, the contradiction is understandable, especially when considering the notion of deterrence being a concept which is covered with uncertainty and ambivalence<sup>14</sup>. Russia has reason to portrait that de-escalation is possible by using tactical and operational-tactical nuclear weapons<sup>15</sup>. Defence minister Sergey Ivanov implied in 2005 that Russia might consider a warning strike with nuclear weapon to be included to the definition of deterrence.

Russia had a double-layered nuclear deterrence until recently which consisted of strategic weapons on a global level and tactical weapons on regional and local levels. This is because the INF treaty imposed nuclear disarmament on the operational level. This formed a blank hole in the capabilities in the hierarchy of the art of war. One solution to this shortage of capabilities in Russia's deterrence was suggested by Andrey Kokoshin saying that it could be compensated by selective use of nuclear weapons with limited impact<sup>16</sup>.

This aforementioned dilemma was officially solved when the INF treaty ceased to exist in 2019. It is obvious that the Iskander-M missiles will fill the gap mentioned in the Russian deterrence system both with conventional and with nuclear capabilities. Therefore, since the abolition of the INF-treaty, Russia's deterrence is based on the threat of utilisation of nuclear weapons on tactical, operational, and strategic level at least from ground-based platforms.

## Military-political deterrence

According to the Defence Ministry's definition of military-political deterrence, the concept is based on the existence of military power. Military power is defined as the collection of capabilities to cause intolerable damage to the adversary in every circumstance. The use of military power requires firm decisiveness in order to choose adequate military means of punishment in the case of an aggression. Russia also regards potential military power as one indirect means of deterrence. By applying this

---

<sup>14</sup> Рукшин А.С. (2000): Ядерное сдерживание: совершенствование системы управления ядерными силами. Военная мысль № 6, 2000, р.7.

<sup>15</sup> Rose Goettemueller (2004): Nuclear Weapons in Current Russian Policy. In: Steven E. Miller and Dmitri V. Trenin (eds.): (2004): The Russian Military: Power and Policy. American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge Massachusetts, p. 194–195.

<sup>16</sup> Валерий Володин (2013): Неядерное сдерживание в оборонной политике России. Международные процессы, том 11, № 1(32) Январь – Апрель, 2013. Can be found: <http://www.intertrends.ru/thirty-second/Volodin.pdf> (27.7.2016). See also: Хряпин А.А., Афанасьев В.А. (2005): Концептуальные основы стратегического сдерживания. Военная мысль № 1, 2005.

definition, Russia wants to emphasise not only the unity of political and the military elite but also to emphasise the fact that the potential military power has a function to be carried out already in the peace time.

It is beyond doubt that peacetime actions of Russia's military force, which is understood as indirect and demonstrative show of force, have become a routine over the past years. Defence minister Sergey Shoigu has carried out the orders of the Supreme commander and organized the so-called snap exercises in different military districts. Once again, Russia wants to emphasise the role of the President as an operational commander. From the deterrence point of view, the question relates to informational effect, the efficiency of the command-and-control system, as well as to the expression of decisiveness of the leaders. The question is purely about the credibility of the deterrence and how it is shown to the outside world.

### **Non-nuclear deterrence**

It was Andrey Kokoshin who put forward in 2012 the concept of “non-nuclear deterrence” by which he meant Russia exercising deterrence with conventional weapon systems (in Russian: *неядерное сдерживание*)<sup>17</sup>. More precisely, Kokoshin used the words “pre-nuclear deterrence” by which he had and intention to emphasise the use of so-called new conventional weapons. In this context, the words of peace time and grey-zone time were used. This is not, however, a categorical limitation: according to Kokoshin, the use of long-distance conventional precision weapons would be “the last warning” before the potential use of selective strike with nuclear weapons. The non-nuclear deterrence, presumably, is one key areas of the R&D in Russia's military establishment.

One perception concerning the concept of non-nuclear deterrence is that it can be exercised also with the regional groups of forces equipped with conventional weaponry. The limitation of this aforementioned perspective, however, is that non-nuclear weapons do not bear the deterrence effect required for an adversary armed with long-range capabilities in its weaponry to be effectively deterred. Instead, it has been identified as having an increasing importance for rapidly manoeuvrable troops and, especially, from the deterrence point of view on the local level.<sup>18</sup>

### **Strategic deterrence**

The starting point for the concept of strategic deterrence was the year 2005 when the General staff, Military Academy of the General staff, and the Academy of Military Sciences published their views on the concept of strategic deterrence. The main goal for the deterrence policy was the prevention of aggression against Russia<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, it was stated that “during peacetime the goal of the strategic deterrence was to prevent constrain and aggression and in time of war to de-escalate the attack and termination of hostilities with conditions favourable to Russia.” The means of

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Полетаев В.И., Алферов В.В. (2015): О неядерном сдерживании, его роли и месте в системе стратегического сдерживания. Военная мысль № 7, 2015, р. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Хряпкин А.Л., Афанасьев В.А. (2005): Концептуальные основы стратегического сдерживания. Военная мысль № 1, 2005, р. 8.

deterrence were considered as a cause fear and they were meant to be executed within the frames of a unified system. This would make it possible to use the different means of deterrence in flexible and rational ways accordingly to the situation”<sup>20</sup>.

In these articles, deterrence was formulated as an all-encompassing, holistic set of tools for the military-political leaders. It would include both political (non-military) means and means based on military power during the times of peace and war until the moment of massive use of nuclear weapons. In to this definition, the content was the same as for the military political deterrence. It is worth to notice that already the idea of a single system known as the National Center for managing the Defence of Russia was mentioned.

After some time, the Defence Ministry published a more comprehensive definition for the concept of strategic deterrence<sup>21</sup>. One difference was that strategic deterrence is executed constantly while it is exercised to “keep the object within certain frames” (удержание объекта в определённых рамках). The definiton also maintained the idea to de-escalate a military conflict through deterrence.

This definition combines different spheres of policy and directs them to achieve a single objective. No matter how clear the definition might be, there is always room for interpretation, which was obviously the original intention of the authors. Another feature of the definition is that it gives Russia the possibility to evaluate the situation by its own means a criterion which is useless for external actor to look for. The subjectivity (without any conditions) relates directly to the national sovereignty, which Russia frequently emphasises.

The nonspecific wordings and incoherence can be considered self-evident from the point of view of achieving deterrence. The essence of deterrence is to influence the adversary’s awareness, to cause uncertainty, and, eventually, even to inflict fear. In this regard, full transparency is not the leading principle of the deterrence. The transparency is practical in the demonstration of military force.

The two main tendencies in the evolution of deterrence are as follows: 1) the set of tools is based solely on military power and especially on nuclear weapons and, 2) the variety of instruments is supplemented with additional, new elements of multidimensional influence towards a possible adversary. The target of deterrence is not only the militarypolitical leaders but also a broader target audience and, more specifically, the consciousness of the audience (cognition).

The described military components have a two-fold task: 1) to deter and to wage war if necessary and 2) to maintain vague borderline between war and peace. The timing of deterrence management and the application of its means are proactive. It seems that the use of dual-purpose technology is increasing, which enables both the flexible use and allocation of destructive power.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=14206@morfDictionary> (30.5.2016).

## National security concept of 1997

Russia is not trying to maintain the parity in military power or in weaponry with the leading countries in the world. Instead, it holds to a principle of “realistic deterrence” on the basis of decisiveness of the adequate use of the existing military power to prevent an aggression. The main task for the Russian Armed Forces is to maintain nuclear deterrence in order to prevent either a nuclear or a regional war.

The concept of prevention was not mentioned in **military doctrine 1993**, thus meaning that the national security concept regulated the activity in the field of deterrence more detailed way. One essential degree was in the military doctrine – Russia refrained from the principle of first strike with nuclear weapons.

According to the **National security concept of 2000**, the prevention of wars and military conflicts, the political, diplomatic, economic, and other non-military means were prioritised. In addition, military defence required adequate military power. The main task for the Armed forces was to deter an aggression of any scale, including by nuclear weapons against Russia and its allies.

In the security concept, one specific issue which concerned the requirement for capabilities of the nuclear forces fulfil their vital tasks regardless of circumstances and situations. The concept was a turning point because preventive non-military actions were prioritised in contrast to the military and especially in terms of nuclear deterrence. As expected, there is a portion of rhetoric included.

**A new military doctrine was signed in April 2000.** In this document, the tasks of the Armed forces were written in much more precise manner. They comprised the prevention of threats, prevention of an attack, localisation, and neutralisation of conflicts. In addition, the tasks included the coercion of an adversary to discontinue the conflict “in the earliest phase”. One can assume that these phrases partially clarified the definition of deterrence and included the task of de-escalation of the conflict.

The following **National security strategy** was revealed in **2009**. According to the document, the strategic tasks for the development of national defence were “the prevention of global and regional wars and conflicts and execution of the strategic deterrence”. The concept of strategic deterrence was mentioned for the first time with “the objective of safeguarding the military security”. At that time, it was impossible to address a comprehensive system of deterrence or its controlled management. Instead, the primary issue concerned the first steps towards a single system, which was still understood as the core of the “traditional” military deterrence.

**In April 2010, the new military doctrine was signed.** According to the doctrine, the most important task for Russia is to “prevent a war waged with nuclear weapons and a military conflict of any kind”. The main task for the Armed forces was strategic deterrence. **The military doctrine of 2014**<sup>22</sup>, included no essential changes to the tasks of the Armed forces. Nevertheless, there was one degree stating that Russia will apply countermeasures against a state which attempts to achieve military superiority. A cautious assessment would be that the doctrine functioned as an instrument of

---

<sup>22</sup> Военная доктрина Российской Федерации, утверждена Президентом Российской Федерации 25 декабря 2014 г., № Пр-2976.

information warfare in the aftermath of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia.

**In the end of 2015, the new Strategy for national security** was introduced. It confirms the interpretation that Russia assesses security as a comprehensive system. In the paragraphs concerning defence, it is stated that the strategic objectives are “to form the conditions for peaceful and dynamic development of Russia and to safeguard its military security – will be achieved by executing strategic deterrence and prevention of military conflicts”. The concrete achievement is the National Center for management of defence.

The purpose of the Russian deterrence is simply to inflict fear in its surrounding area of action. The primary objective of deterrence is the maintainment of peaceful conditions while concurrently the prevention of an emergent military conflict. In this regard, the occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the military operation in Syria 2015 to some extent achieved the first purpose and, from the Russian point of view, they were considered both as preventive actions and actions of deterrence.

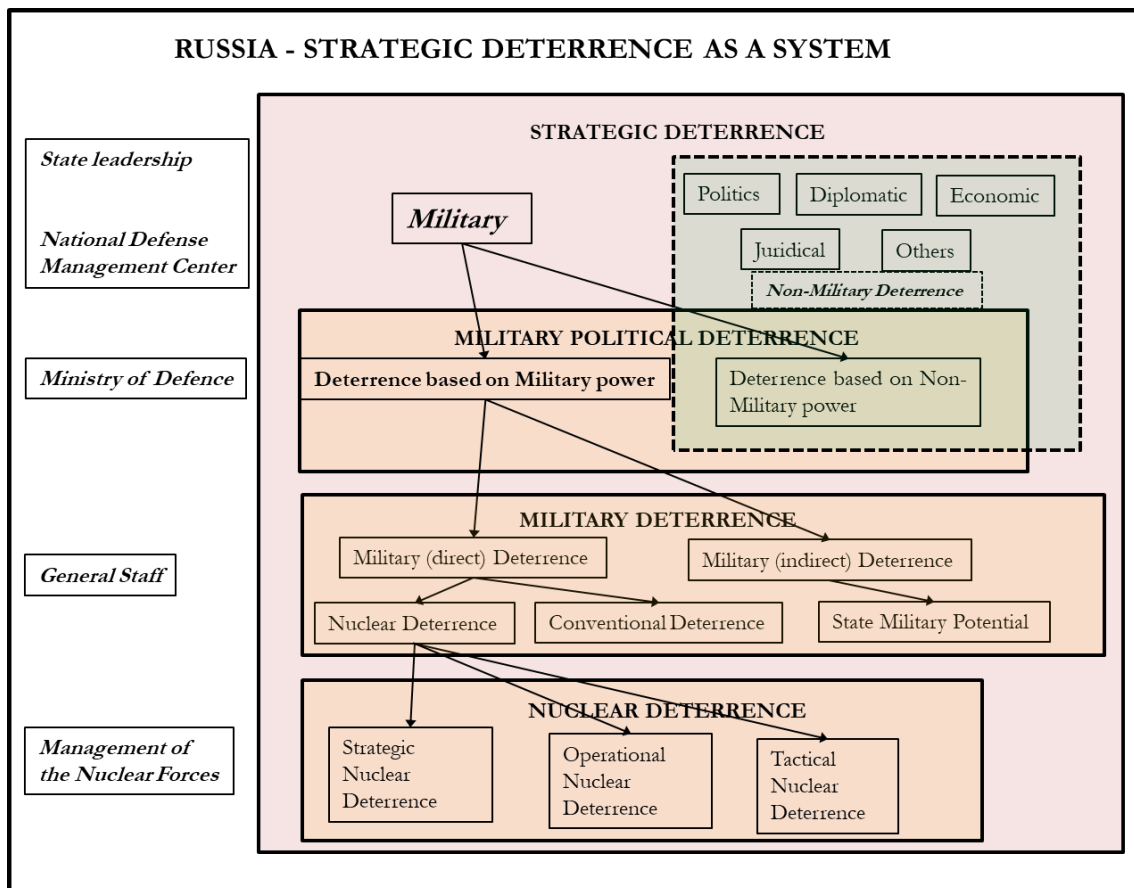
## **Conclusions**

The actions taken during the 1990s can be summarized by saying that Russia’s focus was on the traditional deterrence based on military power and on the meaning of military power as a preventive factor. The strategic nuclear weapons played the main role in achieving successful effect of deterrence. The 1990s resulted in deep disappointment in terms of the significance of military power, especially regarding the potential of the nuclear weapons in preventing war or maintaining parity on local, regional or global level.

After the early years of the shift of millennium, the awareness increased on the significance of deterrence. Importantly, the needs were identified on how to develop the prevention and deterrence system. The mere solution for this problem was found, which emphasized the role of nuclear weapons and their capabilities both in practice and in conceptual documents. The reminder of non-strategic nuclear weapons’ existence did not mean multiplication of military power – these notions already existed in the documents. The essence of their role was rather to compensate the shortages concerning the conventional forces.

The beginning of the conceptual development can be traced to the year 2005, which after the conceptual definitions are more clearly structured and simultaneously broadened. In the picture no. 2 is visualised the structure of the deterrence system as interpreted. The essential change was the division of the functions of military power into the deterrence in peacetime and to the warfare during a possible conflict. The function of deterrence did not apply to conventional forces in the same sense as in comparison for the nuclear forces.





**Picture 1:** The Structure of Russian strategic deterrence

The period starting approximately from the year 2010 and afterwards was the phase of actual development and practical testing concerning the concept of strategic deterrence. Many examples can be found on local (North Caucasus, violation of airspace), regional (Ukraine, Syria) and on global level (presence of strategic capabilities, show of force). In addition, conventional military power could be included to the deterrence system. The function of deterrence of the conventional forces has been exercised, for instance, frequently after 2012 in forms of snap or regular military exercises. The scale of these exercises were unprecedented since the collapse of the Soviet Union. To a certain extent, they obviously also took the Russian military by surprise at least in the early years of 2010s.

The factor of surprise depends on the combat readiness of the Armed forces as exercising readiness produces the information needed to maintain the deterrence. In addition, the tasks for conventional forces have been increased. As of today, Russia is entering to a phase where new military technologies and capabilities are tested and included to the arsenal shown to the outside world. Presumably, these capabilities will eventually change the concept and contents of deterrence as they will be added to the system once operational. This means that the share and proportion of the nuclear weapon in forming the deterrence will decrease. What comes to the question of art of war, the proportion of new weapon systems will increase for Russia's disposal, thus broadening the variety of choices in different circumstances.

From the military point of view, the essence of strategic deterrence is primarily a function combining different military tools and, in broad sense, aimed at one purpose. Secondly, deterrence functions as an operational organism orchestrated from a newly

established defence management centre. From strategic point of view, the concept of strategic deterrence incorporates various political, diplomatic, and other non-military activities with the military ones. Of course, these methods have been there also before, but they were not regarded as elements of a functional system focused towards one goal. These methods were not either a conceptual entity lead by the state leadership.

What comes to military activity, one can see the division to non-military and military means. This aforementioned division is convergent with the entity of the effect-based means. Hence, for this reason the Russians include the argument of military power supporting political activity.

In this respect, deterrence forms a multifunctional set of tools which can be used against the adversary in various combinations. This means that deterrence is used to achieve the designated objectives - as the Russian might say – заданный ущерб. In addition to this, Russia can make the decisions concerning actions and order of deterrence based on subjective assessments and conditions.

The military actions are perhaps not among the first ones in the sequence of actions. From the military deterrence perspective, Russia makes the decisions independently (when and how) on its application. This is the basis for the principle of the strategic surprise.

The described system of deterrence is functional and its activity coordinated as a military formation. It is operated in a centralised way and directed to one objective – to safeguard the security of Russian federation. What comes to notion of the nuclear weapon, the threat to use it can be regarded as one preactive and preventive instrument before the military-political situation deteriorates. The traditional function of the nuclear weapon is (more or less) taken for granted by the Russian military thinking in terms of escalation management of a conflict. The escalation management is based on the principle of preactive augmentation of power. The military doctrine allows the use of nuclear weapon or the threat to use it is based on subjective judgement.

The development of the functionality of the deterrence is influenced by the obscuring line between the functions of preemptiveness and the actual implementation of deterrence especially by the transition towards peacetime. At the same time, the catalogue of means and instruments is increasing and becoming more complex. Theoretically, the development of strategic deterrence is about intentional transformation of military activity into a more complex system by structurally appending more elements. The development primarily means that the relative proportion of one element is reducing. In addition, if one element has lost its effect in the system, the proportion of the remaining ones will increase respectively.

Another tendency is that the aim of deterrence is shifting from affecting directly the military more to the conditions and prerequisites of the adversary's instruments or activity. This can be understood more broadly as having an effect on the basis of military activity (ie. economy, infrastructure, population). A third tendency is that the nature of strategic deterrence is transforming from the annihilation of the target more towards disruption. At a later stage, the development can lead to situation in which the purpose of the target changes. The development is relatively fast especially in the information and cyber space.

The of the Russian word of deterrence is slightly misleading - it refers to deter, keep something away, prevent or repel. This might be interpreted as reactive by nature. But this is not the case – the Russian deterrence in practice is preventive and proactive.

### **Questions and answers**

**Q:** How do you view the role of more conventional threats in the Russian doctrine of deterrence, such as troops in the Kaliningrad region, sandwiched between Baltics and Poland? While the defense of Kaliningrad is a lost cause for the Kremlin, does the threat of the troops and ballistic missiles in the region play a role in deterring potential aggression?

**PF:** The meaning of Kaliningrad is firstly related to the identity (sovereignty) of Russian federation, and as a part of Russia, the perceptions of conventional threats are applicable also there as well what comes to the defence and military security. As we have seen in the last years Russia would like to expand the sphere of influence and the Kaliningrad region was already there after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the military capabilities has been increased in the region. Russia operates with the region as if it was a thermometer in the relations between the West and Russia. From the military point of view, it is a crucial area for Russian defence, deterrence and strategy.

## 4

### ON METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RESEARCH OF DETERRENCE

Stephan De Spiegeleire

**T**he presentation made by Stephan de Spiegeleire in the Russia Seminar 2021 can be found on FNDU Youtube-channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PURKPOeskBk>.

Stephan de Spiegeleire contributed a much larger article on the topic which is available only as a web-version and can be found: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2021110153138>.

#### **Questions and answers - panel discussion (Ven Bruusgard, Forsström, De Spiegeleire)**

**Q:** You mentioned that after 2014 more publications were written, also what is important, and the Russia Group is an example of it, is that there started to be more cooperation in this field. Now it is so, that maybe some groups do it in certain research communities within states, but our seminar is an example of our understanding the problem, but still not seeing the problem as wide way as you demonstrated.

**SDeS:** Frankly speaking about the collaboration – we do see a small optic but it doesn't even come close to any of the levels that we observe in other disciplines. And this is still something that should cause us concern or cause a pulse.

**Q:** Now we recognize it and we can – and I hope will work on it.

**Q:** Another aspect in your presentation was empirical dataset for actual behaviour which leads us to the starting point of today's discussion with the concepts – how to build this kind of data set. I'd like to invite all the panelists into this discussion. We started with Dr. Bruusgard's presentation arguing that Russia's concept of deterrence is about not avoiding the conflict but shaping the environment in a way beneficial for the Russian interests and I very much agree with this idea. This clearly creates in a way conceptual difficulty how we understand and define the role of military deterrence and the role of non-military deterrence, which was presented in Pentti Forsström's graphic, and if we see this as a system as it is meant to be and on the other hand if you define everything that is shaping the environment as part of the concept of deterrence there is no limits to this. I invite the speakers to elaborate the idea of Russian deterrence uniqueness of the term being about the shaping the environment by different means.

**PF:** I could start – the shaping of the environment is one wording of the tasks which the MOD and the military-political deterrence is all about. We must bear in mind that the Russian military and military deterrence is twofold – as it was mentioned: the good news and the bad news – it's the same way. The first approach to the situation is that what can be done without using military power or any other aggressive means to influence and this applies also to the question about the Aland islands – the situation as

it is – it is a demilitarized zone according to the international agreements and it also applies to the interests of the surrounding area and states in the Baltics in a way that the situation should stay calm. Of course, the question how to connect the military aspect of deterrence in this is a tricky one, but anyway one has to be prepared for the good situation and for the worse, so the shaping the environment is a civilized way of taking care of interests possible state is having.

**KvB:** I think that the important point is that the expansion of the deterrence concept in a way that we have seen in the Russian theoretical debate, at least makes it sort of limitless concept, which in turn makes it very difficult to observe empirically because it means that basically you could include all types of state behaviour and try to make sense of it through the lens strategic deterrence. I also think that it raises, at least my investigations of this concept of strategic deterrence and how it evolved, also raised a number of questions with regard to what comes first – is this a concept being developed in order to make sense or to try to systematize some of the behaviour that Russia is exposing or is it the other way around – is it that the concept comes first and then you see the development of these tools and capabilities, it is a difficult deliberation and it may not be possible even to find a proper answer. I think the way I approached it at least is that the investigations of these theoretical debates on this type of a concept like strategic deterrence may at least serve to illuminate the purpose behind some of this behaviour that we see from the Russian side and then of course there are the significant limitations with regard to how precisely knowledge bring us further in terms of deciphering what precisely Russia's intention are and in what conditions they will make use of the precise capabilities they have at their disposal. I'd also like to thank Stephan for his intervention being extremely interesting and this demonstration of how little we make use of the broader range of the deterrence literature in our field or in the international security field and subsequently in the field of studying Russian deterrence is extremely interesting and something that we should think more about – I really appreciate that.

**SDeS:** Just to take Kristin's last point of what comes first and how do we know – this really would require us to start building much more rigorous on both sides more comprehensive parsing of what we know and what has been written and also a more comprehensive dataset on what Russia is actually doing. Some of you may be aware of the event data sets that are out there – for instance there are the global database on events, language and tone, the integrated crisis early warning system of the Pentagon – Phoenix, they all are huge datasets which sometimes go back to 1979, in which hundreds of millions of events are automatically extracted from newspapers. And one of the categories of codes is “threaten” and of course not every use of threaten is deterrent but because they extract source actors which could be Russia, so from all these datasets you can select the ones that Russia initiates, that are the codes for threaten and that are directed to other states. So, that is already a dataset you have now, and so what we are doing now a lot of those datasets are based on rules-based coding, so if the verb “threaten” or its synonyms are there, it will be coded as such, there are smarter ways if doing these things right. My point is that it can be done right, so a lot of the scholastic debates we are having: how they define deterrence or in what fields the deterrence is being used - they can be done more rigorously and they could be matched with the empirical evidence to come out there.

If I can just quickly pick up on two other points raised in the chat: the first is why do we have so many single authored pieces and I think the answer is quite obvious – I already mentioned one of them right the incentive structure in Academia, where the Dutch Defence Academy just came out with a fantastic volume on the deterrence with a whole bunch of people who contributed to that including Russian views, Chinese views on deterrence and so that the state where we are now, but still those things are single authored, so it is a co-authored volume, but still individual authors writing these kinds of thing, there are exceptions to it. There is still the incentive structure basically and that is why I mentioned the founders, if they would know that they actually gave us disincentives to work together, they may want to change our incentive structure to encourage more collaboration. And the point of slender evidence that we have collaborated with others before, none of what I say here is unique to our field, the same applies to all other fields and yet their collaboration demonstrable collaboration indices are much higher than in this particular field.

**Q:** In the presentation the focus was on deterrence by punishment, can you shed any light on Russian theory of deterrence by denial by reducing Russian vulnerability to attack?

**KvB:** I only mentioned it briefly – I think that the Russian strategic deterrence concept entails both versions of deterrence, by punishment as well as by denial. As far as I understand an improved Russian warfighting capability across the board serves to enhance their deterrence by denial capability and there are some specific deliberations about how the improvement of airmissile defence capabilities for example enhances Russian deterrence capability vis-à-vis a technologically advanced adversary. I think that these two come hand in hand also in the Russian discussion, the Russian deliberations regarding their potential of conventional capabilities to inflict unacceptable damage on adversary for example would be also closely to Russian capabilities to deflect adversary attacks or adversarial retaliation towards Russia.

**Q:** About the picture where the nuclear deterrence potential was divided into three categories – strategic, operational and tactical, can you speculate on the non-nuclear potential in the same terms?

**PF:** A good question - to my understanding the debate and discussion in Russian sources is just about to start to see what it means. It was already a few years ago when it was mentioned, so it is a bit earlier than the practical actions or capabilities are operational. I think what comes to the tactical level is for the conventional or non-nuclear forces and that was the main idea of the reform after 2008 and that element was very essential to be built up and it can be seen also in other terms of local level, so that was meant for the local threats to be deterred -that was the main idea for the conventional forces or conventional deterrence. The limitation is the distance, the nuclear deterrence is mainly for the strategic level.

The conventional capabilities which were shown a few years back by President Putin for example can be included into the strategic deterrence as well. The question is when the result of the possible use of these weapons is not as a strategic or crucial like the nuclear weapons have, what will the concept be for the new capabilities emerging in the Russian military and theoretically how they will be used. I'd like to look at the problem from a different point of view – when the non-nuclear forces are more or less local with the exception of the air or naval component, one has to do something with the mobility. I mentioned the mobility being one feature of the development that

would be happening, then the question whether it is Ukraine or more specifically, the Middle East and Syria as a case and as an operation. The question raises thought which glasses we look at these events to happen – from the technical military point of view, or can we assess them from the deterrence point of view - it depends on how we look at the things.

**Q:** The core dilemma, which is in a way mentioned in the presentations, is that when Russians embrace conflict as a natural part of interaction which should be managed and controlled rather than avoided whereas the Western concepts are built on notion of deterrence and its function to avoid the conflict and not to manage it, so we are in a way and this ties into what Stephan de Spiegeleire is suggesting that we would pay attention on how do we know, how our belief-systems influence the concepts and the interpretation of the concepts. So, the question is how we can breach the gap in the understanding in the very definition of the things we are talking about or is there any possibility for that?

**KvB:** I think it's a pertinent observation, I think you are right that to observe that the Russian concept entails a conflict as a more natural state of interaction, but nevertheless the Russian concept is also oriented towards seeking to avoid conflict and also seeking to avoid the escalation of conflict. So, I think that we shouldn't overstate the differences either, or at least as far as I understand one of the key issues with the Russian concept is precisely that it is designed to prevent the emergence of conflict but by way perhaps of employing a different set of tools than what we traditionally would think about when we deliberate our deterrence policies.

It is fair to say, and I think your comment highlights that this concept they are developing indicates certainly perhaps more detailed deliberation about the transition between a peaceful relationship and one that is characterized by conflict or even by a confrontation. In this domain I think that there is a stark difference to several Western countries where we have been thinking less about that transition and how precisely we manage that transition and try to avoid the significant escalation of a conflict that may emerge.

I'm not entirely sure, that would be one way of saying that we could seek to bridge the gap without perhaps taking it too far, I mean at least a lot of people would warn against a full sort of Western adaptation of the Russian concept because, as I alluded to also in my remarks, that there are several problems and problematic aspects with the Russian concept that are yet to be resolved and that raise questions about the effect of this different type of deterrent actions that they imagine will actually have on an adversary and on crisis dynamics.

**PF:** I fully support what Kristin said about the overstating the problems. I see that the Russian concept of deterrence is an open spectrum of these what might be positive or negative ones. They have openly said in written form and scholars brought into light that this is the spectrum of the things which might happen and that is their understanding of the possible situation in the environment. Perhaps we have a bit narrower approach to the problem, but how can we fill the gap in the understanding -I'm firm supporter of discussion and hope that the exchange of opinions and remarks takes place in the future and we would have a connection in different levels also with the Russians in the sense that Stephan brought up in citing different material and would be brought into practice not for limited group of persons but in a broader audience.

**SDeS:** My quick response for all questions of understanding right is - the answer is careful mapping, if you want to know something more about, we had a discussion on deterrence by denial with Michael Kofman saying that Russian almost never use it, but we found four categories of deterrence by denial which were quoted by some military, by some civilian authors: «отрицание» is an obvious one, «лишение доступа» убедить что бесполезно, and so we can trace those and then we can look who wrote that, if you know the author and if you know where they come from, whether it is a military author, a navy author or it's a Russian academic citing a western military.. all those things can be done and the great thing about the CNA report is that they actually started doing that in a more qualitative way by using Excel spreadsheet: this document says this, and this has this understanding of this concept and so on. They did a good job in writing it out and I still think we can do this a lot more systematically. I'll end with the thing I started with - we need to collaborate more with taking advantage of the new tools which are out there. They are not a panacea, we all are look for sources and these things can really help us not only finding them but also processing them and sharing them more quickly with each other to see how we understand their understandings.





## RUSSIAN VIEWS ON FUTURE WAR – THE LEGACY OF A. E. SNESAREV

Gudrun Persson

*If the future generation succeeds  
in throwing off the veil of secrecy  
from the Verdun Sphinx, it will be easier  
to solve the more difficult problem  
of the essence and content of the new strategy.*

*A. E. Snesev, 1923*

**T**he full dimensions of the subject of Soviet military policy are almost never spelled out in Western analysis', William E. Odom, the well-known American specialist on the Soviet Union, noted in 1991. The same could be said about Russian military thought. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western understanding of Russian military thinking has been largely inadequate. This became apparent in 2008, and more acutely in 2014. The results of Western misunderstanding have been evident: a rude awakening at Russian capabilities and the Russian state's ability to use the military as a tool of policy in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, mixed with a lack of understanding regarding the thinking behind it.

In order to contribute to a deeper knowledge, the focus of this article is the military writings of General-Lieutenant Andrei Evgenievich Snesev (1865-1937), whose works are being re-discovered in Russia in later years. My main argument is that without understanding Russia's past evolution of military thought – in this case through Snesev – you cannot understand the current evolution of military strategic thinking in Russia. Another objective is simply to introduce Snesev's thoughts to a wider Western audience, since he thought deeply about the essence of war, and the relationship between society and state.

The main question in this article is: can Snesev's thoughts on war and the development of a military doctrine shed light on today's development of a Russian military strategy, and if so, how? In order to answer this question, Snesev's main thoughts on war, strategy and military doctrine will be examined. Second, Snesev's place in the current military theoretical debate will be assessed. Would it be fair to say, as the corresponding member of the Academy of Military Science Aleksandr Bartosh does, that Snesev's thoughts on war are particularly useful today in a time of non-linear and hybrid war?<sup>1</sup> Finally, conclusions will be drawn.

While names such as Aleksandr Svechin (1878-1938), Michail Tukhachevskii (1893-1937), and Georgii Isserson (1898-1976) are well known, few, even in Russia, had heard of Snesev until recent years. In fact, the writings of Andrei Snesev were forgotten and courageously hidden by his family for many years. His works are now

---

<sup>1</sup> Bartosh, 2019, p. 14, 62.

being published, many of them for the first time. For me, Snesev – and his more famous colleagues of that period, serve as a bridge between Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union up until today's Russian Federation. So who was he, and what did he say?

### Who was Snesev?

As Paret has noticed both Carl von Clausewitz and Marc Bloch had the experience of fighting in wars in which their armies were defeated, and the states for which they fought collapsed.<sup>2</sup> Snesev had a similar experience. He was born in 1865, son of a priest, and the family moved several times when he was growing up.<sup>3</sup> He spent his youth in Cossack territory, graduating from the Gymnasium in Novochevsk, that long served as the capital of the Don Cossacks. At Moscow University, he studied at the physics-mathematical faculty, and it was only after completing these studies, that he turned to a military career. He graduated from the General Staff Academy in 1899. Head of the Academy during his first two years, was the influential Genrikh Antonovich Leer (1829-1904).

Initially, Snesev was stationed in Central Asia. As an intelligence officer, he travelled greatly (this was the time of the Great Game). He spent time in India and in Afghanistan. He knew several languages of the region, and eventually wrote fundamental works on these countries.

He was an experienced military officer having served in Central Asia, in the World War, and then in the Civil War. When the Red Army was created on 28 January 1918 Snesev decided to stay in Russia, and eventually joined the ranks of the Bolsheviks.<sup>4</sup> In May 1918 he was appointed to be in charge of the creation of the Northern Caucasus Military District. In 1919 he was appointed Head of the General Staff Academy, where he initiated courses on the philosophy of war and military strategy. In 1921, when Mikhail Tukhachevskii was appointed Head of the Academy, Snesev was appointed Director of the newly created Eastern Department of the Academy. In the years that followed he was very productive, and wrote several fundamental works on Afghanistan, India, and military geography. Snesev was a colleague and friend of Aleksandr Svechin. Snesev translated Clausewitz *On War* into Russian, and also wrote a book about Clausewitz, both unpublished at the time.

He was arrested in 1930, at the age of almost 60 years, and convicted to death, a sentence that was changed by Stalin to ten years imprisonment. He was sent to the Solovki prison camp, where he suffered a stroke in 1934. He was released, but never recovered and died in Moscow in 1937. During the Thaw, he was rehabilitated in 1958, and only in the 1960s did his name start to appear in the Soviet Union. But it is not until the 2000s that his works started to attract broader attention and began to be published more widely.

---

<sup>2</sup> Paret, 2010, pp. 2-8.

<sup>3</sup> This section is largely based on Danilenko, 2012 and Guber, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Around 75,000 officers joined the Red Army at this point. Kokoshin, 1998, p. 13.

## Thoughts on war, doctrine and military strategy

In the early 1920s – in a time of fast change and uncertainty – the Bolshevik military leadership was trying to work out a military strategy and its views on future war. In doing so, Snesarev made important contributions, some of which are being increasingly recognized in Russia.

His “Philosophy of War” is one of his major works. The manuscript of the book was finalized just before his arrest in 1930, and it was based on his lectures at the General Staff Academy. The book was first published in Russia in 2013.<sup>5</sup> It is a deep-loading and detailed work in which Snesarev explores his topic in six chapters; the role of philosophy in the study of war, human judgements on war, war from a historical perspective, war in a scientific perspective, a moral appraisal of war, and finally war and the state. It would be well beyond the scope of this article to analyse it in its entirety. He sets out to lay the foundation of a “philosophy of war”, and focuses on the questions “why and what for” are wars fought. Here, only a few of his major thoughts on war will be highlighted.

Snesarev’s outlook was mainly geopolitical. He could be described as an étatist, as we would say today. “The state is good”, he wrote,<sup>6</sup> therefore, only the state can determine questions of war and peace.” In studying war, he prefers the geopolitical method, since the state is the product and the basic subject of geopolitical processes.<sup>7</sup> This may sound familiar. Some might associate this line of thinking with the Swedish political scientist and conservative politician Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922). A German scholar finds Snesarev to be a forerunner to Carl Schmitt (1888-1985).<sup>8</sup>

War itself is seen as a constant phenomenon in human life, therefore the state must always prepare for it. His approach to war is encompassing, holistic, and he examines wars not only from a historical and economic perspective, but, importantly, from a moral one and the role of the state. Wars in the future, according to Snesarev, are becoming increasingly large scale and ever more complex. This is not surprising, since it is written based on the experiences of the Great War (aeroplanes and tanks) and the Civil War. He underlines the need for the state to prepare for war already in peacetime, and not only the army and soldiers, but the entire population. In his review of Svechin’s *Strategy*, he wrote: “strategy uses not only the sword, but needs other means as well, such as agitation, undermining the economy of the enemy, outdoing in recreating one’s forces.”<sup>9</sup>

He emphasizes the importance to determine the interests of the state. A state could be founded from five basic perspectives: religious, physical, judicial, ethical and psychological. Regardless of which, war and the weapons of the state, according to Snesarev, are necessary not only to defend the territory but also its people, its richness and ideals, in order to secure the might (*mogushchestvo*) of the state and its self-sufficiency which corresponds to its spirit and the historical vocation of its people.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the state should always prepare its population for war. This, again, might

---

<sup>5</sup> Snesarev, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Snesarev, 2013, pp. 235-236, 244-245.

<sup>7</sup> Danilenko, 2013, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Seidt, 2019, p. 291.

<sup>9</sup> Snesarev, 1926.

<sup>10</sup> Snesarev, 2013, p. 211.

sound familiar, resembling the thoughts popularized by Ludendorff in his *Der totale Krieg*, published 1935. Ludendorff, incidentally, was born the same year as Snesev and also died in 1937.

In addition, he made an important contribution to the issue of a unified military doctrine – a controversial subject, intensely discussed in the early 1920s. This question had been discussed for years in Imperial Russia, not least after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. However, it had not been resolved before 1914. In fact, the discussions about a military doctrine were prohibited by Tsar Nicholas II, who in 1912 bluntly stated: “Military doctrine is what I say it is.”<sup>11</sup> The importance of these discussions cannot be overstated; they played a central role in managing the relationship between politics and military strategy, and even provided a direction for change.<sup>12</sup> They do not only touch on preparing the army for a future war, but the nation, the state, and the people.<sup>13</sup>

Sveshin had initiated the debate in 1920. Snesev wrote an article in the journal *Voennoe delo* analysing the issue from his perspective<sup>14</sup>. He made the case that a unified military doctrine was needed, and even ascribed the defeat in the Russo-Japanese war to the fact that Russia did not have this doctrine, whereas the Japanese had. He examines several definitions proposed by other military thinkers, such as V. Borisov and V. Apushkin but finds their approach too narrow. Snesev suggests that a unified military doctrine should consist of the following:

- 1) The state’s current objectives or achievements.
- 2) High military understanding and development. (Here he included the theoretical part of military science, military history, current military technology, etc.)
- 3) Distribution of the result of the above to the military technical and military-material spheres (instructions, statues, textbooks), and
- 4) Age-old features and skills of the people serving (as interlayers or replacements, correctives).

He reached a definition of a unified military doctrine: “it is a set of military-state achievements and military foundations, practical techniques and skills of the people, which the country considers to be the best for a given historical moment and with which the military system of the state is permeated from top to bottom.”

Snesev drew a line between military science and a doctrine. Military science, he wrote, is a set of generalizations within the military sphere that stand above time, place, people, and technology. ‘Military science can only be international’, he claimed. Doctrine – on the other hand – is national, depending on the history, the culture of the people, and technology. It is no stranger to changes.

This suggests a broad, holistic view, where the strategic objectives of the state, military science and technology, including the morale of the people should be systematically

---

<sup>11</sup> Order to the chief of the Academy of the General Staff, General Yanushkevich in 1912, Kokoshin, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Høiback, 2013, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Kokoshin, 1998, p. 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> Snesev, 1920.

combined with the framework of the military doctrine. This means that the military doctrine had a political side, and a technical one. The officers in favour, including Svechin and not least Michail Frunze, argued that a unified military doctrine was needed because of its political and technical dimension.<sup>15</sup> The anti-doctrinal camp on the other hand, led by Leo Trotsky, argued that no such doctrine was needed since “our state orientation has long been formed by Marxist methodology and there is no need to form it again in the bosom of the military administration.”

Eventually, Frunze finally won the debate, and doctrine became a central concept in Soviet military thinking. The idea and use of a doctrine has, since then, been established in the Soviet Union and up until today. The Russian approach to doctrine is extensive, political, and deductive.<sup>16</sup> As Marshal Sokolovskii’s team noted many years after these debates: ‘Military doctrine depends directly on the social structure, domestic and foreign policy, and the economic, political, and cultural state of a country.’<sup>17</sup>

### Relevance today

In contemporary Russian writings about Snesev, his contributions to the development of a military doctrine, his views on Clausewitz and the philosophy of war are highly valued. For example, the former Head of the General Staff, Yurii Baluevskii wrote the foreword to Snesev’s book on Clausewitz, and has highlighted Snesev’s importance in laying out the foundation for a military doctrine.<sup>18</sup> Andrei Kokoshin mentions the importance of Snesev in several books.<sup>19</sup> Also, the current Chief of the General Staff, Valerii Gerasimov, in 2017 underlined his contribution to Russian military thought, not least regarding Clausewitz. Sometimes Snesev is called the Russian Sun-Tsu.

Starting in 1999, the Military Academy of the General Staff hosted a centre for the study of domestic military strategy in Snesev’s name.<sup>20</sup> Since 2013, a Snesev Prize is being given to contributors in geostrategic studies.

Bartosh argues that Snesev’s thoughts on war are particularly useful today in a time of non-linear and hybrid war. He highlights Snesev’s holistic view, that war involves so much more than only weapons and the organization of the Armed Forces. It is about the relationship between economy, politics, society, and the morale of the people.

Mikhailov devotes his dissertation to the military-political views of Snesev, and their relevance today. In particular he highlights, Snesev’s scientific and methodological approach to strategic thought and doctrine.<sup>21</sup> The examples could be multiplied.

The re-discovery of Snesev takes place against a broader background as the contemporary Russian Federation is in the process of developing a military strategy. The debate revolves around such questions as: (1) whether the character of war has

---

<sup>15</sup> Frunze, 1941, p. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Høiback, 2013, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Sokolovskii, 1963, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Baluevskii, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Kokoshin, 2013, pp. 77-80.

<sup>20</sup> *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, No 10, 2007, p. 15

<sup>21</sup> Mikhailov, 2008.

changed fundamentally, (2) the relations between military and non-military means, (3) the importance of non-nuclear deterrence in relation to nuclear deterrence, and (4) the role of colour revolutions in contemporary warfare.

Over the past thirty years Russian military thinking has been influenced largely by (1) the technological development and (2) the political, economic, and social changes in Russia and in the outside world. The military theoretical debate has reflected these fundamental changes: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the reduced Russian territory (particularly in the Western parts), and globalisation. The international developments have also affected Russian military thinking, which constantly discusses the impact of Desert Storm 1991, Serbia 1999, Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, and Libya 2011. Russia's own experiences from the wars in Georgia 2008, Ukraine, and Syria in recent years are persistently discussed. Interestingly, the Syria operation was preceded by a close study of the Soviet experience from the Soviet operation in Cuba 1962, according to Gerasimov.<sup>22</sup>

The re-discovery of Snesev is part of a larger context in which Russia is finding its own military theorists again – both from the past and from exile. Evgenii Messner (1891-1974) whose writings about wars of rebellion (*miatzebevoiny*) are considered important today in relation to the discussion on “colour revolutions.” Messner was also a former officer in the Tsarist army, but he joined the White side during the Civil War and was forced into emigration. Isserson and Tukhachevskii and their thoughts on war and deep battle are also increasingly analyzed.

Another example to illustrate the re-discovery of former military thinkers is when General Nikolai Makarov in his memoirs re-introduces Alexander II's War Minister, Dmitrii Miliutin (1816-1912). During his period as Minister (1861-1881), Miliutin systematically reformed the military education system, and introduced military districts and universal conscription. Makarov clearly identifies with Miliutin's view of meritocracy and competence. He highlights Miliutin's last article from 1912 which Makarov claims could have been written today. In the article, Miliutin notes that war now (1912) breaks out suddenly and unpredictably in spite of international agreements, and he worries about the great technological gap between Russia and Europe. Miliutin also argues for the value of the “personal initiative” by officers and soldiers. All these issues that are at the centre of the contemporary military debate.

## Conclusion

Snesev's thoughts then were focused on the interests of the state, not necessarily on the interests of the Bolshevik party, which may have contributed to the fact that few of his works were published at the time. Today, on the other hand, his thoughts on the interests of the state are highly topical. In fact, the interests of the state are often underlined in various strategic documents, not least in the National Security Strategy and the Military Doctrine.

At the same time, his writings on war as more or less total, involving the entire society and using other means than weapons have also attracted contemporary thinkers. And in that respect, it would perhaps be fair to say that Snesev's thoughts on war are

---

<sup>22</sup> Baranets, 2017.

particularly useful today in a time of non-linear and hybrid war. At least, it offers us deeper insights into the mindset of the current military political leadership.

Finally, it is clear that Snesev's geopolitical views resounds well within the current military leadership. His contribution to developing a theoretical base for a military doctrine is evident, if appreciated only almost 100 years afterwards. In addition, his thoughts on war, provide an important background for understanding current Russian thoughts on non-linear warfare, and the development military strategy. Without this background, we are unable to grasp current development, and will be surprised again.

## References

Cited works by A. E. Snesev

Snesev, Andrei. *Filosofia voiny*, Moskva: Lomonosov, 2013.

Snesev, A.E. *Pisma s fronta*, Moskva: Kuchkovo pole, 2012.

Snesev, A.E. *Zhizn i trudy Klauzevitsa*, Moskva, Kuchkovo pole, 2007.

Snesev, A.E. 'A. Svechin "Strategiia,"' *Voina i revoliutsiia*, Nr 4, 1926: 144-147.

Snesev A. 'Grimasy strategii,' *Voennaia mysl i revoliutsiia*, Nr 4, 1923: 74-85.

Snesev, A.E. 'Edinaia voennaia doktrina', *Voennoe delo*, Nr 8, 1920: 226-234.

## Secondary literature

Baluevskii, Yuri. 'Teoreticheskie i metodologicheskie osnovy formirovaniia voennoi doktriny Rossiiskoi Federatsii' *Voennaia mysl*, Nr 3, 2007, 14-21. <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2007-vm/10069-teoreticheskie-i-metodologicheskie-osnovy> (2021-02-11).

Baranets, V. 'Nachalnik Genshtaba Vooruzhennykh sil Rossii general armii Valerii Gerasimov', *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 26 December 2017, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26775/3808693/> (2021-02-11).

Bartosh, A.A. *Tuman gibridnoi voiny*, Moskva: Goriachaia liniia – Telekom, 2019.

Danilenko, I. 'Geroi Voiny i Geroi Truda', in A.E. Snesev, *Pisma iz fronta 1914-17*, Moskva: Kuchkovo pole, 2012, 8-31.

Danilenko. I. S. 'Vydaiushchiisia voennii teoretik i filosof XX veka' in Snesev, *Filosofia voiny*, Moskva, Lomonosov, 2013, 5-32.

Frunze, M. V. *Edinaia voennaia doktrina i Krasnaia Armia*, Moskva: Voenizdat NKO SSSR, 1941. Originaly published in 1921.

Kotovskii, G. G. (eds) *Andrei Evgenievich Snesev – zhizn i nauchnaia deiatelnost'*, Moskva: Nauka, 1973, 11-22.

Høiback, Harald. *Understanding Military Doctrine: A multidisciplinary approach*, London: Routledge, 2013.

Kokoshin, A. A. *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91*, Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 1998.

Kokoshin, A.A. *Vydaiushchiisia otechestvennyi voennii teoretik i voenachalnik Aleksandr Andreevich Svechin*, Moskva: Izd. Moskovoskogo universiteta, 2013.



Mikhailov, Yuri. 'Problemy voiny v tvorchestve A.E. Snesarev', *Vlast*, Nr 10/2007, 98-100.

Mikhailov, Yuri. *Voенно-politicheskie vzgliady A. E. Snesareva i sovremennost*, avtoreferat dissertatsii, Moskva, 2008.

Odom, William E. "Thoughts on the future of the Soviet military", *Defense Analysis*, (7) 2-3, 1991: 133–39.

Paret, Peter, 'Two historians on defeat in war and its causes' in P. Paret (ed.), *Clausewitz in his time. Essays in the cultural and intellectual history of thinking about war*, New York: Berghahn, 113-126.

Seidt, Hans-Ulrich. Lehrjahre am Hindukusch: Kontinuität und Zäsuren russischer Geostrategie. *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 12, 283–299 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-019-00774-9>.

Sokolovskii, V. D. (ed.) *Voennaia strategii*, 2nd ed. Moskva: Voенnoe izdatelstvo Ministerstvo oborony SSSR, 1963.

*Voенno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 'Issledovateli otechestvennoi strategii', Nr 10, 2007, 15.

## Questions and answers

**Q:** What are the reasons for “rebirth” of Snesarev’s works in current Russia?

**GP:** He was mentioned also in some publications of the Soviet time in late 1960s and 1970s, but it is only after 2000 that he gained prominence. It happened after publishing the manuscript of the book on Clausewitz, which initially was published within the General Staff Academy in 2001 and followed by a seminar in 2004. He’s book on Philosophy of war was published in 2013.

It is not only because that the chiefs of the General staff (Balujevski and Gerasimov) mentioned him but also because his memory has been very much alive in the General Staff Academy, where they have been thinking about the development of current military strategy in quickly changing strategic landscape. It is a combination. I should also mention late professor Danilenko, who promoted Snerarev within that particular context.

It is the key-points I mentioned are the very reason for his prominence and the fact that the Russians themselves have almost forgotten him, though he had highly relevant insights into developing military strategy and the relation with policy, economy, and society at large.

## 6

### THE ROLE OF “AKTIVNOST” TODAY IN RUSSIAN MILITARY-STRATEGIC THINKING AND THE CRUCIAL TARGET OF THE “PROTEST POTENTIAL OF THE POPULATION”

Rod Thornton and (Marina Miron, absent from the seminar)

#### Abstract

This chapter considers how the Soviet principle of *aktivnost'* is still being employed today by the Russian military as it attempts to weaken - in a variety of ways - both the societal structures and the military efficacy of certain of its Western state adversaries. Pressure is being constantly applied, mostly through the application of sub-threshold warfare activities, that is designed to undermine and destabilise opponents. This chapter highlights the particular Russian focus on one particular target of *aktivnost'* – the ‘protest potential of the population’ within Western states.

#### Introduction

There appears to be a distinctly aggressive edge to Russian military activity today. In recent years, Russian forces have been used in Syria, Ukraine and Libya. Russian-controlled private military companies (PMCs) are also operating in many locales, most notably in Africa. Overseas bases for the Russian armed forces are being built in Tartus in Syria and Port Sudan in Sudan and are being sought elsewhere. Evident also are what may be looked upon as sabre-rattling military exercises and the provocative use of both naval and air assets. Russia’s warships are, for instance, acting to intimidate NATO vessels and its long-range bombers operate close to NATO airspace, while other aircraft conduct close flybys of NATO ships and aircraft. Familiar too are the information warfare operations and the likes of Russian attempts to influence elections in the West; to conduct cyber attacks, and to engage in operations abroad designed to be subversive and politically influential. Even these ‘non-military’ activities are perceived as being directed by the Russian military - through the Ministry of Defence’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).<sup>1</sup> Other non-kinetic operations can also be sourced to the GRU. Notable here are the poisoning of the Skripals at Salisbury in the United Kingdom in 2018 and the attempted assassination of the Montenegrin Prime Minister in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

All of the above undertakings are just some of the pointedly provocative actions originating with the Russian military. It is acting on behalf of a government that is itself

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexsey Ramm, ‘Russian information and cyber operations’, *Moscow Defense Brief*, 58/1 (2017).

<sup>2</sup> The GRU (or GU) was held responsible in both instances. See ‘Bellingcat: Top GRU officer coordinated Skripal attack from London’, *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/skripal-novichok-poisoning-attack-gru-officer-sergeyev-bellingcat-report/30029474.html>; and ‘Russian GRU agents found guilty of attempted Montenegro coup’, *Warsaw Institute Russia Monitor*, 9 May 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-gru-agents-found-guilty-attempted-montenegro-coup/>

clearly minded to act in a belligerent fashion towards those states that it now perceives to be its adversaries in what has been dubbed an ‘era of persistent competition’.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to examine why this degree of Russian aggressiveness is evident. The argument presented here is that it is largely a product of Russian military-strategic culture. That is, it is down to what appears to be a default setting of the Russian military to display the quality of *aktivnost’*.

*Aktivnost’* is a word that does not readily translate into English, but it may be looked upon almost as a form of defence-through-offence that has influenced Russian and before that, Soviet, military-strategic, operational and tactical thinking for many decades.<sup>4</sup> The general idea is that there is a Russian military predisposition to put disruptive pressure - in both peacetime (and regardless of any geo-political threat scenarios) and when engaged in actual kinetic battle - on adversaries in order to create degrees of what might be called ‘neutralisation’. The means used can be non-kinetic or kinetic. *Aktivnost’* is, ultimately, about the seizing of the initiative; about being proactive rather than reactive, and about keeping on the front foot at all times.<sup>5</sup> The targets of *aktivnost’* and its disruptive actions can range from alliances - such as NATO - to individual adversary states and all the way down to fielded infantry platoons on a battlefield. *Aktivnost’* is core to the Russian way of warfare. ‘*Aktivnost’*’, as Shimon Naveh puts it, ‘represents a unique idea, constituting one of the fundamentals of Russian military thought’.<sup>6</sup>

*Aktivnost’* is a quality that today’s Western analysts of both Russian military and geo-political behaviour need, as this chapter will highlight, to factor into their thinking.

This chapter will, in particular, highlight the growing danger for NATO and its partner states inherent in one particular facet of *aktivnost’*. This is the Russian military’s emphasis on the use of what it calls ‘information-psychological warfare’. This is designed, fundamentally, to foment social unrest in the Western states that it targets. This form of warfare is focussed on agitating what current Russian military doctrine refers to as the ‘protest potential of the population’. It is this element of *aktivnost’* that may be seen as posing the most significant threat to certain Western states.

## Russian belligerence

Before going on to look at the background to the concept of *aktivnost’* and the focus on the ‘protest potential’, it seems necessary to firstly provide a framework for understanding the current Russian acts of belligerence. There may be several cause-and-effect rationales behind them. Russia has, for instance, been called a revisionist state with designs on re-ordering the world to suit its own particular *weltanschauung*. Status quo powers in the West have therefore to represent an obstacle and thus targets. Russia may also, as expressed by the European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell,

---

<sup>3</sup> Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, launches Integrated Operating Concept, UK Ministry of Defence, 30 September 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-general-sir-nick-carter-launches-the-integrated-operating-concept>

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Leites, *Soviet Style in Warfare* (New York, NY: Crane Russak, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of New-Generation War,” *Military Thought*, 22(4), 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 172.

look upon ‘democratic values as an existential threat’ and Moscow thereby seeks to target those countries which espouse these dangerous ‘democratic values’.<sup>7</sup> Other rationales could, of course, be put forward for Russia’s behaviour, including naked revanchism and even perhaps outright fear of what NATO’s on-paper military strength might one day do to Russia in any surprise attack. This Russian belligerence might then be a form of ‘preventive action’. It is not, however, the idea here to investigate too deeply the rationales behind this Russian state belligerence. Rather, the idea is to highlight the dangers for certain Western states inherent in the actual manifestations of this belligerence by the military arm of the Russian state. This is its propensity, as a default setting, to be proactive and provocative: to display *aktivnost*’.

### **Russian sub-threshold warfare**

If the actual acts of belligerence by the Russian military are examined, however, they appear to be largely characterised by restraint. The kinetic actions in the likes of Ukraine, Syria and Libya are specifically limited and often those measures that utilise traditional military assets (such as ships, aircraft, etc) are merely non-kinetic in nature – being predominantly intimidatory (‘buzzing’/near collisions, etc). To this mix can be added the use of other elements of Russian military power, specifically activity in the information warfare realm, including cyber attacks. The latter, as the Russian military perceives it, can take both cyber-psychological and cyber-technical forms.

To use the term *du jour*, all of these above Russian acts of aggression fall into the category of ‘sub-threshold’ operations where, basically, they are not sufficient (and designed to be so) to goad any targeted state adversary into a kinetic response.<sup>8</sup> This form of warfare used to be referred to as ‘hybrid warfare’ (until recent doctrinal statements by the United States and United Kingdom militaries dropped the term from their military lexicons as it was causing conceptual confusion<sup>9</sup>). In the eyes of the Russian military, it is important that its *aktivnost*’ measures do not provoke NATO into a kinetic response. There is a general understanding within this military that it would lose if NATO ever did decide to use its full conventional force potential against Russia. Objectively, the Russian military does understand its weakness vis-à-vis NATO’s conventional forces.

While often seen to focus on shaping adversary decision-making on a number of levels, the ultimate aim of the Russian sub-threshold activities appears, fundamentally, to be to destabilise the alliance that is NATO; the individual powerful states at its core; certain weaker but strategically impotent NATO members, and a number of NATO partner states. The states under threat are to be targeted from within: to create

---

<sup>7</sup> Jon Henley, ‘EU chief’s Moscow humiliation is sign of bloc disunity on Russia, say experts’, *The Guardian*, 11 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/11/eu-chiefs-moscow-humiliation-is-sign-of-bloc-disunity-on-russia-say-experts>

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, *Multi-Domain Integration*, JCN 1/20, UK Ministry of Defence, December 2020, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/950789/20201112-JCN\\_1\\_20\\_MDI.PDF](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950789/20201112-JCN_1_20_MDI.PDF); also *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC, December 2018, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-MultidomainOps2028.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Technically, the term ‘hybrid warfare’ includes both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches but in modern nomenclature hybrid warfare has come to refer merely to activities in just the non-kinetic space.

what Janis Berzins notably called an ‘inner decay’.<sup>10</sup> Moscow is using - through its military arm - non-kinetic means to create degrees of destabilisation and disruption that appear to be planned so that NATO as an organisation, the militaries of its core states and the governmental structures that control NATO militaries are unable to either appropriately stand up to or, indeed, to take any effective political or military action against Russian interests. Degrees of ‘neutralisation’ are created. Russia seems to be playing what is, in effect, a zero-sum game: the weaker its adversaries become then the stronger Russia becomes *or*, according to another point of view, the less vulnerable Russia becomes to any possible NATO ‘aggression’.<sup>11</sup>

This push to weaken NATO and state adversaries through the military’s sub-threshold activities was highlighted perhaps most notably in a 2013 article by the Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov. He pointed out then that future ‘warfare’ would involve a ratio of four parts non-kinetic activity to just one part kinetic and that the main target of this non-kinetic activity would be the internal cohesion of adversary states.<sup>12</sup> The writings of other important military authors, such as Chekinov and Bogdanov in several articles in *Voennaya Mysl’* [Military Thought] also stressed the importance of trying to undermine opposing states from within, rather than trying to impose military defeat on them from without (which Russian forces, as is understood, are largely incapable of doing where NATO states are concerned).<sup>13</sup>

This notion of ‘warfare’ moving away from the use of kinetic tools and more towards the non-kinetic was captured in large part by the Russian Military Doctrine of 2014 within its espousal of the ‘strategic deterrence’ logic. This concept will have been discussed more fully in other chapters in this book, so it is not the intention here to describe it in detail.<sup>14</sup> But basically it can be seen as including a series of sub-threshold measures being applied against targeted state adversaries in peacetime in a variety of realms continually and often in coordination, or even synergistically, with the aim of undermining those states from within. Relying overwhelmingly on information means (including cyber), the ultimate aim would be to ignite what the Military Doctrine refers to as the ‘protest potential’ of any adversary state’s population. Once this ‘potential’ has sufficient impetus within any state then Russia can reap the rewards in terms of the adversary states becoming weaker and thus more likely to be manipulated by Moscow; or, if those states do become completely ungovernable because of domestic protest movements, then they may become subject to actual ‘control’ by Moscow. As such, and in Clausewitzian terms, they would thus have been completely ‘neutralised’ and thus defeated.

Of course, in the 2014 doctrine, the point was made that it is Western state actors who will be trying to play on the ‘protest potential’ of the Russian population and thereby seek to undermine the control of the Kremlin. But, as ever when reading Russian military documentation and articles, what is portrayed as a threat to Russia has to be understood as the Russian military stressing how just how effective certain

---

<sup>10</sup> Janis Berzins, ‘Russia’s new generation warfare in Ukraine: implications for Latvian defence policy’, National Defence Academy of Latvia Centre for Strategic and Security Studies, April 2014, <https://sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/New-Generation-Warfare.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> This idea of Russian being under threat from NATO is a constant refrain in Russian military writings.

<sup>12</sup> Valery Gerasimov, ‘Tsennost nauki v predvidenii’, *Voенно-promyshlenniy kurier*, 27 February 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Rod Thornton, ‘The Russian Military’s “New Main Emphasis”: Asymmetric Warfare’, *RUSI Journal*, 162/4 (2017), [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2017.1381401](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2017.1381401)

<sup>14</sup> See Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, ‘Russian strategic deterrence’, *Survival*, 58/4 (2016).

activities can be. If they are being used by the West against Russia then it must be logical for the Russian military to itself utilise the self-same tools against Western targets. Mark Galeotti calls this the use of ‘Aesopian language’ by the Russian military.<sup>15</sup>

## Non-kinetic warfare

At first glance, all of these ideas about warfare today being a case of military organisations coming more to actually target the internal fabric of their state adversaries through the use of non-kinetic means seem new. (Military organisations are, after all, supposed to engage other military organisations kinetically.) The sense is that this is a novel approach given the impetus in the current era by the availability of a host of new technologies and information-era tools. It would seem, therefore, to be a military-strategic approach only fit for its age. But just how new is this idea of the Russian military using *non-kinetic approaches* in order to achieve strategic effect?

This chapter seeks to point out that this latest emphasis on non-kinetic means to generate internal disruption within adversary states is actually nothing new for Russian military thinking and long predates the current ‘information age’. What is evident today is merely a re-emphasising of what might be seen as a long-held Russian military propensity: that is, to engage in non-kinetic *aktivnost'* measures aimed at seeking to destabilise adversary states from within in peacetime.

## Background to *aktivnost'*

It is important that the depth of the inculcation of *aktivnost'* into Russian military thought is understood. Where *aktivnost'* is concerned, the important notion of ‘path dependency’ may be seen to be involved. According to this idea, modes of operation that were employed in the past will continue to be used by any organisation in the future because it makes intuitive sense to do so - no matter how changed the external circumstances might become.<sup>16</sup> Understanding organisational culture is key here. Military organisations are seen to have strong organisational cultures that are very hard to change, and which create firmer path dependencies than would be apparent in, say, business-orientated organisations. These have profit motives that will always be moving them away from path dependencies because reactive changes/innovations are often necessary in the business world. Military organisations are not subject to the exigencies of the marketplace and thus their path dependencies tend to remain firm. Indeed, to use the pertinent language, this path dependency relating to Russian military *aktivnost'* may be seen as being particularly ‘sticky’.<sup>17</sup>

## A history of *aktivnost'*

Specifically, non-kinetic *aktivnost'* measures were applied during the Soviet era but Russian-studies historiography tends to give them a different name. There was the

---

<sup>15</sup> Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political War: Moving Beyond the Hybrid* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Paul Pierson, ‘Increasing returns, path dependence and the study of politics’, *The American Political Science Review*, 94/2 (2000).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Mariana Prado and Michael Trebilcock, ‘Path dependence, development and the dynamics of institutional reform’, *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 59/3 (2009).

employment, at the geo-strategic level and particularly in the Cold War era, of a form of activity then known as ‘active restraint’ (*aktivnoya sderzhanost'*). This was a long-term, non-kinetic strategic tool designed to weaken the Soviet Union’s ‘main enemies’ – individual NATO states and the Alliance itself – but without provoking a kinetic response. Active restraint consisted of the continuous application of a series of low-level ‘active measures’ (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*), which concentrated on the manipulation of information. The Soviet military, alongside the KGB and the Ministry of Interior, were, as the writer Anatoliy Golitsyn expressed it in the 1980s, ‘mobilised to influence international relations in directions required by the new long-range policy [‘active restraint’], and, in effect, to *destabilise* the “main enemies” and weaken the alliances among them.’<sup>18</sup> Such non-kinetic activities, which can be seen to come under the umbrella concept of *aktivnost'*, have, of course, also considerable resonance today. In large part, these ‘active restraint’ measures of the past can be looked upon as mirroring the non-kinetic elements of the ‘strategic deterrence’ idea of today. Of course, the current activities employed by Russia’s defence and security agencies tend now to have far more sophistication, most notably in terms of the use of operations in the information realm and especially in cyberspace.

Much of the energy in the Soviet period for applying *aktivnost'* measures came from the fear of a surprise attack by Western states on the homeland. Marshal Vasili Sokolovsky was one who described this fear of such an attack in the book he edited in 1963 entitled, *Military Strategy: Soviet Doctrine and Concepts*, As Raymond Garthoff put it in his introduction to an English-language edition of this book, ‘the Soviets have a Pearl Harbor complex’.<sup>19</sup> That is, they feared a sudden and overwhelming attack that could destroy the Soviet Union’s economic and military potential overnight. As such, and to mitigate the effects of any such surprise attack, the senior leadership of the Soviet military felt that they had to take a full part in working assiduously to weaken and destabilise the Western adversaries in peacetime so that they would simply not be in a position to engage effectively in any war with the Soviet Union.

A particular desire of the military was to mitigate the effects of any attack launched by NATO in its initial phases. If the enemy was allowed to develop its strengths without interference, then the threat was that the Soviet military would lose this initial phase. If it did, and to quote Sokolovsky, then ‘all is lost’. Such an immediate setback could not be made up for later in any conflict. To quote Garthoff, ‘In other words, either side could win the ensuing war by winning the first phase, and each must make strenuous efforts at *preparation, vigilance, pre-emption* or quick reaction, and defence – to see to it at least that the opponent doesn’t win the first round’.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, the Soviet leaders thus felt that they had to use their military to its best effect *before* any conflict began. This *military* had, in essence, to make non-kinetic prior ‘preparations’. It was stressed by the Soviet leadership that, and again to quote Garthoff, the ‘*political uses of military power* short of major war will...prove to be the substance of the contest’. It is thus necessary to understand the importance the Soviets placed on this idea of using the military as an instrument whose ‘efforts’, in Garthoff’s words, ‘will remain

---

<sup>18</sup> Anatoliy Golitsyn, *New Lies for Old* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1984), p. 49. Emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Garthoff in foreword to Marshal V. D Sokolovsky (ed), *Military Strategy: Soviet Doctrine and Concepts* (London: Praeger, 1963), p. xi.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii. Stress added.

focused on political conflict'.<sup>21</sup> In essence, the threat to the Soviet Union needed to be mitigated by using Soviet military power, not so much in purely static deterrence terms, but rather in a more proactive, non-kinetic, way *prior* to any outbreak of conflict. Non-kinetic *aktivnost'* measures had to be employed to make the necessary 'preparations'.

### **Aktivnost' today**

Moving on from this Soviet period, the same type of situation can certainly be recognised as applying today. There is still a fear in Russia of the surprise attack (a 'Pearl Harbor') by the United States and its NATO allies. This is seen as most probably taking the form of a non-nuclear strike on the Russian homeland using the thousands of cruise missiles in the Prompt Global Strike (PGS) system. President Vladimir Putin has himself voiced his fears about such an attack.<sup>22</sup>

The Russian government and military also feel that they face another threat vector. They have shown that they are acutely conscious of being the victim of a sub-threshold warfare campaign directed at Russia by Western military and security agencies. When today's Russian military publications are examined there is the oft-mentioned idea of the West applying 'hybrid warfare' (*gibridnaya voina*) against Russia. Malign Western state actors are supposedly utilising the likes of NGOs, information warfare - including cyber warfare - and *agents provocateurs* (which Alexei Navalny is accused of being by the Kremlin) to destabilise Russia; to undermine its social order and to create 'colour revolutions'.<sup>23</sup> The change of governments in Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine in 2014 were, according to the Russian leadership, the result of such Western interference. Russia, it is perceived, might be 'next'.<sup>24</sup>

With these twin threats from a surprise kinetic attack and the instigation of a colour revolution in Russia, and with a military path dependency stressing the seizing of the initiative and the need to make 'preparations', it may come as no surprise that this military would be engaging in what appear to be belligerent *aktivnost'* measures today. Its default position is to be proactive and on the front foot. It has to be applying measures that would go some way to negating these twin threats. The measures must, though, and as noted, remain sub-threshold (or 'political'). Hence, they will mostly be in the information warfare realm with the aim of creating destabilisation and disruption internally within state adversaries.

In terms of preventing any PGS strike, the Russian military leadership understands that for such a PGS to be ordered, NATO would have to be in full agreement and that the US governmental structures must also be able to speak with one voice so that such a bold decision to be made. A destabilised, disrupted adversary riven by disunity and more concerned with domestic matters than foreign would be one unlikely to

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Rod Thornton, 'Countering Prompt Global Strike: The Russian military presence in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean and its strategic deterrence role', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 31/1 (2019)

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Valerie Bunce, 'The prospects for a color revolution in Russia', *Daedalus, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 146/2, (2017).

<sup>24</sup> Dimitry Gorenburg, 'Countering colour revolutions: Russia's new security strategy and its implications for US foreign policy', *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, 342, September 2014.



form the political and military consensus to make a major decision such as to attack Russia or, indeed, to engage in a coordinated hybrid warfare campaign against Russia.

Of course, while understanding that there might be a defensive - 'preventive action' - logic behind the Russian military's wish to engage in activities that seek to destabilise the NATO alliance, its core states and those of its partners, it must also be understood that there might be a more aggressive intent involved. With its *aktivnost'* measures, the Russian military could also be playing the aforementioned zero-sum game: the more disruptive pressure that is applied on adversary states and the weaker they become then the stronger Russia becomes. With such a change in relative power, greater licence could be generated for Moscow to push its own geo-political agenda. A weakened, 'neutralised' West would be unlikely to stand up to Russian revisionist or even revanchist tendencies.

It must, of course, be understood that there might not be a specific set of rationales behind the Russian military's *aktivnost'* measures. It might simply be a case of a default setting being applied. With path dependencies in mind, these measures might be being utilised simply because the Soviet/Russian military has always sought to apply them – regardless of degrees of threat or any revisionist/revanchist tendencies.

All of these *aktivnost'* measures, though - and whatever the logic behind them - engaged in by the Russian military must, of course, still be sub-threshold. Open conflict has to be avoided. While the intimidatory use of military assets might have its place, the most strategically effective forms of these measures will be in those in the information realm.

While the plethora of information operations (from social media disinformation to cyber-technical attacks) that the Russian military engages in may create degrees of destabilisation, their true effect may be seen to occur only when they reach what may be seen as a 'critical mass' and when they can be effective enough to excite what the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine called the 'protest potential of the population'. Here is one of the core goals of any destabilisation campaign organised by any malign actor - whether it has defence in mind or offence: it is to make the population of its adversary state actually conduct the 'war' on the malign actor's behalf. It represents the best means of creating 'inner decay'. It is highly efficient way of 'neutralising' an opponent.

### **The 'protest potential of the population'**

The ability of the Russian military to generate a significant degree of 'protest potential' in the West may be viewed as an unlikely prospect. The liberal democracies in the West seem strong. However, the events on Capitol Hill in Washington in January 2021 served to illustrate that there was indeed a good of deal of 'protest potential' within a country - the United States - that was seen as the very bedrock of liberal democratic values. Even if Russian military misinformation and disinformation activity had nothing to do with Capitol Hill (but is highly likely that it did play some part), the event must have given encouragement that significant results could be achieved.

It is important to understand just how important to both Soviet and Russian *military* thinking this idea of using the 'protest potential of the population' is. To make use of this potential is, again, nothing new. Just because the actual phrase only made its appearance in the Military Doctrine of 2014 does not mean that the idea behind it is in any way novel. Focusing on this 'potential' is not the product of the information age

and all it has to offer in terms of gaining strategic advantage; it has actually been central to Russian military thinking going a long way back into Soviet times.

### ***Myatezhvoyna* [Rebellion War]**

In the immediate post-Second World War period, there was the sense in the Kremlin and the Soviet military that the West would try and weaken the Soviet Union's societal structures. Influenced by and building on the thinking of the British strategist Basil Liddell-Hart and his 'indirect approach', some post-war Soviet thinkers began referring to what, in 1946, the military theorist Evgeny Messner called *myatezhvoyna*.<sup>25</sup> This basically translates as 'riot war' or 'rebellion war'. The central idea was that Western actors were trying to destabilise the post-war Soviet Union and undermine its social cohesion by, in essence, working on the 'protest potential of the population'. This *myatezhvoyna* was a mode of warfare that would, in Soviet thinking, make use of, at one end of the spectrum, terrorists and illegal military formations while, at the other end, employ 'information-psychological' means to influence and to agitate the population. All of such measures and their like would be designed to focus on turning what was referred to as the *dusha* - the 'soul' or the 'psyche' - of the Soviet people actively against their government.

Messner's ideas first appeared just after the fighting had ceased in the Great Patriotic War and when the Soviet Union was facing what was then seen as a rising threat from the Western liberal democracies. 'The cannons of the big war', wrote Messner, 'became silent, but the common war against Russia is assuming new shapes...in reference to the conditions of the conduct of *myatezhvoyna* against Russia and the battle for the souls of the population.'<sup>26</sup>

Continuing into the 1960s, this fear of Western actors seeking to create an 'inner decay' within Soviet society still held good in Soviet military thinking. The morale of the population was again considered key; particularly as this morale was seen as directly linked to the fighting potential of the fielded forces: undermine the former and you also undermine the latter. As Marshal Sokolovski expressed it, 'the most important sources of high morale in the armed forces are the social and political homogeneity of the rear areas and the unity of spirit of all levels of the population.'<sup>27</sup> The 'military strategists of imperialism', noted Sokolovski, would employ non-kinetic means to create debilitating schisms in Soviet society. He pointed out that 'an important part of [their] strategic plans is allotted to ideological work...among the population of the opponent, [and] to so-called "psychological warfare."' Importantly, 'psychological warfare' was seen as not just a mere tool of influence - creating a long-term undermining - but also as an actual war-winning instrument that could have effect in a fairly short order. 'Psychological warfare' was seen as capable of delivering,

---

<sup>25</sup> In Messner's book, *Rebellion – The Name of the Third World War* [*Myatezh – Imya Tretei Mirovoi Voyny*] (Moscow: Moscow Publishing House, 1960). See also V.I. Marchenkova, I.V. Domnin, and A.E. Savinkin (eds.), *If You Want Peace, Defeat the Rebellion War! The Creative Heritage of E. E. Messner* [Hochesh' Mira, Pobedi Myatezhvoynu! Tvorcheskoe Nasledie E.E. Messnera], *Russian Military Collection No. 21* (Moscow: Voennyi Universitet Russkyi Put', 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Authors' translation. Messner quoted in Sergey V. Anchukov, *The Secrets of Rebellion War. Russia at the Turn of the Century* [Sekrety Myatezhnoi Voyny. Rossiya na rubezhe stoletii], (Moscow: 2000), p. 691. Available at: [http://www.pseudology.org/Anchukov/Anchukov\\_TaynyMyatezhVoiny2.pdf](http://www.pseudology.org/Anchukov/Anchukov_TaynyMyatezhVoiny2.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Sokolovsky (ed), *Military Strategy: Soviet Doctrine and Concepts*, p.39.

in Sokolovski's words, a 'demoralising blow which...could lead to final victory within a short time.'<sup>28</sup> It must be noted here that this stressing of the importance of the power of psychological warfare is coming from a leading *military* figure. This, in itself, is noteworthy. The Soviet military's acceptance of the role and power of psychological warfare stood in stark contrast to what was evident in military organisations in Western countries. For the US, British and French militaries, for instance, psychological warfare was traditionally seen as something to employ as a tool of counter-insurgency against sub-state actors - and not in any context where peer- or near-peer states were the adversary.

Thus, it should be understood, and given the importance of Sokolovski as a source, that there was a sense in the Soviet Union at the time that the country could be just as easily defeated by the use of non-kinetic, 'indirect' means as it could by a surprise kinetic attack. And, of course, because the Soviet Union was seen as being so vulnerable to a non-kinetic campaign then it must also be an effective military tool and therefore one that could also work in reverse. It must thus be assumed that the Aesopian prism still applied then - that what threatened the Soviet Union and its military was also supposed to be applied by the Soviet side against the West and its military organisations. And all available evidence supports this notion.<sup>29</sup> Western states could also be made subject to a 'demoralising blow' leading to a quick 'victory' simply by using non-kinetic psychological warfare means.

Messner's concept of *myatezhvoyna* and its focus on the indirect approach of utilising the discontent of domestic populations to produce results at the strategic level continued to hold resonance in Soviet strategic thinking. It did not lose its appeal with the passage of time. *Myatezhvoyna* and its generation through psychological warfare techniques was still being discussed at a time - as in the immediate post-Cold War era and in its immediate aftermath - when Russia and the West were on relatively good terms. There would seem to be no reason at this time to discuss any 'demoralising blows' which needed to be delivered against adversary states. But there were such discussions.

Analysing the *myatezhvoyna* concept in 2000, Sergei Anchukov made the point that the winner in any strategic tussle between adversary peer states would not, because of the power of *myatezhvoyna*, be down to how relatively preponderant each might be in any armed confrontation. Rather, it would be down to who could win in the 'invisible battle' for the '*dusha*' of *both* Russia's own domestic population *and* that of its opponents *before* any armed hostilities broke out.<sup>30</sup> As Anchukov pointed out, Russia still had state adversaries and, despite any geopolitical rapprochement in the immediate post-Cold War era, they would still be trying to foment rebellion in Russia; still be trying to direct or facilitate terrorist attacks; still be employing special forces in destabilisation missions and still be trying to assassinate political leaders. And it would all be geared to turning the Russian population against its own government.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-41.

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (London: Profile Books, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Anchukov, *The Secrets of Rebellion War* pp. 14-15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Anchukov's clear message, moreover, was that Russia, *in order to defend itself*, should reciprocate. Prior 'preparation' for war was again key. He stressed that the general undermining of the morale of any state population to generate *myatezhvoyna* could actually be a much more utilisable tool of 'warfare' than kinetic force, because, he said, of the dangers of nuclear escalation. Wars could thus, in essence, be won through generating *myatezhvoyna* in adversary states without inherent risk. But this could only come about if, as he pointed out, the constant pressure of the various elements within the *myatezhvoyna* concept was maintained. The measures employed had to be many, varied, coordinated and continuously applied.<sup>32</sup> It was *aktivnost'* in all but name.

### ***Konsciental'nye Voyny* [Wars of Conscience]**

There was also another variant of the 'invisible battle' for the *dusha* of states' populations being put forward at roughly the same time as Anchukov was expressing himself about *myatezhvoyna*. Other strategic thinkers such as V. K. Potekhin, Yuri Kroupnov, Yuri Gromyko and Vladimir Makarov were all separately discussing what were called 'wars of conscience'. In short, this idea sees human conscience as being the main battleground of strategic confrontation. Thus, the principal target in these 'wars of conscience' was the concept of allegiance: that is, how an individual among a population self-identifies, who or what they see themselves as 'belonging' to. The aim of such wars was thus to turn such individuals away from allegiance to their governments and towards other loci of allegiance, ones antagonistic to the ruling authorities.<sup>33</sup>

'Wars of conscience' can also be seen to very much fit in, of course, with the *myatezhvoyna* idea. Those whose allegiances to the authorities are undermined are far more likely to protest - to rebel - against those authorities. This form of warfare was to be conducted, to translate from the Russian term, in the 'informational-psychological' realm. As Makarov put it, within 'fixed communities' the 'distribution of images and texts through communication channels [will be used] to destroy the functionality of conscience' and thus traditional norms of personal identification.<sup>34</sup> The first objective of such 'wars of conscience' is, therefore, the undermining of traditional belief systems. Potekhin saw that, in such 'wars', 'the object of destruction and transformation is the value setting of the enemy population'.<sup>35</sup> Kroupnov noted that once that value setting has been undermined then, in theory, any so-called 'identity' can then be grafted on to the subject of any attack in line with the wishes of the instigator of the 'war of conscience'.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Yuri V. Gromyko, 'The weapons of conscience and wars of conscience. A lecture by Yuri Gromyko', [Konsziental'noe Oryzhie i Konsziental'nye Voyny. Lekzia Yuria Gromyko], *GTMarket.ru* (25 February 2007), available at: <https://gtmarket.ru/library/articles/782>

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir M. Makarov, 'War of Conscience: Myth and Reality' [Konsziental'naya Voyna Mif i Real'nost'], *Nauka i Voennaya Bezopasnost'*, 2 (2003), p. 20. Available at: <http://militaryarticle.ru/nauka-i-voennaya-bezopasnost/2003/11842-konszientalnaja-vojna-mif-ili-realnost>

<sup>35</sup> V.K. Potekhin, 'Contemporary Wars and Russia's National Security' [Sovremennye Voyny i Nacional'naya Bezopasnost' Rossii], in Y. Gromyko (ed.), *Who Will Own the Weapons of Consciousness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?* [Komu Budet Prenodlezhat' Konsziental'noe Oryzhie v XXI Veke?], (Moscow: Rossiya, 1997), pp. 69-87.

<sup>36</sup> Yuri Kroupnov, 'How Russia can prevent the Fifth World War' [Kak Rossiya Smozhet Predotvratit' Pyatuyu Mirovuyu Voynu], *Kroupnov.ru* (21 February 2005), available at: <http://www.kroupnov.ru/pubs/2005/02/09/10403/>

The point being made by these authors, and in particular by Gromyko, was that, and as pro-forma, Russia was itself the victim of such a ‘war of conscience’ being conducted against it by the West.<sup>37</sup> But they were talking in terms that indicated that all states could be made subject to such ‘wars’. Russia could be both victim and instigator simply because ‘wars of conscience’ appeared to be an effective and efficient way of achieving strategic results – and, crucially, again without risking a kinetic confrontation.

The chief defence mechanism, of course, in terms of countering ‘wars of conscience’, and as these authors were pointing out, was in creating a firm ‘identity’ for the at-risk population. Thus, senior political leaders in any country under threat would have an important role in inculcating a high level of patriotic sentiment and thus of national self-identification. This is not just a question of having allegiance to a country, it needs to go further in order to engender governmental stability. In Russia today, for instance, Putin seems very well aware that he must develop a sense among his own population that, if they want to show allegiance to Mother Russia, they must also show allegiance to him. He is now presenting himself as the personification of Russia – *l’etat, c’est moi*. Several Russian authors have noted this trend.<sup>38</sup>

But in order to use ‘wars of conscience’ as a strategic tool significant energy has to be put into the system. If the Russian military wants to play its part in generating both ‘wars of conscience’ and *myatezhvoyna* in adversary states then its *aktivnost’* measures will be a vital element in creating the necessary dynamics.

### Utilising the ‘protest potential’ today

Moving into the most recent era, the idea of utilising this ‘protest potential of the population’ is coming to receive more and more attention. In 2014, for instance, three officers from Belarus, writing in the influential, *Russian Journal of the Academy of Military Science*, stressed how ‘information-psychological warfare’ had now, given the technological means available, become such an important *military* tool. In line with previous thinkers on this issue, they noted that information-psychological warfare was a very powerful weapon. It was capable of undermining the social and political fabric of any state. An information-psychological warfare campaign could, as these three officers noted, bring about effect by, and among other approaches, usurping citizens’ cultural and moral values; enhancing political differences; provoking social, political, national and religious conflicts; mobilising protest movements; discrediting the authorities, and by encouraging government clampdowns that multiplied discontent. A point would be reached, they noted, where a population’s ‘social consciousness’ was so weakened that it could be manipulated by the instigator of any information-psychological attack. In essence, the instigator could gain ‘control’ of anti-government movements. The aim then, as these authors noted, would be to push for the ultimate goal

---

<sup>37</sup> Gromyko, ‘The weapons of consciousness and wars of consciousness’.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Kir Latukhin, ‘Putin named the most important Russian value’ [Putin nazval glavnyu zennost’ Rossii], *RG.ru* (7 April 2016), <https://rg.ru/2016/04/07/reg-szfo/putin-nazval-glavnuu-cennost-rossii.html>; and also, Dmitri Dubrovski, “‘Traditional Values’ – ideological weapons of contemporary Russia” [‘Traditsional’nye Zennosti’ – Ideologicheskoe Oruzhiye Sovremennoi Rossii], *Eurasianet.org* (31 March 2018). Available at: <https://russian.eurasianet.org/node/65199>

of 'regime change'.<sup>39</sup> And it would all seemingly come from within the state itself; how could an external actor be blamed? Hence, again the point was made that there could be no kinetic response from the state being 'attacked'.

The results gained in 'information-psychological warfare' would obviously depend on the degree of effort put it by whoever was conducting the 'warfare'. If Russia was the instigator here, then it would all depend on the quantity and quality of its sub-threshold *aktivnost'* measures.

This article is one of a number appearing recently in Russian military journals (most notably in *Military Thought*) that discuss 'information-psychological warfare'. It is, however, the one that perhaps describes its possible effects most clearly. As the US Army's principal analyst of the Russian military, Timothy Thomas, points out, these three authors, 'state that information-psychological warfare has now become an acknowledged form of military art. This is an extremely important statement and one which Western analysts should seriously consider as to its meaning and expression.'<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

It appears to be the case that the Russian military - whatever the geo-strategic situation and whatever the degree of threat the Russian state is exposed to - will, as a default position, always want to be proactive and operating on the front foot. It needs to be belligerent. This belligerence has been and is being displayed today through its *aktivnost'* measures. These must, however, remain sub-threshold in nature: the Russian military cannot go so far as to provoke NATO into a kinetic response.

The most utilisable and, indeed, the most effective forms of sub-threshold *aktivnost'* employed by the Russian military will be those in the information warfare realm. This is a form of warfare privileged today because of the advantages offered by the technologies available now in our 'information era'. These promise to develop significant degrees of strategic effect, particularly if information-psychological warfare is employed. Because of its long history of engaging in what Garthoff in the Soviet era called 'political conflict', the current Russian military will be both comfortable with and adept at employing information-psychological warfare. It thus comes as no surprise then to see the 'protest potential of the population' being mentioned in current Russian military doctrine. This is because the ultimate goal of information-psychological warfare applied at the strategic level will always be to change the political order in targeted states so that the new order suits Moscow's tastes. Popular protests can bring about 'regime change' and when it happens that state is then, in Russian thinking, 'neutralised'. Information-psychological warfare, properly focused, thus promises to win today's wars without firing a shot. As such, it is probably the most essential element of Russian military *aktivnost'*. Western military strategists and, indeed, politicians need to be aware and to develop counters.

---

<sup>39</sup> I. E. Kuleshov, B. B. Zhutdiev and D. A. Fedorov, 'Information-psychological confrontation under contemporary conditions: theory and practice', *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk* [The Journal of the Academy of Military Science], No. 1 (2014).

<sup>40</sup> Timothy L. Thomas, *Russian Military Thought: Concepts and Elements*, (McClean, VA: Mitre Corporation, 2019), at <https://www.mitre.org/sites/default/files/publications/pr-19-1004-russian-military-thought-concepts-elements.pdf>, p. 7-3

## Question and answers – panel discussion (Persson and Thornton)

**Q:** Today we've been discussing of what is unique in Russian strategic thinking and one of the themes has been notion of "holistic" and emphasising systemic measures integrating the non-military and military means. The question is about the originality or roots of this kind of thinking? Maybe there is nothing surprising here due to the fact that many authors' – Gudrun Persson brought up the Snerarev's way of thinking - writings were made in the context of the political regime being authoritarian – totalitarian and where the gap between politics and society were suppressed, non-existing or very vague. How do see the future of Russian strategic thinking in terms of its current political system and how the context influences the thinking in the military sphere?

**Q:** Observation on Snerarev's topicality related to his elaboration on total war – currently termed hybrid war.

**GP:** No comments on whether total war is hybrid war because I don't know what hybrid war is. But absolutely - the total war concept in the Western world is sort of tainted, so I would almost avoid that too, but what he does write about and what I think resonates very well is the relationship between the interests of the state and society at large and policy. What Snerarev is concerned with is that the defined interests of the state and the use of the armed forces to achieve - there should be a gap between and as he expresses it that the certain traits of the people or the skills of the people. He does that mainly I think because he is looking back not least to the Japanese war, where the popular support for the war was non-existent and obviously what happened with the coming down of the Romanov dynasty and the Civil war.

**RT:** I just throw this idea – the Russians today have this idea of forward defence which I kind of mentioned – one element of forward defence is "aktivnost" measures, or whatever you want to call them, and the idea of teleport continuous, low level sometimes high level, non-kinetic pressure on Western empires, notably the NATO Alliance, electronic kind of influence on elections, that is one method of Russian forward defence. The other one is the idea of making war in essence contactless, like Sliptshenko's idea. So, Russians develop these very long-range missiles of NATO's forces cannot match. So, if you push war outwards, you push war away from Russia itself, so Russia is not subject to any meaningful attack by NATO forces, important here is the AA/AD defence mechanisms which are causing quite alarm in NATO military circles because if you can't brake through a Russian air-defence-area-denial shield, then how can you hold Russia under leverage on the international stage. So, there is element of Russia protecting itself in this kind of kinetic way with the use of kind of airdefence shields but also the way of defending itself, in Russian eyes, by putting pressure on the West so that they are so weakened and destabilized – NATO, state governments, western power so that they don't have the ability to coordinate action against Russia or against Russian state interests. So, I think this kind of twin-track approach being adopted by the Russians: one "aktivnost" whether you want to call it that, and the other one: a more hard-edged military element basically making use of technologies and military weapon technologies.

**Q:** The theoritizing of Snesarev sounds fascinating and what really caught interest was the characterisation or description of state rather than party interests. So, I was wondering if you could say a bit about what implications are there for contemporary state

interests and what is the relationship between state interests and regime interests in the current context?

**GP:** I'll try to address very briefly because it's a very relevant and huge question – it's almost a seminar itself. What I can say at this point regarding the relationship between the current political regime, military leadership and the state if you will, is at least that the political leadership tends to tie the regime and the survivability of the regime to the fate of Russia. I mean - we have this famous “there is no Russia without Putin” and it tells me that that is their view. The discussion in military circles at least as I read them and when I talk to people is more nuanced, where also obviously geography plays an important role apart from the sphere of interests. That is the expressed in the national security strategy.

**Q:** I'd like you to contemplate a bit more about the relationship between the strategic deterrence that we discussed this morning and these concepts you illuminated so well?

**RT:** I don't actually see that much of a difference between “aktivnost” and strategic deterrence, but what I wanted to do, was kind of a move away from the idea of how we get where we are today with the strategic deterrence. So, if you look back to the “aktivnost” ideas and all the active measures and active restraint then you begin to my mind to form a better picture of why these strategic deterrence measures have been adopted and where they might go in the future. So it's a question of understanding, so I don't particularly see any massive difference between “aktivnost” and strategic deterrence – it's just a question of how we link that back to Soviet ideas and back to immediate post-war ideas about what these analysts are looking at and why they looking at what they are looking at. So, we generate a link basically, so there is no real kind of difference.

**Q:** Could you estimate or give your analysis on the fact that which one is more important for the current Russian strategic thinking – the Soviet heritage, as we have for example Snerarev, or the distorted perception of the Western way of war - in other words – the Western tradition and the Soviet tradition – which one plays a bigger role in your view in the current Russian thinking?

**RT:** To my mind, because I'm a big “path-dependency advocat”, what happened in the past will kind of dictate what goes on in the future and what goes on now despite what is new in the system – new technologies or new ideas or new ways of looking at the west. And we've talked about a lot about this Russian state and what makes the Russian state and like the United States and more or less Russia is defined by the other – what does the other do, be it, NATO be it, United States be it, so you define Russia, that country in terms of what it basically isn't, and it isn't the West. So, you always have to look towards the West as being this kind of in a sense malign actor in order to reinvigorate the idea that in essence Putin as the epitome of the Russian state has to be supported, because he's saving you, the Russian people from the depredations of the West and its societies. So, always often come back with these two populations and it the West and in the western militaries later we're discussing of all we have military technologies, guns and weapons and stuff and hardly ever discussing the importance of the effect of activities on the population itself. Is the population itself being destabilized, disunited, pulled apart and is harbinger of that what we've seen recently in Washington, at the Capitol Hill building – is that what we can expect more of in the future as part of a kind of population war, a war of conscience that the Russians might kind of, shall we say, wish to encourage in the future?



**GP:** I had a reflection during Rod Thornton's remark of two people on a different side during the civil war, when Snerarev joined the Reds and Messner the Whites and the latter eventually moved abroad. It's also about the discovery or rediscovery of Russian diaspora's military thinking that ties very well with Snerarev.

**Q:** Can we say that the Russian strategic thought as viewed in the observable and relevant past demonstrates continuity and consistency, and regardless of the personality of the Head of the Russian state be putting on someone else even Navalnyi? This continuity and consistency will be traced in the future?

**GP:** This is a good question. I'll say this, knowing that Russia is never that easy that you can say it's either or, it's perhaps both - this is why we are talking about continuity and change, and sometimes it changes. But overall, in political history and political philosophy we tend to talk about the slavofils and the westeners in the Russian context and the same source of things, maybe you have two, three schools of thought that sort of interact, feed off each other and sometimes brings change and sometimes continuity. It's not as easy and I appreciate Rod Thornton being a fan of both dependencies, I would be a bit more careful and not just say - it's been the same since Ivan the IV and nothing has ever changed, because it does change sometimes. It's depending also what the outside world and the West does in relation to Russia, that comes also into the equation in the development of the Russian military strategy.

**RT:** I wouldn't rule out change per se happening, not everything is on a linear progression, there will be like the Yeltsin era, which kind of moved of track, you might say that with the Russians' kind of standardized thought in strategic terms. But I think that, what is happening now I see in Russian with the kind of Navalnyi protest, the idea of a split between the urban elite - as you might call them - and a kind of rural, not proletariat, but kind of who still look upon Putin as their nationalist, their leader and the Saviour of Russia, for whom want to have a raise. There is this schism within Russia but I think it's important to understand that such schisms are dangerous to a lot of people within the body politic within Russia and within the military itself, that they don't want to see that particular avenue being explored by the urban elite, by the Navalnists and that they want to hang on. So, this is where change is always a problem because change generates friction and it's how you deal with that friction, or how effective that friction is, is it enough to unseat Putin somewhere down the line or is it just a kind of case of: we like the old ways because we are in essence the organizational strategic culture. The strategic culture continues the state and the military along a specific line which doesn't veer of from, but there is friction to get them of that particular line and that's where the problems arise in terms of destabilization within Russia itself.

**Q:** The military doctrine was mentioned as a central concept of thinking and there has been changes happening, but the fact is that this kind of document has always been there within the society within the military. What was actually the main audience at Snerarev's time for this document? Nowadays, we are looking at the doctrine, I'm of the opinion that you must read it, but you must not underestimate it or overestimate it, and somewhere in the middle might be the idea, so what is the audience for the military doctrine at that time and how has the main target audience changed during these years?

**GP:** The discussion and the debate about the fact that should the Soviet Union have a unified military doctrine or not was the relationship to policy and once it was

decided. I mean that this was when the discussion itself took place was the military press and it started with Svetchin and Snesev wrote in a publication called “Voyennaya dela”, which was one of the military-theoretical journals at that time. There was also a particular “society”, where they gathered at nights and gave talks and had discussions - like we are having here today in another format. It was obviously both for the political leadership and for the military leadership and it also served a purpose of education at the lower levels of the military and in society.

**Q:** General Gerasimov a few years back brought up the concept of active defence and ideas that included. What about the “aktivnost” a 100 years ago compared to nowadays thinking about it within the military?

**RT:** I think that’s invigorated - modern technologies have invigorated the process of the idea of “aktivnost”. As I mentioned in my presentation it can be applied more readily with information warfare and techniques, cyber warfare and especially, AI enhanced cyber warfare. When you can get an AI enhanced cyber warfare correct, then the ability to apply various forms of “aktivnost” measures will be fundamental to, in essence possibly destroying a society. This is why AI enhanced cyber warfare is perceived to be a doomsday weapon and discussed as such in Russian military and analytical circles.

With technologies I think “aktivnost” has been given a new lease of life so you can look back and resurrect these ideas and that’s why they are being, and they can be so effective, and the old idea of trying to destroy the population’s morale with consciousness wars it was very hard to do back 40-50 years ago but now it’s kind of more easier to do and, as you can see, being quite, not easy, but less difficult to generate protest potential of a population in countries like the United States and possibly in Britain and other countries as well. Especially, you set up websites in places like the United States which will attract to a non-people, people to use parlor website, if you can develop these sites to bring in these people and to manipulate them and manipulate what they are doing, so all these new technologies are given extra invigoration to the “aktivnost” idea.

**Q:** The next question brings us back to how our theories in a way affect the threat perceptions and then perhaps the actual actions. The morale of the population features in both your presentations and the Russian military and political leadership has become visibly and increasingly worried about the so-called protest potential of the Russian population – the question is that should we expect an increased Russian effort to affect Western citizens and if so, in what forms? So, how the perception in Russian leadership or military leadership about the threats towards themselves is affecting to what Russia might be doing abroad?

**RT:** I tried to answer this question already, but it’s important to go back when we look at the new technologies and how they can affect populations, to go back to the idea of Gerasimov’s saying that future warfare will be four parts non-kinetic and on part kinetic and that did open a lot of eyes in the western militaries because they always previously looked upon the Russian military being this very kind of dogmatic, doctrinaire military that would use force first and then ask questions later. But to come out with such what seemingly subtlety kind of shows what the Russian military is all about these days, that it would think about using for parts non-kinetic to one part kinetic to achieve objectives.

**GP:** I will say that in terms of trying to influence the population, the Russian leadership has a hard time trying to persuade not least the young people, the importance of joining the Armed forces and there is a certain glorification of the military movement if you will, from the political side and you are all aware of this Yunarmija, and that I can only note that Shoigu had set the goal for the number of Yunarmija 2020 last year, 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the II World War to one million. But last time I looked they hadn't reach that, something 750 000.

**Q:** What comes to Snesev's views, his idea and conclusion about the development of the concept of war, that it becomes larger, and the scale is changing, and it will be more complex. What are the causes for this development of becoming more complex, what were the reasons at that time for this?

**GP:** I touched very briefly on it - the I World war saw new military technology, the beginning of military aeroplanes, the beginning of tanks, the use of chemical warfare, being just a part of the complexity coming along that he was addressing, and I think that also his own experiences of the Civil war added to the complexity of future war.

**Q:** What about the state and states at that time – they had unions, agreements and so on - in the view of complexity?

**GP:** It was a turbulent time obviously, here you had the Romanov empire collapsing and the Austro-Hungarian empire collapsing and the German empire collapsing, so absolutely that also affected. That was a time where empires fell and new states were beginning to form.

**Q:** Snesev, studying the peculiarities of conducting a large-scale war, called for determination, especially pointing out the danger of long wars. What could it mean today Russian military thought-wise, in your understanding?

**RT:** I think that I don't perceive as a Russian military idea of conducting a long war anymore. The idea is to use missiles, to create of a devastating effect and that devastating effect will end war fairly quickly and even the Americans – their latest US Army doctrine Multi-domain operations is basically envisaging a war against Russia that would only last a few days and then they just go back to peace. So, in both thinkings the Russian military and the US military there's no sense that they are planning for any long wars. They see that modern technologies will mitigate any kind of eruption of a long war – it will end pretty quickly given military technologies of today.

**GP:** I can also add that I don't see a long war planning process going on, but then again - when have general staffs planned for long wars - I don't really know. It always seems to come as a surprise when they drag on. I mean that the obvious example is the I World war, where the model, where the German was the unification, that was short, crisp, clear and everyone thought that now this great war will also be, will be home by harvest time.

**Q:** A continuation question on the mobilisation preparation of the Russian industry? A good point, but I think that we can finalize our discussion by thanking all our panelists for giving us a lot of thought and this discussion was integrated with the first panel and somehow, I hope that it was obvious to all that there are developments being similar, global trends that affect different countries differently and different general staffs in a way interpret the meaning differently. We've had a wonderful opportunity to learn about the Russian military classics.

## CONTINUITIES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT, MILITARY REFORM, MILITARY STRATEGY AND ALEKSANDR A. SVETCHIN

Lester W. Grau (absent from the seminar)<sup>1</sup>

*A particular strategy policy must be devised for every war; each war is a special case, which requires its own particular logic rather than any kind of stereotype or pattern, no matter how splendid it may be. The more our theory encompasses the entire content of modern war, the quicker it will assist us in analyzing a given situation.*

*Aleksandr A. Svechin*<sup>2</sup>

Russian/Soviet/Russian military thought is evolutionary, not revolutionary and follows a logic determined by continuities of Geography, Enemy and History. Russian military thought drives Russian military reform and military strategy. Russian military thought has developed through dictate and debate. Once imposed or accepted, it is not immutable, but subject again to the continuities of geography, enemy and history. Russian military thought is unique in that it always has to consider the needs of its two different armies—one for a European enemy and one for a Turkish or Asiatic enemy. Both armies also have the responsibility to defeat internal revolts and unrest.<sup>3</sup>

Geography has determined that Russia is a land power. It is a northern country where cold weather is normal and a necessary part of combat training. The terrain in which it has conducted most of its fighting is flat, dominated by rivers, vast forests, swamps and marshes. Large rivers provide primary defensive lines and transport. Railroads tie the country together and are a primary means of transport. The all-weather road system is underdeveloped, and the autumn freeze and the spring thaw make much of the

---

<sup>1</sup> The author assumes responsibility for the veracity, accuracy, and source documentation of the material, including no use of classified material and conformity to copyright and usage permissions. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1992, 62. First published as *Служба*, Moscow: Voennyi vestnik, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> The format and much of the content for this chapter are based on a course and course notes that the author and Lieutenant Colonel John T. (Tom) Banks developed and taught at the US Army Command and General Staff College in 1987 and 1988. The course, A370: Soviet Operational Art was based on the authors' post-graduate education at the US Army Russian Institute, service as US Army Soviet Foreign Area Officers and conversations with leading Soviet military experts Chris Donnelly, Charles Dick, Michael Orr, David Glantz, Dr. Jacob Kipp and Dr. Graham Turbiville. Colonel David Glantz kindly taught several classes in this course. The authors were fortunate to have stood on the shoulders of giants. The introduction of this chapter was written before the 2020 Finnish National Defence University's Russia seminar was canceled due to Covid-19. Part of the introduction of this chapter was subsequently used in "Russia views Central Asia/South Asia—the immediate threat and longer-term opportunity", book chapter for CENTCOM/John's Hopkins/University of Southern Florida conference proceedings and is recycled for this chapter.

terrain temporarily impassable. Although Russia has global aspirations, its navy is presently configured for inland and coastal defense-and as part of the nuclear triad. Its ground forces equipment is purpose-built to fight primarily on its own terrain.

Russia has fought with all its neighbors and many non-neighbors have gone out of their way to fight Russia. They include the Mongols, Sweden, Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Saxony, Prussia, China, France, Austria, Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, Rumania, Turkey, Japan, Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, United States, Finland, Communist China and Afghanistan. Russia has also fought as many battles with peoples now incorporated or once incorporated into Russia and in internal civil wars, revolts and putsches. The Soviet Union/Russia faced off with the NATO Alliance for most of NATO's history. Russia has usually fought with its back to - or in - Mother Russia. Soviet/Russian forces have supported and advised out-of-area forces in Africa, the Middle East, Spain, the Balkans, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Asia. This experience with a wide variety of enemy and foreign forces influences the work of Russian military strategists who must incorporate Asian, Western and other military thought and experience in their considerations. Further, many of Russia's historic enemies are still potential enemies opposing Russia's goals and ambitions.

All countries are products of their history. The experience of war and conquest produces cultural memory and good and bad lessons which become part of the continuities of history. For example, the 'Tartar yoke' enforced the Russian lesson that war is a constant fact and continued condition. Security can only be realized through buffers. The Tartar-Mongol rule led to the early adaption of portions of the Mongolian military art: the primacy of the offensive, the scale and scope of war, the importance of mass and mobility on the battlefield and the value of meeting battles. Further, it demonstrated the decisive role of firepower over manpower, the value of bypassing pockets of resistance, the need for constant reconnaissance, the conduct of deep operations, the value of Winter operations, the need to adjust ends to means and the advantages of a lean tactical supply level.<sup>4</sup>

The earlier Russians adopted the Tartar-Mongol military system to become principally a cavalry and militia force patterned on the Asiatic model into the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The Tsar relied on his aristocrats [*boyars*] to raise the bulk of the forces during an emergency. The threat was primarily from the south and east. However, the growing strength and threat of the West became apparent and Tsar Alexsei Mikhailovich (1645-1676) began the drive to incorporate or imitate Western military ways.<sup>5</sup> Peter the Great (1682-1725) provided a major impetus toward westernizing the Russian military. He created the standing regular army of Russia in 1699, which was patterned after Western armies. Yet Tsar Peter's Cossack forces continued in the traditional eastern model. He also created the Russian Navy. After the Swedish victory at Narva in 1700, Peter reconstituted his forces and decisively defeated the Swedes at Poltava in 1709. Sweden lost her status as a major power while Russia emerged as a rival regional eastern European power. However, Peter lost to the Turks and had to make major concessions. Still, Peter left Russia a well-trained and disciplined state army of

---

<sup>4</sup> Chris Bellamy, "Heirs of Genghis Khan: The Influence of the Tartar-Mongols on the Imperial Russian and Soviet Armies", *The RUSI Journal*, 128, March 1983, 52-60.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

infantry and dragoon regiments, well supported and coordinated with mobile artillery and controlled and trained to the standards of Peter's military code of 1716.

Peter was succeeded by Catherine (not the other Great). When Catherine (the other Great) seized power, her most famous general was Aleksandr Suvorov (1730-1800). Suvorov inherited the problem of fighting a western and a southern enemy. He fought successfully in the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the Russo-Polish conflict (1768-1772) and the First Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774). He then helped suppress the serious Pugachev rebellion. He was back fighting the Turks in the Second Russo-Turkish War (1787-1791). In 1794, he crushed a nationalist-revolt in Russian-ruled Poland. After Catherine's death, Emperor Paul I ascended the throne and dismissed Suvorov. Paul was overthrown and later assassinated. Alexander I ascended the throne and reinstated Suvorov in 1799. Suvorov then commanded a Russian-Austrian army against the French in the Alps of Northern Italy. Suvorov's long career involved numerous battles in the west and south as well as suppressing internal revolts. *Откуда угроза?* from whence the threat? Russia faced multiple threats from multiple external and internal directions.<sup>6</sup>

The Napoleonic Wars, known as the First Patriotic War, provided Russia with a new form of Western warfare. Napoleonic warfare was a radical departure from the "normal" warfare which had existed since the Thirty Years War. Napoleon abandoned the small professional army for the large, popular-based conscript army backed by the nascent industrial revolution. Napoleon, as well as his enemies, abandoned total reliance on the magazine and depot system of supply, choosing to strip the countryside as they advanced. Napoleon further abandoned the time-honored custom of winter quarters to fight year round. Up to his invasion of Russia, Napoleon's strategy proved superior to that of his enemies and his operations were primarily offensive. Russia defeated Napoleon's invasion by losing battles, yet maintaining its army throughout successive retreats. As the army retreated, they set fire to their own crops and villages leaving scorched earth behind. Napoleon seized Moscow, yet Russia still refused to surrender and soon Moscow was also consumed by flames. Russia was fighting an attrition strategy whereas Napoleon was fighting a destruction strategy.

A Russian "inverted front" grew in Napoleon's rear area as guerrilla forces attacked Napoleon's already inadequate supply columns and eroded his fighting strength. There were two types of guerrilla groups. The first were volunteers who took up arms against the enemy and had no affiliation with or support from the Russian government. Theirs was a popular "people's war", even though some of these guerrillas were little better than opportunistic highwaymen and freebooters. There was little coordination between the Russian ground forces and the "people's war" guerrillas. The second type were government-paid, led and equipped cavalry and Cossack forces formed into "flying detachments" of up to 500 uniformed or non-uniformed combatants who worked in coordination with the army and attacked the enemy flanks and rear.<sup>7</sup> Both

---

<sup>6</sup> Philip Longworth, *The Art of Victory: The life and achievements of Field Marshal Suvorov, 1729-1800*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966 provides an excellent history of this remarkable general who never lost a battle.

<sup>7</sup> Lester W. Grau and Michael Gress, *The Red Army Do-It-Yourself Nazi-Bashing Guerrilla Warfare Manual (The Partisan's Companion)*. Translation and commentary of the 1943 Soviet edition, *Сынмиук Партизанска* used to train Partisans to fight the Nazis. Casemate, released 28 May 2010.

types of guerrillas were important in the war, but the need for central control was obvious.

The Russian Army refused to provide Napoleon with the opportunity for a decisive battle which would fit his destruction strategy. On 16 October, Napoleon began his withdrawal from Moscow hoping to beat the Russian winter. He did not. Napoleon abandoned his army as it disintegrated and froze. Some 27,000 soldiers of the original 500,000-strong *Grand Armée* survived. In October 1813, the coalition of Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sweden defeated Napoleon's reconstituted army at Leipzig. Earlier, Wellington's Army defeated the French Army in Spain and Portugal and was now crossing into France. Still, it took the coalition of Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sweden to finally defeat Napoleon's continually-forming armies in the campaigns of 1814 and 1815. The Russian Army constituted part of the occupation force in Paris. Their attrition strategy, coupled with a strong counterstroke had worked.<sup>8</sup>

## The Industrial Revolution

The Crimean War (1853-1856) was fought in five theaters. Russia's loss to the coalition led to the collapse of the old army and a growing awareness of the need to rationalize military administration into military districts. It further led to the reform of tactics and combined arms training. Improved officers' education followed national reforms. Russia created a mass army with universal conscription, a reserve system, a national railway system suitable for military needs and the revitalization of the general staff. Rifled small arms, cartridges, smokeless powder, the breech block and ammunition magazine demanded a more flexible soldier, not a parade ground automaton. Railway nets and the telegraph made time a critical factor as war swung away from campaign seasons to precise movements and timely concentrations.

Russia went to war with Turkey again (1877-78). It was a Russian victory which had much to do with the poor showing by the Turks in this two-theater war. However, much of Russia's gains were lost in the treaty that Great Britain chaired. Polish-Jewish banker and financier Jan de Bloch (Ivan Bliokh) produced a six volume work titled *Future War and its Economic Consequences*. His 1898 work used the Russo-Turkish War to draw the linkage between the defense-dominant battlefield and war of attrition leading to social revolution. Another influential theoretician was General G.A. Leer (1829-1904) who published *Strategy* in five editions. Leer was a student of Western wars who focused on Napoleon, Jomini and the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>9</sup> He stressed the immutable laws of war at the strategic level and relegated the tactical level to the realm of intuitive thought. His only recognition of the impact of technology at the strategic level was that railroads were replacing the magazine system of supply. He ignored the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as an anomaly since it was fought against Turks instead of Europeans.<sup>10</sup> Leer's insistence on eternal strategic principles

---

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace*, London: Penguin Books, 2009 is a recommended source for the campaigns of 1812-1815.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Leer, Генрих Антонович [Leer, Henrikh Antonovich], *Военная Энциклопедия* [Military Encyclopedia, Volume 4, Moscow: Voenizdat 1999, 412-413.

<sup>10</sup> Since Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, son of the Tsar, was Commander in Chief of the Russian armies of the Danube (and performed poorly), the lessons of the war were generally suppressed so as to not embarrass the monarchy.

and lack of a tactical feedback loop effectively blocked the development of Russian military thought from 1850-1890.

General Mikhail Dragomirov (1830-1905) was the principle author of the 1902 Field Regulations which show the clear break between Leer's strategy and his tactics. Severely wounded in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Dragomirov's military career spanned a series of commands and senior staff positions as well as becoming a famed military educator and theoretician in the Academy of the General Staff. He published the Tactics primer in 1879. In this, he responded to change by insisting that tactics move with changes in technology. He examined the use of artillery in the indirect fire role and the tactics of the approach march. He examined the effect of smokeless powder to the concepts of fire and shock action. He looked at the soldier, not as an automaton but as General Suvorov had-the factor whose high morale, not installed by strict regimen but by proper training, would bring victory when properly led. Dragomirov denounced the role of strict military discipline, rather instilling a binding force throughout all the ranks. Dragomirov stressed the superiority of morale over material. Clausewitz and Moltke were replacing Jomini. Dragomirov did not interpret Moltke as much as to his relationship with Napoleonic concepts, but rather in the way he revolutionized modern warfare in the new age of industrialization. Dragomirov based much of his concepts on the much-younger Andrei Zaionchkovskiy's observations on the 1877-78 conflict and the 1888 Prussian Field Regulations of Schlichting.<sup>11</sup> Still, his view that morale, not technology was the decisive factor in war led to his undervaluing developing rapid-fire artillery and the machine gun.<sup>12</sup> There was no tie-in between Leer's strategy and Dragomirov's tactics. This would become obvious in the next war.

### **The Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905**

The next war came as a surprise. Japan broke off relations with Russia on 7 February 1904 and late on the following evening, ten Japanese torpedo boats slipped into the fogged-in Russian Port Arthur (leased from China) and attacked the Russian Pacific squadron anchored there. The battleships *Tetvizan* and *Tsetsarevich* and the cruiser *Pallada* were severely damaged and run aground. The following morning, the rest of Admiral Togo's fleet arrived to attack the rest of the fleet and bombard the port. The declaration of war was delivered three hours after the attack began. The 100,000 Russians in theater were primarily tied up in the defense of Port Arthur and so the operational line was set at the start of the war. Russia was outmanned and outgunned in the Far East and the sole overland transport link was the single-track 5,500 mile long Trans-Siberian Railway leading from Moscow through the Chinese Manchurian city of Harbin where it split into spurs to Port Arthur and Vladivostok. The Minister of War, General A. N. Kuropatkin, was appointed Commander of the Far Eastern Armies. General Kuropatkin's idea was to emulate Alexander I. Deny Tokyo an early victory by fighting a series of stubborn holding actions and withdrawals to gain the time to bring large numbers of troops into theater while stretching the enemy's

---

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Драгомйров, Михаил Иванович [Dragomirov, Mikhael Ivanovich], *Военная Энциклопедия* [Military Encyclopedia, Volume 3, Moscow: Voyenizdat 1995, 130-131.

<sup>12</sup> William C. Fuller Jr., *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 6.



logistics to the breaking point.<sup>13</sup> However the Japanese attack was not confined to Port Arthur. Japan invaded Korea and moved up the Korean Peninsula and by early May had defeated a Russian force and crossed the Yalu River into Manchuria. Another Japanese force landed near Port Arthur and invested it. Port Arthur surrendered to the Japanese on 29 December 1905. The Japanese advanced along rail line toward Harbin. After several battles, three entrenched Russian armies, totaling 330,000 soldiers met the advancing Japanese south of Mukden in March. The Russians lost close to 100,000 men and retreated to Harbin. The exhausted Japanese were slow in their pursuit. The final battle was fought at sea on 28 May in the straits of Tsushima between the Russian Baltic Sea Fleet and the Japanese fleet. The coal-burning Baltic Sea Fleet had sailed around the world only to be sunk. In the treaty talks that followed, Russia ceded its rights to its 25-year lease on Port Arthur and surrendered the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Japan.<sup>14</sup>

This was the first crushing defeat of a modern European nation by an Asian nation. Revolution broke out in parts of Russia against the dynasty. There was a clear need for reform in the Russian army. The scope and scale of the battlefield had changed. The complete battle of Borodino against Napoleon could be observed by a single person in a central position with a good pair of eyes. The battlefield of Mukden occupied 150 x 80 kilometers!<sup>15</sup> Instead of aides and couriers, command and control now required the telegraph and telephone. The Japanese had introduced the meeting engagement which kept the Russian reserves in a continuous state of motion. There was a need to address troop control and a unified military doctrine. It was apparent that the Napoleonic concept of the single decisive engagement had been replaced by one of mission-oriented tactics. The lack of professionalism of the Russian officer corps and the lack of an overlapping identity as a unified officer corps (rather than by regimental or assignment affiliation) was obvious. The small layering of military professionals were primarily graduates of the Alexander Academy of Military Justice, the Nicholas Engineering Academy, The Michael Artillery Academy and the Nikolaevskii Academy of the General Staff.

## Post Russo-Japanese War

Russian war plans were revised from those with an initial defensive period and covering force actions to those with initial offensive operations. Another of the Ministry of War's priority tasks was to publish a comprehensive account of the Russo-Japanese War. Published in 1913, it is a 9 volume (16 book) official history. Other unofficial histories were published. Lieutenant Colonel Alexandr A. Svechin wrote a survey history of ground operation in the Far East. A. V. Gerua published *After the War* in

---

<sup>13</sup> William C. Fuller Jr., *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914*, New York: The Free Press, 1992, 397.

<sup>14</sup> Fuller, *Strategy and Power*...397-406 and Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Русско-Японская Война 1904-1905 [Russian-Japanese War 1904-1905], *Военная Энциклопедия* [Military Encyclopedia, Volume 7, Moscow: Voenizdat 2003, 331-334.

<sup>15</sup> Modern war had destroyed the symmetry of the Napoleonic paradigm in which tactics were the management of forces on the battlefield and strategy was the maneuver of forces to the battlefield. Jacob W. Kipp, "General-Major A. A. Svechin and Modern Warfare: Military History and Military Theory". Introductory essay in Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1992, 29. First published as *Стратегия*, Moscow: Voennyi vestnik, 1927.

1907.<sup>16</sup> Alexandr A. Neznamov published *From the Experiences of the Russo-Japanese War* in 1906.<sup>17</sup> General A. N. Kuropatkin published *Tasks of the Russian Army* in 1910.

Nikolai Petrovich Mikhnevich (1849-1927) published the *Fundamentals of Russian Military Art* in 1898 and *Strategy* in 1911. Mikhnevich inherited Leer's mantle as Commandant of the Nikolaevskii Academy of the General Staff. He found himself trying to conduct a balancing act between the Russian nationalist and the academic schools. He revitalized the chair of the Russian Military Art with Historian A. K. Baiev, who is usually identified with the nationalist school. During the 1890s, Baiev had studied the local war experience of other nations. He concluded that the Russian military art must deal with technological change (the M1891 Mosin-Nagant magazine-fed rifle and rapid-fire artillery and must learn to deal with change over time. Mikhnevich was a follower of Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy (the evolution of human institutions and knowledge from simple to more complex forms) and so was at odds with his predecessor Leer's unchanging laws of military science. He was endeared to the historians approach stressing the study of change over time. He directed that the General Staff Academy (particularly Lieutenant Colonel Alexandr Svechin and Aleksandr Neznamov) lead the way in a study of the operational level of war.

Military encyclopedias and professional journals have long been a part of the Russian military intellectual process. The first military encyclopedia was published in the 1830s.<sup>18</sup> The Naval professional journal dates from 1848 and the Army professional journal since 1857. The period of 1905-1912 is considered a period of tremendous intellectual vitality in Russian military affairs. The 1911-1916 military encyclopedia reflects this intellectual revival. In 1912, there was a public debate on unified military doctrine between Neznamov and Gusev versus Zaionchkovskii. The debate was sparked by the 1912 Field Regulations were rethinking strategic concepts. Key points were not to stand on the defensive as the offensive wins wars. Tactically there was a new sense of combined arms with major attention paid to the role of the machine gun in the attack [machine guns were still in machine guns companies]. The role of the cavalry was being rethought. There was a new structure-the Stavka and the Front. The meeting engagement and attack from the march as well as maneuver from the march were addressed. Tsar Nicholas II ended the 1912 debate when he announced to General Yanushkevich, the Commandant of the Military Academy of the General Staff "Military doctrine consists in fulfilling my orders. I ask you to tell Neznamov for me to address this question in the press no longer..."

The General Staff was small but vital-filled with "young Turks" who wanted to change the army and were inculcating their new ideas into the students at the Nikolaevskii General Staff Academy. They saw a unified military doctrine as neither a straitjacket nor a dogma. There was a lot to change. The reality of regimental duty is that the Colonels commanding regiments were responsible for the management of their units.

---

<sup>16</sup> Gerua may have been the originator of the concept of the operational level of war-which is usually credited to Svechin. Clearly, Svechin developed the concept of the operational level of war in a series of 1923-1924 lectures at the Military Academy of the RKKA. Kipp, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Grau and Banks instructor course notes. Key points of Neznamov: 1. Puts Schlicting into a Russian context. 2. Order comes from above. 3. Initiative is not a quality to be prized in the junior officer. Predictability, not initiative, is what counts. 4. A unified military doctrine is needed. Russia is a powerful state, but the dynasty keeps getting in the way.

<sup>18</sup> Russian (and Soviet) military encyclopedias reflect the state and military's official view of the topic entry. Purchase is normally by subscription and it takes several years to publish a new edition.

There was no directed, unified doctrine and training. Training was at the whim of the Colonel. The regimental economy dictated that the unit must feed, clothe, and shelter itself and little funds or time were left over for training. Most Russian units had a regimental farm where they grew their own food using soldiers as labor. The Russian training accorded Guards and line officers differed greatly in quality. Group identity as an officer corps was lost. Officers were Guards, Topographers, Don Cossack's, members of the Imperial suite on down to the line officers. Further, dynasty interference widened that gap among the officers and dynasty. The loyalty of the army was shifting from to that of a protector of Russia-not the dynasty.

The 1912 Field Regulations increased the emphasis on the problem of mobilization and concentration. This period saw a confusion of this emphasis with strategy. Consequently, the major effort was put into the initial period of war instead of a campaign of successive operations. There was no long-range view.

## **World War I**

Russia's War Plan A was to fight Austria to liberate Galicia (the triangle formed by the Ukrainian city of Lvov, east to Ternopil, southwest to Ivano-Frankovsk. Galicia was originally Polish). This plan was popular with the military for its pan-Slavic approach and intent to knock out Hungary. Plan G was the French-sponsored plan to attack East Prussia. Russia was a good ally and fought World War I with a combination of plans A and G-which diluted the correlation of forces for both. Russia had a large army, but it was fighting in a larger area. During the fighting, the blunders of the dynasty became very apparent to the officer corps and led to its disenchantment. There was a wide acceptance of Hegelian thought and many close contacts between the officer corps and the Bolsheviks.<sup>19</sup> The revolution started with peasant uprisings, the burning of estates and land seizure. Rasputin's hold over the Tsarina fed the discontent until the revolution reached Petrograd. The Kerensky government followed the Tsar's abdication. The army frontline units were basically loyal, but discontent was rampant among the rear echelon forces. The revolution was accomplished by the rear echelon soldiers and sailors. Kerensky launched an unprepared offensive against the Germans which accomplished nothing except destroying loyal units. The rear echelon units were fed into the fighting front-and the front collapsed. Desertion became widespread and the army's cohesion disintegrated. Civil War broke out in 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolshevik's seized control of Russia's government and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which ceded large tracts of Russia to Germany and left the War.

## **Post World War I**

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed to buy time for the Bolsheviks, but was not popular with Russia's former allies. German forces in the East were now available to turn their attention against the allies in the West. Further, the aggressive political ideology of the Bolsheviks threatened the established allied governments. Allied and

---

<sup>19</sup> Recommend Prit Buttar's *Collision of Empires: The War on the Eastern Front in 1914; Germany Ascendant: The Eastern Front 1915; and Russia's Last Gasp: The Eastern Front 1916-17*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing. The author does a good job of using multiple-language sources although he leans heavily on the German.

Central Power military forces intervened in Russia. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland formed separate republics. The Russian Civil War broke out immediately pitting the Whites versus the Reds (and the anarchist Greens). Guard's officers went to the Whites, many of the professional officers with the Reds. Initially, the Bolsheviks had to determine whether to form a militia army or regular army. This quickly resolved in favor of a regular army officered primarily with former Tsarist officers.<sup>20</sup> Approximately 50% of the Tsarist officer corps went over to the Reds with most of the General Staff embracing the Bolshevik cause. Before the collapse, the General Staff was moved from Petrograd to Moscow and Kazan in August 1917 when the capital was threatened. The Moscow portion of the General Staff became Bolshevik with key figures such as Shaposhnikov, Neznamov, Svechin, Novitski, Verkhovski and Kamenev. Most of the Kazan General staff joined the forces of Kolchak. Former qualified Tsarist officers were incorporated into the Red Army as *Voen-Spetsiallistii* (military professionals). All the major quality civil war commanders had a General Staff advisor/educator. Of the 5000 *Voen-Spetsiallistii*, over 60% were General Staff members before the revolution. During the period 29 July 1918 to 15 April 1919, the Mobilization Directorate of the All-Russian Main Staff recruited 28,711 former officers, 4,444 doctors and 2,985 former officials of War and Naval Ministries. By 1 September 1919, the number had risen to 35,502 former officers and 3,441 former officials of the War and Naval Ministries. By 15 August 1920, the Red Army had recruited 48,409 former officers and general. In the spring of 1919, the Red Army had more than 200 former tsarist generals and more than 400 former Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels. In 1918, *voenspets* made up more than 75% of the command personnel of the Red Army. In 1919, this had declined to 53% due to a rapidly expanding Red Army. By 1920, 42% of the command personnel were *voenspets* in an army of 5.5 million. The total officer corps for this force numbered some 130,000 compared to 50,000 prior to World War I and 300,000 officers at the height of that war. In 1922, Ordzhonikidze reported that about 34% of all Red officers were *voenspets* including 13,000 *voenspets* in the Red Army school system.<sup>21</sup> The Civil War demonstrated that there was a need for junior officer to act uniformly, not independently and their training reflected this need. Battle drills were used at the tactical level, while creativity was left for the operational level of war.

The Russian Civil War or Civil Wars if one includes the counterinsurgency in Ukraine, the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920 and the Basmachi rebellion were, like all civil wars, brutal, fratricidal and bloody.<sup>22</sup> The Civil War proved a conflict of massive scale, maneuver and mobility-and focused on the rail lines. World War 1 was a far more

---

<sup>20</sup> John Erickson, *The Soviet High command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941*, London: Macmillan and company, 1962, 113-118.

<sup>21</sup> Grau and Banks course notes. For an analysis of archival material released during the *perestroika* process in the Soviet Union, see A. G. Kavtaradze, *Военные специалисты на службе Республики Советов 1917-1920гг* [Military specialists in the service of the Soviet Republics 1917-1920], Academy of Science of the USSR, Institute of Military History of the USSR, Moscow: Nauka, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Recommended readings include Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987; I. V. Mikhutina, *Польск-Советская Война 1919-1920гг* [the Polish-Soviet War 1919-1920], Moscow: Institute of Russia and the Balkans RAN, 1994; Jonathan Smele, *The Russian Revolutions. 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*, Oxford University Press, 2016; Vitaly Rapoport and Yuri Alexeev, *High Treason: Essays on the History of the Red Army, 1918-1938* Durham: Duke University Press, 1985 and V. Kh. Lavatts and N. N. L'vov, *Русская Армия на Чужбине* [The Russian Army in Exile (1920-1923)], New York: Possev-USA, 1985, originally published in Belgrade: Русское Издательство in 1923.

mobile war then it was for the French, British and Americans and this mobility extended to the Civil War. It was the heyday of cavalry.

### **The Question of Official Military Doctrine<sup>23</sup>**

The Civil War was accompanied with an ongoing military doctrine debate from 1918 to 1921. In 1918, Aleksandr Svechin was appointed to head the “Commission for the study and use of the Experience of War, 1914-1918”. Svechin stated that the commission’s motto would be Clausewitz’s-“the truth, only the truth, the whole truth”. The lack of a ruling Tsarist dynasty made this possible, however the study was later expanded to cover the lessons of the Civil War. The truth then became constrained, especially when discussing Budennyi’s First Cavalry Army and its political commissar Joseph Stalin.<sup>24</sup> In 1920, Svechin published “The Foundation of Military Doctrine” which posited that military doctrine was a point of view from which to understand military history, its experience and lessons. Military doctrine is military, and particularly tactical philosophy. Doctrine creates certainty which is the soul of every action. Svechin thought that it was necessary to unify views at a tactical level and through educational programs, regulations and manuals to reach the great mass of the Army. It was useful to deal only with a required minimum of technical knowledge in order to not infringe on creative freedom in strategy and politics.

There were other views on military doctrine. Neznamov felt that military doctrine expresses the view of the people and government on war, in accordance with which foreign policy is conducted and the armed forces are organized. This approach makes the approach to war and military interests the very foundation of politics.

Trutko and Frunze felt that the Red Army needed its own proletarian, communist military doctrine. Its basic tenets must be worked out, precisely formulated and decreed. It would be different from imperialist doctrine since this was a new type of army.

Trotsky’s view differed in “Military doctrine or Pseudo-military Doctrinairism?” There is a need for a unity of view on military questions, but they cannot be fixed as standard weights and measures. One must think, not rely solely on pertinent paragraphs. One should not make a fetish out of the experience of the Red Army in the civil war. There cannot be a particularly proletarian military science. The Marxist method does not apply outside politics. “Those who think we can arrange work in a candle factory with the help of Marxism, know very little about Marxism or making candles.”<sup>25</sup>

The 11th Party Congress (April 1922-April 1923) had a debate on an official military doctrine but did not proclaim one. Trotsky lost his debate with Frunze, which essentially left military-related issues to the military. However, in the 1930s, Stalin foisted three provisions on the army which greatly impacted planning and preparation for future external war. First, war could have few Soviet casualties and must be fought on foreign soil. Second, the Soviet Union does not need a foot of foreign land, but will not give up a single inch of its own. Third, in the rear area of any aggressor against

---

<sup>23</sup> Section based on Vitaly Rapoport and Yuri Alexeev, *High Treason: Essays on the History of the Red Army, 1918-1938*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1985, 124-126 and Grau and Banks instructor course notes.

<sup>24</sup> Kipp, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Grau and Banks instructor course notes.

the Soviet Union, the Red Army will find support in the form of an uprising by the workers and peasants of the aggressor nation. This set the boundaries for determining how the Red Army would prepare for and fight future external wars.

### **The Tukachevski-Svechin Debates on Future War**

How should the Red Army conduct a future external war for national survival, particularly against major powers on the scale of the recent world war? Radio communications, airpower, tanks, nascent airborne forces (employed by Frunze during the Central Asian rebellion) and improvements in mechanization, mobility, firepower and artillery would require new approaches and a combined arms doctrine and strategy. Svechin, Triandafilov, Frunze, Tukachevski and Varfolomeev served as spokesmen for a larger group of General Staff thinkers and innovators. They generally divided into supporters of a “smashing” or “destruction” (*сокрушение*) strategy and an “attrition” or “exhaustion” (*измор*) strategy. The “destruction” strategy adherents were represented by Tukachevski, Triandafilov and Varfolomeev. They argued that future war is about mobility and firepower represented by tanks, trucks, airplanes, artillery and chemicals. Defense is senseless since defending against such modern weaponry is impossible. The best course is to mass as much force as possible into a strike force and, using a series of well-planned strikes, destroy the enemy. The rising, aggressive Soviet/Marxist forces of history support this. The capitalist world, riven with contradictions will be forced to the defensive and its destruction is inevitable. The capitalist countries are not strong in their rear areas and, without a doubt, the proletariat will rise and welcome the Red Army liberators.<sup>26</sup>

Svechin led the attrition strategy school of thought with Frunze a strong supporter. In a world war, attrition is sensible, economic and the only way to achieve victory. A resolute attack consumes incalculable resources and generally is not justified by operational gains. Attacking forces run the risk of interdiction of lines of communication and flank attack. In the opening phases of a war, it is more expedient to keep on the strategic defense. “A politically aggressive goal can be combined with a strategic defense. The battle is conducted simultaneously on the economic and political fronts, and, if time works in our favor, that is if the balance of pluses and minuses is favorable, then the armed front... might gradually achieve a favorable change in the relationship of forces.” Strategic defense might permit the loss of some territory and cannot always be applied to small countries.” For Russia, at that time, however, in Svechin’s opinion, defensive warfare was ideal. The enemy would be forced to waste resources to conquer territory, establish communications, overcome intermediate defensive lines and so on. The Soviets would preserve their forces until the advantage swung. This goal must be held-never give battle in unfavorable circumstances from considerations of prestige or historic memory. “A hurriedly deployed defense would act least economically by heaping up troops in front of the attackers or by occupying a series of lines in the path of the assault. Saddest are those defensive maneuvers which expend armed forces in large numbers in conditions for which the enemy has best prepared.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Rapport and Alexeev, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Grau and Banks instructor course notes. Rapport and Alexeev 127-137.

The strategic debates were conducted in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Tukhachevski won. The Red Army adopted his strategy of destruction and concept of deep operations and began the creation of a mass, mechanized army. But neither Tukhachevski nor Svechin would view the results. They were executed during Stalin's mass purge of the officer corps in 1937.<sup>28</sup> While the Soviets were involved in the Spanish Civil War, and later as a hostile power in the first Soviet-Finnish War, followed by the annexation of Bessarabia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, none of these involved the survival of the Soviet Union and the need for a strategic doctrine of destruction or attrition.<sup>29</sup>

When Germany and the Soviet Union invaded and partitioned Poland, the Soviet Union began dismantling the Stalin Line that defended the borders of the Soviet Union and moving the defenses forward into Poland. The new defenses were not in place when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Red Army's official concepts were the destruction strategy and offensive deep-operations theory of Tukhachevski and Triandafilov. The Red Army was now forced into the defense, but attempted a series of Tukhachevski-style counterstrikes to move the destruction of war onto German-occupied territory. These failed due to inadequate strength and coordination. The Polish proletariat failed to rise to welcome the Red Army. The Red Army then compounded the problem by "heaping up troops in front of the attackers or by occupying a series of lines in the path of the assault". The Germans were finally stopped at the gates of Moscow. Soviet stubborn resistance, German inadequate logistics and transport, eventual Soviet maneuver defense and the Russian winter were all factors in the success of the defensive portion of the Battle for Moscow.<sup>30</sup> As the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany progressed, the Tukhachevski/Triandafilov concepts of deep battle became more practical and eventually brought the Red Army to Berlin. Marshal Zhukov proved one of Tukhachevski's best disciples.

The Soviet Great Patriotic War, the post-war creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the impact of the advent of nuclear weapons and the Cold War are familiar to most readers. During the Cold War, NATO believed that the destruction strategy and offensive deep-operations theory of Tukhachevski and Triandafilov were still the core of Soviet military thought, however modified by nuclear-threatened conditions. During the Cold War, Marshal of the Soviet Union V. D. Sokolovski published *Military*

---

<sup>28</sup> "Of an estimated 75,000 to 80,000 officers in the armed forces, at least 30,000 were imprisoned or executed. They included three out of five marshals; all 11 deputy defense commissars; all commander of military districts; the commanders and chiefs of staff of both the Navy and Air Force; 14 of 16 army commanders; 60 of 67 corps commanders; 136 of 199 division commanders; 221 of 397 brigade commanders; and 50 percent of all regimental commanders. Another 10,000 officers were dismissed from the service in disgrace." David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995, 11. For a detailed examination of Stalin's purge of the Red Army elite, recommend N. Cherushev, *1937 год: Элита Красной Армии на Голгофе* [1937: The Elite of the Red Army at Golgotha], Moscow: Veche, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed discussion of the development of Red Army doctrine, recommend Jacob Kipp, "Soviet Military Doctrine and the Origins of Operational Art, 1917-1936," in *Soviet Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. William C. Frank Jr. and Philip S. Gillette (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992); John Erickson, "The Development of Soviet Military Doctrine: The Significance of Operational Art and the Emergence of Deep Battle," in *The Origins of Contemporary Doctrine*, ed. John Gooch (Camberley, UK: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997) and David M. Glantz, "Soviet Operational Art and Tactics in the 1930s", Fort Leavenworth: Soviet Army Studies Office, March 1990. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a195053.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, Second Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, Chapter 6. Glantz and House, 49,87.

*Strategy* in three editions.<sup>31</sup> It dealt primarily with nuclear weapons and focused on an attrition approach—as a retaliatory measure. In the summer of 1987, the Soviet Union announced that the primary method of action of the armed forces of the USSR in repelling aggression would be defensive operations as well as the counteroffensive.<sup>32</sup> This was discounted or ignored by the West, but is probably accurate considering the difficulties the Soviet Union was experiencing at the time. The dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the loss of its buffer states put Russia in a military, economic, political and international quandary which has taken decades to sort out.

The Russian military is now working in the context of the collapse of the Soviet dynasty and the imposition of a new system and the impact of internal and external conflicts and the impact of new types of weapons. They need a strategic doctrine to determine their supporting operational art. Svechin's works seem to have the attention of the Russian military leadership.<sup>33</sup> There are two major issues. First, the distance from the Estonian border to St. Petersburg (a city of five million) does not allow for a Svechin strategic defense. Second, what does the operational art look like in 6<sup>th</sup> generation warfare?

---

<sup>31</sup> V. D. Sokolovksi, *Военная Стратегия* [Military Strategy]. Moscow, Voenizdat, 1962 through 1968.

<sup>32</sup> General V. N. Lobov, Chief of the General Staff, “The Significance of Svechin’s Military-theoretical Legacy Today”, introductory essay to Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1992, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Charles K. Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right” *Military Review*, January-February 2016, 34. “Each war represents an isolated case, requiring an understanding of its own particular logic, its own unique character.” is General Gerasimov, the Russian Chief of Staff, paraphrasing Svechin.

[https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20160228\\_art009.pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art009.pdf)





## RUSSIAN MILITARY-ANALYTICAL THINKING ON “DAMAGE”

Anya Fink<sup>1</sup>

Russian military-analytical thinking on “damage” has been evolving over the last three decades as part of the Russian military’s efforts to work out “strategic deterrence” in theory and in practice.<sup>2</sup> This paper argues that this evolution has been two-fold. First, military thought has transitioned from a central focus on large-scale “unacceptable damage” purely in the context of nuclear forces toward concepts like “deterrent damage” with reference to the whole spectrum of strategic deterrence capabilities. Second, it has shifted toward ideas about tailoring damage to impact the psychological perceptions of the adversary. In this regard, recent debates in Russian military writings have centered on the challenge of estimating and incorporating subjective notions of damage.

### Defining “damage”

Damage (ущерб) is a way to quantify losses in a conflict. According to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) Encyclopedia, damage can be “moral or physical.” Further, “damage in the process of combat actions is usually expressed by the degree of decrease in the intensity of the functioning of combat systems, military-industrial and administrative-political objects, that is, the degree of their destruction, as well as direct or indirect losses of manpower, population, material values, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

Damage leveled on an opponent as part of pre-planned operations during combat is usually referred to as “assigned damage” (заданный ущерб). Such damage, generally inflicted on target sets by military means, can be specified in advance by political-military leadership. It is the type of physical damage to combat forces or infrastructure that can be *objectively* assessed.

One of the key concepts in Russian military thought on nuclear weapons is “unacceptable damage” (неприемлемый ущерб). This term is omnipresent in Russian doctrinal documents. For example, the 2014 Military Doctrine states the importance of the ability “to maintain the composition, state of combat and mobilization readiness and training of the strategic nuclear forces and their support forces and facilities, as

---

<sup>1</sup> The ideas and opinions in this paper, which builds on her presentation at the FNDU’s Russia Seminar 2021, are hers alone.

<sup>2</sup> This paper builds on Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, and Jeffrey Edmonds, “Russian strategy for escalation management: evolution of key concepts,” CNA occasional paper, April 2020 and Anya Fink and Michael Kofman, “Russian strategy for escalation management: key debates and players in military thought,” CNA occasional paper, April 2020, both papers available at <https://www.cna.org/centers/cna/sppp/rsp/escalation-management>.

<sup>3</sup> “Ущерб (воен.)”, Russian MOD Encyclopedia, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=14076@morfDictionary>.

well as command and control systems at a level which guarantees the infliction of an unacceptable damage on an aggressor in whatever situation.”<sup>4</sup>

In turn, the 2020 Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence (Foundations) document says the following: “Nuclear deterrence is ensured by the presence in the structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation of combat-ready forces and means capable through the employment of nuclear weapons of guaranteed infliction of **unacceptable damage** on a potential adversary in any conditions of the environment, and also by the readiness and resolve of the Russian Federation to use such weapons.”<sup>5</sup>

Like in U.S. strategic thought, in Russian military thought, unacceptable damage has traditionally been associated with nuclear weapons. Some grade damage on a scale as acceptable, unacceptable, and irreversible.<sup>6</sup> The MOD Encyclopedia states the following:

*“Damage from the use of nuclear weapons can be characterized by the degree of environmental consequences of a local, regional, or global scale. In the latter case, damage that leads to a global environmental catastrophe, is called irreversible. In deterrence theory, one compares the effect of achieving a goal set by the aggressor by inflicting a preemptive strike, with the damage obtained by the aggressor in retaliation by the other side. Damage inflicted on an aggressor in retaliation that exceeds the benefits of a preemptive strike, is called **unacceptable**; it has the effect of deterring and is a subjective assessment of the norm of defeat at which it is more expedient to refuse the strike than to allow damage of this level.”*<sup>7</sup>

As per the definition above, unacceptable damage is associated with the ability of one party’s strategic nuclear forces (SNF) to (threaten to) inflict a pre-specified level of damage on an opponent’s target sets thus causing losses that the opponent would consider unacceptable. Overtime, notions of unacceptable damage have come to involve, in addition to *objective* assessments of how many nuclear weapons would be necessary to inflict damage on a set number of targets, a *subjective* judgement on the part of one side with regard to what its opponent’s political leadership, elites, and population would find unacceptable.

## Evolution of “unacceptable damage”

During the Cold War, Soviet military thinkers closely followed shifts in U.S. nuclear doctrine and declaratory policy. They traced the evolution of U.S. concepts of “unacceptable damage.” And, even as they debate the types of damage that the United States would find unacceptable today, Russian military analysts reference the “McNamara criterion” of 400 warheads and the 200 warhead “Brown criterion” as

---

<sup>4</sup> Translation of the 2014 Russian military doctrine at the website of the Russian embassy in the UK, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>. emphasis by the author)

<sup>5</sup> Unofficial translation of the 2020 Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence document by the CNA Russia studies program, June 2020, [https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/Foundations%20of%20State%20Policy%20of%20the%20Russian%20Federation%20in%20the%20Area%20of%20Nuclear%20Deterrence.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/Foundations%20of%20State%20Policy%20of%20the%20Russian%20Federation%20in%20the%20Area%20of%20Nuclear%20Deterrence.pdf). (emphasis by the author)

<sup>6</sup> Г.Н. Охотников, “О нормативном подходе в современной теории сдерживания, *Военная мысль*, no. 12 (2005).

<sup>7</sup> “Ущерб (воен.)”, Russian MOD Encyclopedia, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=14076@morfDictionary> (emphasis by the author)

being sufficient, at one point in U.S. history, to inflict “unacceptable damage” in a retaliatory strike.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the Cold War, there were Soviet/Russian efforts in military planning institutes to decrease what was understood as “unacceptable damage” levels. These efforts involved the development of a “normative assessment of the minimal level of unacceptable damage for states-objects-of deterrence, structured by a range of factors in the relationships between the vulnerability of key industries and economic sectors as a result of a nuclear strike.”<sup>9</sup> They also enabled nuclear force reductions under U.S.-Russian strategic arms control agreements. As the U.S.-Russian relationship shifted in the 1990s, the understanding of “unacceptable damage” began to evolve from objective measures to more subjective ideas about types of damage that would be psychologically unacceptable to a potential aggressor’s leadership.<sup>10</sup>

Subjective ideas permeate thinking in the early 2000s Russian military thought. For example, planners like Vitaliy Tsygichko developed the “*intolerable (or unallowable) damage*” (недопустимый ущерб) concept.<sup>11</sup> He wrote as follows: “*intolerable damage, in contrast to unacceptable damage (which is determined in advance and relatively permanent) is not a constant value and depends primarily on the “price” the aggressor wishes to pay to achieve goals in a specific conflict. However, this “price” cannot be greater than the level of unacceptable damage, or a certain determined limit, which touches on vital interests and security of citizens of developed states of the West.*”<sup>12</sup>

Tsygichko’s intolerable damage was inherently subjective and involved a “civilizational factor,” or an understanding of the moral and cultural values of the opponent that could have implications for casualty tolerance. He wrote:

*“[F]or the modern post-industrial society, even dozens, if not a few, losses in manpower are unacceptable damage in a military conflict. And the casualty tolerance (that is, the threshold of unacceptable damage) characterizes the effectiveness of any military organization no less and often more than any quantitative and qualitative parameters of its most modern weapons systems. [In turn] the current infrastructure of European states is extremely vulnerable and only an assumption about the possible consequences of the destruction of critical facilities (high-pressure dams, chemical plants, nuclear power facilities, etc.) would stop any hostilities if such a threat appeared. In other words, the United States and developed European countries in modern conditions cannot wage wars with an enemy capable of damaging critical industrial infrastructure, since this threatens their very existence.”<sup>13</sup>*

For Tsygichko, the implication of the vulnerability of Western critical infrastructure meant that Russia could eventually employ conventional precision weapons for

---

<sup>8</sup> Р.Г. Тагиров, Ю.А. Печатнов, В.М. Буренок, “К вопросу об определении уровней неприемлемости последствий при решении задачи силового стратегического сдерживания,” *Вестник Академии Военных Наук*, no.1 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Василей Буренок, Лев Лысенко, “Мифы ядерного разоружения,” *Военно-промышленный курьер*, Jan. 27, 2014, <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/18910>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Also see response by Сергей Ознобищев, “И вновь о «ядерном поле»” *Военно-промышленный курьер*, Mar. 24, 2014, <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/19632>.

<sup>11</sup> В.Ф. Лага, С.В. Голубчиков, В.К. Новиков, С.В. Аксенов, “О мерах по повышению эффективности стратегических ядерных сил России для решения задачи сдерживания в условиях развертывания национальной противоракетной обороны США,” *Вестник Академии Военных Наук*, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>12</sup> В.Н. Цыгичко, “О категории «соотношение сил» в потенциальных военных конфликтах,” *Военная мысль*, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>13</sup> В.Н. Цыгичко, А.А. Пионтковский, “Возможные вызовы национальной безопасности России в начале XXI века,” *Военная мысль*, no. 3 (2001).

deterrence. Similar arguments were made by Vladimir Slipchenko. He wrote in 2002 that “strategic nonnuclear deterrence will likely be implemented with a higher decisiveness of actions and the creation of a real threat of infliction on the adversary of unacceptable damage with precision conventional weapons. Unlike nuclear deterrence, it will be possible to not only *threaten irreversible damage* to specially selected vitally important objects of the economy of the adversary state, but to also inflict a preemptive strike as part of demonstration of deterrence.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, Slipchenko argued that precision conventional weapons could eventually be able to (threaten to) inflict damage that is potentially even greater than unacceptable.

### “Deterrent damage” and nuclear forces

A key damage concept that has emerged in Russian military thought over the last decade is “*deterrent damage*” (сдерживающий ущерб). In military writings and discourse, this concept started out in the context of SNF and then gradually evolved to additional capabilities, beginning with nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) and then conventional precision weapons.

According to S.V. Kreydin, the term was first introduced by V.G. Prudnikov who worked to develop deterrence criteria for SNF. This “deterrent damage” or “Prudnikov criterion” “operates on the basis of countervalue damage, but not with its absolute unacceptable levels, but the interrelation of levels of damage, which could be inflicted by the sides onto one another depending on the scale of counterforce actions.” Kreydin wrote in 1999:

*“A potential opponent has a hypothetical ability to prevent own damage by inflicting a preventive (disarming) strike. The more means are designated for employment in carrying out such a strike, the less effective are retaliatory actions of our strategic nuclear forces (SNF) and higher the level of prevented damage. However, the more the opponent increases the proportion of means employed in carrying out counterforce tasks, the greater the decrease of the reserve means he has for realizing countervalue tasks in inflicting damage to our military-economic targets, concentrated in cities. As a result, while he is attempting to undermine SNF potential, the opponent has to sacrifice to an extent his own potential of countervalue deterrence.”<sup>15</sup>*

At the time, Russian military analysts associated deterrent damage with a subjective decrease in what constitutes unacceptable damage as well as the “provision of minimally sufficient nuclear potential” in the context of economic constraints and challenges with defense spending during the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Some described the resilience needs of Russia’s SNF as follows: “it must be at a level so that the opponent would not destroy it with one massive strike, even with nuclear weapons use. In addition, the remaining potential of nuclear forces after the actions of the aggressor must be sufficient to inflict upon ‘deterrent damage’ upon him, which would make further actions against Russia dangerous and disadvantageous to the attacker. The necessary level of

---

<sup>14</sup> Владимир Слипенченко, *Войны шестого поколения* (Вече 2002), 115-116.

<sup>15</sup> С.В. Крейдin, “Глобальное и региональное ядерное сдерживание: к системе принципов и критериев,” *Военная мысль*, no. 4 (1999).

<sup>16</sup> А. В. Радчук, “Стратегический наступательный потенциал: необходимость и достаточность,” *Военная мысль*, no. 4 (2003).

deterrent damage and how many warheads are necessary for this is one of the central questions of nuclear deterrence and the sufficiency of nuclear arms.”<sup>17</sup>

Mikhail Sosnovskiy, a proponent of the employment of NSNW in the context of regional deterrence, described the state of the debate about deterrent damage as follows in 2004:

*“For a lengthy period of time there have been discussions about the necessity of transitioning to more pragmatic levels of damage (like ‘deterrent damage’), the likelihood of infliction of which could be more highly likely to deter an attack due to the disadvantage to the aggressor of the correlation between losses and ‘gains.’ The transition from ‘unacceptable damage,’ which, as many experts maintain, is too high, toward ‘deterrent damage’ could allow the avoidance of excessive expenses of resources due to the reduction of forces and means necessary to deterrence. But the determination of the level of deterrent damage is a highly complicated and as of yet unresolved military-scientific problem. Available assessments are sufficiently subjective, particularly when it comes to guaranteeing results.*

*At present (until agreed assessments of the level of deterrent damage are developed) it seems appropriate to use the criterion of ‘unacceptable damage’, since in this case there is a possibility of inflicting assigned damage on the enemy in retaliation, up to unacceptable (destruction with massive use of strategic nuclear weapons). This makes it possible to implement a wide range of threats, as well as to dose the damage inflicted on the aggressor in proportion to the damage from the aggression. And when repelling an attack, if it did take place, the ability to consistently increase the amount of damage (primarily by using non-strategic nuclear weapons) makes it possible to find such a level at which the enemy will be forced to de-escalate hostilities. In modern conditions, when solving the problem of deterrence, along with nuclear weapons, it is advisable to consider high-precision conventional weapons, the experience of which has shown their high efficiency.”<sup>18</sup>*

In contrast, Slipchenko argued at the time that after the experience with the Chernobyl nuclear accident, one could not use nuclear weapons in a war. He wrote: “[T]oday, it is apparent that the borrowed from the Cold War archives ‘unacceptable, defined, or deterrent damage’ for nuclear weapons doesn’t fit because it carries an unavoidable threat of self-destruction through first nuclear use and the destruction of the rest of the global civilization.”<sup>19</sup> “No threat of ‘deterrent damage’ with nuclear weapons will be able to stop an armed conflict or even a war with the employment of conventional weapons, including against countries that have nuclear weapons. This weapon is equally dangerous for the victim and the aggressor.”<sup>20</sup>

## Evolution of “deterrent damage” terminology

In the first decade of the 2000s, deterrent damage terminology became commonplace in Russian military thought. But it evolved and meant different things to different people as Russian military analysts worked out the concept of “strategic deterrence” and sought answers to questions on the sufficiency of nuclear forces and the place of precision conventional weapons. Overtime, objective and subjective meanings came to coexist.

---

<sup>17</sup> В. В. Сухорутченко, С. В. Крейдин, "Актуальные аспекты проблем ядерного сдерживания и достаточности ядерных вооружений," *Военная мысль*, no. 07 (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Михаил Сосновский, "О ядерном сдерживании в современных условиях," *Обозреватель*, no. 11 (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Владимир Слипченко, *Войны шестого поколения* (Вече 2002), 257.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

In 2005, A.L. Khryapin and V.A. Afanas'ev connected deterrent damage to SNF in their writings about the development of Russia's "strategic deterrence." But their meaning close to unacceptable damage and did not involve a subjective perception of damage by an adversary. They wrote, "for strategic deterrence at global level, the qualitative amounts of effectiveness of Russian armed forces (GPF and nuclear forces, employed for strategic retaliation) are based on assessments of deterrent damage, which could be inflicted as a result of retaliatory (mass) strikes on military-economic potential of a potential adversary. This damage is assessed by the level of losses of main industrial capital (buildings and equipment), determined by their direct impact (disablement). Additional indicator of results of nuclear strike could include population losses, as well as time of the post-war reconstruction of the economy."<sup>21</sup>

Objective and subjective notions persisted alongside one another. For example, also in 2005, G.N. Okhotnikov writes at the time that "deterrent damage" could be understood as "unacceptable to the aggressor damage, the preliminary assessment of which forces him to not proceed with an aggressive action, but at the same time this damage would not be irreversible. We will note that, in the terminology we use here, 'deterrent damage' could be called unacceptable, but reversible."<sup>22</sup>

Around 2009, the work of V.M. Burenok and others explored the escalation management concept "strategic deterrence through the use of military force" that eventually became a part of Russian military doctrine in 2010. As part of this effort, they wrote of the need for a new term that could be used in "pre-nuclear deterrence" and in select limited nuclear employment cases because the use of the "unacceptable damage" term was excessive. They argued of the need to introduce the concept "deterrent damage," defined as "strictly dosed damage, inflicted by nuclear and/or strategic nonnuclear forces on objects of vitally-important infrastructure of the aggressor-state." They noted that this concept could be viewed a "projection' of the category 'unacceptable consequences' ... on the scale of military phases of the conflict." Thus, the highest level of deterrent damage could be "unacceptable damage."<sup>23</sup> They further wrote:

*"The introduction of the deterrent damage concept allows to discover certain principal aspects of strategic deterrence through the use of force, connected to the possibility of employing sequential increases of the level of damage to the aggressor depending on his reactions to previous deterrence measures, as well as with determining of the level of damage inflicted to any potential adversary taking into consideration national values, opportunities to defend national interests, and the sensitivity of society and individual persons toward possible losses. In addition, there is the possibility of determining the impact of informational-psychological aspect on the mechanism of deterrence on the scale of phases of development of interstate conflict."*<sup>24</sup>

Through these writings, the deterrence damage concept was broadened to include conventional precision strike (nonnuclear deterrence) capabilities alongside the

---

<sup>21</sup> А. Л. Хряпин, В. А. Афанасьев, "Концептуальные основы стратегического сдерживания," *Военная мысль*, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Г.Н. Охотников, "О нормативном подходе в современной теории сдерживания," *Военная мысль*, no. 12 (2005).

<sup>23</sup> Р.Г. Тагиров, Ю.А. Печатнов, В.М. Буренок, "К вопросу об определении уровней неприемлемости последствий при решении задачи силового стратегического сдерживания," *Вестник Академии Военных Наук*, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

possible limited use of nuclear weapons. The employment of either capability set could be aimed at achieving subjective damage in an opponent. Gradually, the subjective or reflexive control element became central in this discourse, though the challenge was in the metrics.

In 2010, V.V. Matvichuk and A.L. Khryapin echoed the work by Burenok et al and noted that that deterrent damage can be subjective and thus difficult to assess in advance or in the moment:

*"It is this level (scale) of damage that ensures the enemy's losses beyond the "acceptability" established by him, expressed, as a rule, quantitatively, in the theory of deterrence is called "deterrent damage". The upper limit of deterrent damage is "unacceptable damage" in the classical sense. In this, a relevant problem is the correct scientific substantiation of the level of deterrent damage. At the same time, the very choice of the level of deterrent damage is a political decision of the state's military-political leadership. Strategic deterrence of military aggression is based, first, on the state's ability to carry out a timely transition of the country from peacetime to wartime, and second, on the capabilities of the RF Armed Forces to inflict deterrent damage on the aggressor, that is, damage incommensurate with the benefits that he would like to receive as a result of the use of military force."*<sup>25</sup>

According to V.D. Roldugin and Yu.V. Kolod'ko, there was also confusion in the terminology as it was employed at the time in the work of Okhotnikov, Burenok, and others. They posited that the common thread between all three was that deterrent damage is the type of damage, which could be inflicted on an adversary in response to or as a result of "deterrence through the use of force" and the degree of which it was assessed by the adversary as unacceptable and compelled the adversary to not initiate or continue military actions. They noted that deterrent damage could be objective/material or subjective, and both needed to be considered.<sup>26</sup> This use applied to "deterrence through the use of force" is evident in other works.<sup>27</sup>

It should be noted that, in their writings, Roldugin and Kolod'ko also noted that the non-public 2010 Foundations document reportedly had the following definition of the deterrent damage term: "deterrent (unacceptable) damage" is understood as "damage that is greater than the benefit, which the aggressor expects to receive as a result of using force."<sup>28</sup> The 2020 version of this document does not use or include the deterrent damage term. If the term was indeed included in the 2010 version, its omission in the 2020 may be for several reason. First, because the document was public-facing, the term was omitted out of desire to stick to clear and consistent terminology. Second, it could be because, as noted above and discussed in greater detail below, deterrent damage is subjective and can be difficult to substantiate and assess.

---

<sup>25</sup> В. В. Матвичук, А. Л. Хряпин, "Система стратегического сдерживания в новых условиях," *Военная мысль*, по. 1 (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Ролдугин В.Д., Колодько Ю.В., "Уточнение понятия сдерживающего ущерба при решении задач силового сдерживания коалиционного противника," *Стратегическая стабильность*, по. 4 (2015).

<sup>27</sup> Н. А. Морозов, "О методологии качественного анализа военно-политических систем," *Военная мысль*, по. 7 (2014).

<sup>28</sup> Ролдугин В.Д., Колодько Ю.В., "Уточнение понятия сдерживающего ущерба при решении задач силового сдерживания коалиционного противника," *Стратегическая стабильность*, по. 4 (2015).



## “Damage” discourse in the future

As Matvichuk and Khryapin wrote in 2010, determining actual levels, or criteria, of deterrent damage is a challenge for Russian military thought. Even today, there appears to be no scientific or consistent approach to assessing deterrent damage levels and or a basis of how to “dose” such damage. At the same time, notions of subjective damage are likely to persist as Russian military thinkers contemplate the changing nature of warfare.

Over the last decade, Russian military thought has focused on the importance of non-military means. In this regard, S.R. Tsyrendorzhiev and others have written of the need to understand the deterrent damage concept in the context of nonmilitary means. They define deterrent damage as “a minimally-sufficient damage, inflicted on a subject, during which he can achieve the decrease of his abilities to form a military threat to a level, guaranteeing the achievement of Russian military security.” They note that such damage could be dosed in accordance with the level of threat and also incorporating psychological assessments of the adversary.<sup>29</sup> Separately, analysts like G.N. Vinokurov have developed various damage criteria and even proposed a new subjective “de-escalation damage” concept.<sup>30</sup> However, it is unclear if any of these subjective approaches proposed across Russian military journals will be adopted in any formal way by military planners or if they will remain largely conceptual and untested.

As new military capabilities emerge, and information combat acquires greater importance, the debate about damage concepts will continue to keep pace. As A.V. Serzhantov has written:

*“[F]or all the invariability of the essence of the war, its content has undergone a definite transformation. First of all, this is determined by the appearance of fundamentally new means of confrontation, including the armed one, and, accordingly, the expansion of the spheres and methods of their application. The use of new means and methods of confrontation in the relevant spheres is undoubtedly aimed at causing damage to the opposing side. Moreover, this damage can often be comparable to the damage from the use of weapons of war.”<sup>31</sup>*

It is thus likely that the notions of objective and subjective damage will continue to coexist across the Russian military-analytical community as military thinkers seek to understand what capabilities and concepts of operations Russia will need for effective strategic deterrence in the future.

---

<sup>29</sup> С.Р. Цырендоржиев, С. А. Монин, “Оценка вклада обороноспособности в военную безопасность Российской Федерации,” *Военная мысль*, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>30</sup> Г.Н. Винокуров, Б.А. Коняхин, И.А. Рябченков, “Социальные последствия как основа методологии формирования критериев деэскалационного ущерба для докрупномасштабных этапов военного конфликта,” *Стратегическая стабильность*, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>31</sup> А.В. Сержантов, “Трансформация содержания войны: от прошлого к современному,” *Военная мысль*, no. 1 (2021).

## Questions and answers

**Q:** Could you summarize the main changes which have happened in the concept of damage management Russian thinking accordingly to your research?

**AF:** I think I stated this at the top of my presentation – the key thing is that we've shifted from a concept of unacceptable damage in the context of the nuclear forces towards a concept of deterrent damage, so we've come from a specific focus of damage conversation in the context of primarily strategic nuclear forces to discussion of damage when it comes to the whole of strategic deterrence capabilities to include nuclear forces, general purpose forces and other strategic deterrence forces that are non-nuclear – that is the one aspect of it. The second aspect is, I think, that the discussion has evolved from objective damage – strikes on targets towards more combination of subjective damage in it as well. So the idea is that if you target aspects on critical infrastructure you'll also be able to affect and impact the decision-making cycle of the adversary and the population, so, that's the other part of the subjective part of the damage discussion. We've progressed in that as well and I think as strategic deterrence evolves in terms of capabilities and in terms of theory this damage is going to be very critical to it because the idea of how to dose damage during different parts of the conflict and as part of strategic operations and that's I think sort of the key change to here.

**Q:** You mentioned that deterrent damage concept was removed from the 2020 document, what is your interpretation – what is the reason, is it because there is discussion on its definition - why this is the case?

**AF:** I'll be the first person to say that I haven't seen the 2010 version of this document – it was not public, it was classified, I've seen only references to certain quotes from the document in articles by different authors from the Strategic rocket forces military academy who quoted in some parts very extensively and so, that's sort of what I rely on here and that's why I said reportedly because I haven't seen it. I think that a lot of changes that, I understand, have happened from the 2010 to the 2020 version also have to do with the fact that the 2020 version is a public document, it essentially became the articulation of Russian nuclear doctrine, as they were preparing the military doctrine revisions and I think a lot of it was also intended for to some extent to public consumption or public diplomacy by the Russians about their nuclear forces. So, I think the language that you see there is much more of tightening, kind of careful sifting of the language so that there is less misperception on part of Western actors specifically, this is my interpretation.



## BEFORE SDERZHIVANIE: SOVIET NUCLEAR STRATEGY AND ITS LEGACY

Edward Geist

The presentation made by Edward Geist in the Russia Seminar 2021 can be found on FNDU Youtube-channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzKbfMXr9D0> .

### Questions and answers – panel discussion (Fink and Geist)

**Q:** The question deals with the Russian idea of unacceptable damage — would or could the Kremlin leadership perceive the large scale, widespread, violent protests throughout the country as some sort of “unacceptable damage” and could they direct their response to their, what they perceive as, their western enemy?

**AF:** I think, as noted that the question, it was a little tongue-in-cheek, we’re talking about sort of these concepts of unacceptable damage have to do much more with strategic nuclear forces and retaliation, sort of the upper bounds of the violence, if you will. So, I think as we all know the Russian military views – the sort of, the idea of protests potentially widespread and potentially violent protests as the key-issue of domestic instability and obviously written in the Russian military doctrine, I think this sort of key-issue what happens and when that happens and if there’s a crisis preceding, particularly crisis with the Western partners is something that kind of would need to be monitored, but I think, if you look at Russian writings on escalation management, the key idea there to some extent is proportionality. So, you wouldn’t want to escalate beyond the level of conflict that you think would be enough to deter your partner. The idea of that Russia would use violent means, to include nuclear means, in a case of domestic protests is something that I think potentially could be viewed as unacceptable by the Russian leadership.

**EG:** I agree with everything that AF just said. Basically the issue with the unacceptable damage is, like this is originally, really conceived as counter-value attacks on population, industrial targets and admittedly there are some Russian writers who, you’ve been used the term, shall we say, very loose sort of way to encompass some of these like limited nuclear employment concepts, but not in the sense of like - they’re not going to nuke us because they think a colour revolution is going on at least, I don’t think they are.

**Q:** Just kind of a follow-on, if the situation domestically in Russia were to become, I don’t want to paint too dark of a picture, catastrophic – do you think then the Kremlin might use their great information sources to somehow - would they be tempted to perhaps spark a conflict externally to redirect that domestic dissatisfaction toward an external enemy?

**EG:** I suppose that there's a possibility that you can't rule out, but there's the issue of, if they are losing control domestically and keep in mind sort of, like the Russian history of this is that they think about the events of 1917 quite a bit, where the external conflict is not necessarily a obvious way to try and shore up domestic support. Like the idea that – well like - we're going to start an external war to try - and solve our domestic political problems. I think this is counterintuitive to most Russian defence thinkers. I now keep in mind that of course – like the President loses his mind or something. You can't rule out the possibility but it's not the first thing that I would expect.

**AF:** I'd agree with that and add also that you need a certain number of personnel to persecute conflict as well as to maintain domestic stability, I haven't looked at the numbers, but I suspect that there are some discrepancies between the numbers that you would need to do both at the same time.

**Q:** A question about the calculation of the damage which is acceptable – is it only assessed towards the adversary or have the Russian or Soviet theorists calculated what the possible use of nuclear weapons cause to their address in what happens to the formation or state which launches the strike whether it is retaliation, or the first strike and I would broaden the issue that how does the perception of the status of Soviet union or Russia affects to the calculation what comes to the parity with the nuclear weapons in total?

**EG:** So, you are referring mainly to the political effect and reputational effects or to the physical effect of engaging nuclear use?

**Q:** About the political perceptions – do they affect to the realistic amount of the nuclear weapons or test the damage calculation and the technical approach to the question?

**EG:** I can certainly speak to the technical piece of it, so, contemporary perceptions of shall we say third parties and, in these discussions of like limited, or dose damage is something that – I'd be interested if AF has seen something, because I don't recall having seen anything in the Russian literature that specifically refers to these reputational costs with the third parties. Maybe we should try to assign some numbers to that Tsygichko back in his memoirs talked about Soviet research starting in the mid 60's where they were trying to calculate what the physical effects of nuclear use would be, say, on a theater were in Europe and it rapidly became apparent that these, sort of like dreams that - we're going to use these tactical nuclear weapons to create openings in the NATO lines, or we're going to drive the red line tanks through those lines or we're going to head out to the English channel - it rapidly became apparent that if you start using nuclear weapons in Europe on any kind of scales like the entire place is just going to be covered with fall-out and no one is really going to be going anywhere, then it's not a way to create any kind of usable military advantage and apparently he refers obliquely to assessments or apparently done by the General staff that basically found that like trying to fight this nuclear war in which you're trying to use the nuclear weapons for military effect and exploit it, was just not going to work. But the same time for these ideological reasons there wasn't an ability to renegotiate the declared doctrine on the basis of that. So, there was this very strange disconnect between of a lot of technical research the Soviet analysts were doing but found logically that the survival strategy just was not technically feasible and then an ideological incapability to acknowledge that. Today the general trend in the post-soviet period has

still been to sort of go down in terms of controlling the side-effects, there are discussions about how well you need to avoid collateral damage because too much collateral damage is too escalatory. The extent to which they believe that the collateral damage is predictable and controllable is not entirely clear or it's also possible that the Russian nuclear weapons' effect experts and the people who are thinking about these limited nuclear use concepts are just not the same people and they may not really be talking to each other. I don't have not actually seen any direct evidence of a recent discourse going on there for what it's worth.

**AF:** I think, we have seen Russian writings in the past about the challenge of generally assessing when you were in the thick of conflict – what would be the level of unacceptable damage inflicted on Russia and how to do that the challenges of doing that in practice again when you're potentially in a conflict that involves nuclear weapons and how to get to a political decision by the leadership to actually engage in a retaliatory strike. And we've seen some of those writings and they get to some extent that the technical ability of the military is actually – to be able to assess that and to be able to give a recommendation to the leadership. I think there are other concepts that relate to the resilience of forces in the theatre and to the sufficiency of forces in the theatre when you're actually in a conflict in given primarily conventional forces that have to do – this is another aspect of it. When it comes to, I think both of us have noted in our presentations – military institutes speculate about concepts of geopolitical distance and what would happen with the great power status if in case of nuclear use, nuclear war or large-scale war and the implications that would have for the economy of great powers, but you see that as sort of speculations and studies that are aimed at much more philosophy – I would say – not at necessarily practical implications.

**Q:** In thinking about deterrence its important we parse differences about escalation management following nuclear use, that is whether limited nuclear war is possible, and differences in escalation from conventional war to nuclear war. Those begin to emerge clearly in 1977, as Soviet planning for an independent conventional war option comes to the fore – and so, is it safe to say that current Russian military thinking on non-nuclear deterrence dates back to this period as both USSR and US begin planning around an independent conventional war option assuming the nuclear escalation is quite possible but it is not inevitable.

**EG:** I personally prefer to periodize things a little bit differently because of just differently these theories like in the Ogarkov period of having this independent conventional war in which there's these ideas like reconnaissance strike complexes but the theory was not that – the Soviet Union allies will be acting from a position of marked conventional inferiority. It's like all through to the end of 80s in fact Lester Grau wrote actually very insightful article about this 30 years ago about the emerging thinking in the 80's about how to fight this conventional war that the Gorbachev era military theorists were making and my impression is that the Soviet, post-soviet Russian military thinkers got blindsided in the early 90s just by a complete collapse of the Russian conventional military power and ended up having to rethink about how they would go about this because they're no longer in a position of being at least evenly matched conventionally which is what the thinking in the 70s and 80s seem to be built around. There is a case being like 1977 which in a variety of ways is a breaking point for instance because it's also like Bryson have made in his tulip speech that year and Western analysts didn't know what to make of it because he said nuclear war was

unwinnable and then at the same time the Soviet military doctrine still said these things that it had been saying since the 50s about, implied that nuclear wars were winnable, the Soviet union would somehow try and win it and the dissonance drove people like Raymond Garthoff to dig very deep into the available sources trying to make sense what's the actual policy - the general secretary is saying one thing and then the General staff is saying this other complete incompatible thing like where are coming from. So, the dissonance was real, it's like apparently Brezhnev was off on his other page from the military leadership and the General staff people were starting to think in ways that we considered very unacceptable two decades before. But where we draw that dividing line is really a matter of judgement.

**Q:** Could you elaborate a bit on why the concept of unacceptable damage is more suitable for public consumption in the 2020 deterrence policy document than the concept of deterrent damage?

**AF:** I wish I knew the real answer to that question, which is much more bureaucratic in nature, I suspect that if one is writing a document about how one plans to use nuclear weapons and the document is written primarily for the external audience, especially at a time when a lot of people are paying attention to the Russian nuclear doctrine and how it's evolving, one probably wants to minimize the number of terms you're using so that the language is kind of as clear and precise as possible in the nature of kind of bureaucracy that produces that document. So, this is one thing like bureaucratic explanation of how the document was extracted. The second is just also speculation on my end and my personal opinion that there was a lot of confusion with the use of "zadannyj uscherb" (заданный ущерб) in the 2003 document that was put out by Ivanov and others with the discussion of nuclear employment, this idea of that you potentially would lower the threshold. I suspect what they were trying to do is just to minimize the number of terms that would minimize the amount of speculation and stay close to the traditional doctrinal language – that's just my assumption.

**EG:** My read of articles of the concepts mentioned - my impression is that this is just ongoing debate that they wouldn't still be arguing about if they had actually settled on something. They seem to be recycling the same terminology and I think there's a parallel in the Western case, so the historians like Frank Gavin have grown very confused about what was "flexible response" in the 60s and the reason for this confusion is that the term was always somewhat ill-defined and was regularly re-defined over the course of 1960s and afterwards to the point that it became, I would argue, almost effectively meaningless – that you don't know what they're talking about necessarily and a lot of the Russian terminology is evolving the same way – like – "we have this nice phrase", "it sounds good" or at least "we've forgotten to using it" and it gets repurposed and it doesn't have a constant meaning over time and sometimes that's what you want in your doctrine and that's how your paper over bureaucratic uncertainties and other times that's really bad to put in your doctrine because you actually need to be more on the same page. The unacceptable damage formulation – it does date back to the Soviet period, I don't have any confirmation that they actually used it in an official doctrinal document at that time, but they were definitely talking about it even in the late 60s – early 70s. You don't have to deal with this issue that apparently there's not agreement about "sderzhivayushij uscherb" either what it exactly is or whether it should be the formulation. So, you want to keep that sort of thing out of the official statement that you're putting out for the Westerners which is such as, the amount in just the last two years or so that they put out it's because – I remember

having conversations with Kristin and Anya a few years ago before this came out – they are a lot more forthright than they used to be and this must be some sort of intentional policy change on their end and exactly what’s motivated it I’m not entirely sure. Just the fact that we have the document I think, is in itself remarkable.

**KvB:** I was super intrigued by the use of this term in this document that was published and evidently intrigued by the fact that it was indeed published and as far as I recall it has been the “*zadannyj uscherb*” (заданный ущерб), that term has been used in the official military doctrines up until this point, so actually, the change came in the 2014 military doctrine but the 2010 military doctrine contained the term “*zadannyj uscherb*” (заданный ущерб), so, that was part of the reason why I was confused, but it might be that I’m not right in recalling. My understanding was this signified some kind of change and I think that you’re entirely right in line indicating that the explanations might as well be bureaucratic and as lying elsewhere, but I also think that in itself it is quite interesting in terms of tracing who it is, who participates in the deliberations of the content of these documents and who gets their say in determining what precisely this should look like.

**AF:** I think you’re absolutely right and there’s obviously “*zadannyj uscherb*” (заданный ущерб) language in the doctrine and it has to do with the strategic nuclear forces’ operation, and you are absolutely right on that time. I was referencing to the language in the 2003 document that was put out and caused a lot of controversy that talked about not employment in the strategic nuclear forces’ operation but on other levels.

**Q:** We have so far discussed deterrence and damage from a West-Russia perspective, but would current Russian concepts also be applicable to China? China is very rarely openly discussed as a potential adversary, but its military power and geographical closeness dictates that it has to be addressed. However, it is a very different society from the US, so would current publicized thinking suffice? A very hard question, I admit ...

**AF:** I’m not the China scholar - I don’t know, I don’t speak the language, but I have colleagues who do, and I think there’s has been a lot of writings on the evolution, on the Chinese thought on escalation management and Chinese views on nuclear weapons and employment. I think that this is a distinct body of thought and should be of greater interest to western scholars as China’s nuclear doctrine continues to evolve.

**EG:** I read the question being how much the Russians say about deterring the Chinese. Actually, it has been very interesting to what extent which both in the Soviet period and after. A formal Russian this is a topic that they just tend to steer very clear from... it must be political reasons, it’s like Russian and China in recent years have moving closer together. But even in the period of the dark days of Maoism when they actually fought little border wars, the extent to which official Soviet document that I’ve seen just steer away from the possibilities – like the nuclear war between the People’s republic and the Soviet Union was very conceivable and yet it was not discussed. In the official documents all talked about a potential war with NATO. This raises a question of life – did they think of it as being a different case for deterrence – they definitely don’t perceive quite the same sorts of threats from China as they do from the West, because the theory with the West was – the West posts this advanced technological threat, this aerospace campaign, maybe they could have conventional disarming strikes and that sort of thing. From China you don’t have to be worried about the



same sort of thing. It's like - the issue with China is that they have an enormous conventional force where Russia can't feel the large enough conventional force to try and counter it and how would you stop it. If you saw this like some sort of Chinese invasion brewing and it is true that there are certain the Russians posture in certain places don't make any sense of their posture of the West, I'll put it that way. But at the same time - like the old Russian and China say that they're such good friends that they don't need a formal alliance, because formal alliances are for people who don't really trust each other. I don't believe that line item but that's what they say, and it also makes it very difficult for them to acknowledge any kind of public forum or even of you have to worry with - if you're talking about this internally leak and then it's like you're wonderful friend who's actually maybe not such a great friend you're worried about, now this document saying that are you planning to nuke them, it looks really bad. So, in any case it's a taboo subject, seemingly even though if you talk to individual Russians in the right positions, many of them seem to take it fairly seriously. So, take on that what you will.

**AF:** I agree with that - it's that type of a subject, and I would add also that to some extent Russian thinking on unacceptable damage as we've discussed during this panel has evolved from this US- Russian interaction during the Cold war, so, China wasn't necessarily a part of that interaction. So, in military journals it is to some extent a taboo to discuss China in those terms. But I think where you do see a discussion to some extent about what Chinese society values and kind of contrast to some extent, what would be the values in a western democratic society, is in some language and some of the sort of deterrent damage and societal differences and kind of perceptions of large-scale war and how that would be perceived in China versus other countries. You do see some of that language but again it's mostly sort of hypothetical conceptual terms and not really linked to the practical realities of the Russian - Chinese relationship.

**Q:** I'd like to return to where Anya started with - the definition of deterrence damage as a physical and moral damage. Now that we have discussed the conceptualizations are based on very much on kind of developments in the nuclear deterrence where the idea is that the nuclear weapons inflict physical damage that then have moral consequences or implications for the moral authority or the authority in the country. I'd like to ask - how in the Russian debate, the fact that there are strategic information weapons, how does it change, or does it change the calculations of what is counted in the moral damage?

**AF:** If I understood you correctly what you're asking is sort of what are some of these aspects of subjective damage?

**Q:** And how the bigger role of the cyber and the strategic information weaponry make for these calculations of the damage or is there any major difference in the theoretical discussion in Russia right now?

**AF:** A good question - I think that we really need to pay attention to, as there's this growing interest in the information warfare and broadly defined in the Russian military thought. I think, the ideas of subjective damage rely to such a great extent on the ideas of reflexive control and kind of changes in public opinion and interaction with leadership, I think that they are understood as very fluid and unstable as a conflict evolves. I think how you take that part that the Russian military thinks and kind of add it to the information implications of a conflict that the Russian military doesn't

necessarily do itself or the things like trolls and some of these other things and how do you sync those two, I think they've figured that out and kind of have discussed it in practical terms, because I think a lot of this thinking that we see is still from before 2014 and you are seeing kind of this growing interest in how these things work with non-military means, with information and you see that from thinkers like Tsyrendorzhiev (С.Р. Цырендоржиев) in the 46. CSI (46. Central scientific research institute, 46 Центральный научно-исследовательский институт). But it's still kind of, at very conceptual and theoretical level where he tries to figure out what that level of deterrent damage would be. I think cyber is understood, to my mind, the way I have seen it written, is to the extent that it inflicts both physical and subjective effects, but I'm not sure that I have seen clear scenarios of the Russians writing about what the physical effects could be in a conflict. The way for example they write about if we'd strike things with strategic conventional weapons, they don't necessarily write in the same way about cyber capabilities. So, I think that's a kind of a "rambling" answer just to say that it's something that I thought, and I need to think about more because that's an important question.

**Q:** I'd like to turn our eyes to the future - new military technologies are more or less operational what comes to the land-based, airborne, or sea-based weaponry which were "advertised" recently. How do you see, this is hypothetical but anyway, would this development, and if it will, affect to the calculation of damage concept and what it means on the other hand to the military strategy?

**EG:** So, the question is basically what impact emerging technologies would have on strategic nuclear damage criteria. My impression with regards to the strategic nuclear forces is that the Russians have a theory of requirements which is that the Russian nuclear forces have to be able to inflict unacceptable damage as defined by, it's varied apparently somewhat over time, but it's still defined on a relatively high level in absolute terms. I mean it's like at the very least dozens and maybe a few hundred nuclear warheads detonating and that's delivered. So, the idea being – what we need 1550 or what ever counting in order to ensure that maybe like 10 per cent of them actually make it after a counter force attack and get through the missile defence system and so forth. Putin talks about these super weapons, my impression is that one of the goals of these superweapons is to try and ensure, unacceptable damage will be inflicted without causing an armsrace by building things that will go through defences and not following the cold war strategy which is that "we'll have more warheads", it's like "we can't use redundancy to try and ensure retaliation because that will cause armsrace", so, "we are going to try on invent these novel things and have a sort of smaller number of qualitatively diverse things on the theory that will make comprehensive defences so difficult and expensive to build that the Americans won't be able to do it". My impression is that the technology will actually, if anything, it will allow the unacceptable damage criteria to remain the same or to go down in terms of like "how much is enough" in order to ensure unacceptable damage. The question of how the definition of unacceptable damage change, that's sort of an independent matter. They could decide just like that "we go from McNamara criteria to Bundy criteria" which is one actually detonating. The Russians just decided that they just need fewer weapons to make it, then that requirement could change but that's independent of what technology is available.

**AF:** That's a good answer and I think that in addition to buttstressing second strike, it's in my belief that the exotic capabilities are intended to derive psychological effects

upon the adversary and this is the reason why, if we believe what some have written that the Soviet era concepts that were dusted off for the present time and I think that gets into these discussions about subjective notions of damage and what western audiences could perceive as being potentially unacceptable in certain situations. I think the broader phase of your question if it's on emerging technologies for instance IR and some of these other new things that are bound to have an impact on Russian conventional modernization and nuclear modernization to some extent. There is an interesting debate ongoing in Russia about the implications of new technologies, as they are applied to conventional capabilities and what the implications are for that in terms of strategic deterrence - Russian strategic deterrence, are by and large defined and I think you've seen Putin's statements about the fact that nuclear weapons may necessarily be the end, be all deterrence in the future, what their the future importance is and the possibility to innovate and kind of adapt these new technologies to military capabilities that are effectively able to deter Russian opponents and I think that's where discussion about deterrence is going to my mind, because what you see in the discussion about military modernization is that they continue and finalize, put the finishing touches on nuclear modernization, this kind of evolution of conventional capabilities will continue. That's kind of thing that I'll keep my eye on as well as the earlier discussed aspect of information warfare.

# 10

## CENTRALIZED MILITARY APPROACH (RUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF) AS A RECENT MILITARY PHILOSOPHY

Daivis Petraitis

### Introduction

In October 2003, the Ministry of Defense of Russian Federation presented a document “Urgent Tasks for the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” which became the political-military guidance for the General Staff to work out a plan to transform the existing Soviet-type military into new military forces. It took two years for the General Staff to work out a detailed plan. In September 2005, the Chief of General Staff, Army General Yuri Baluyevsky presented to the MOD board a plan “How to improve combat readiness of Russian army”. It took few more years to test the plan proposals in the field and in 2008, a reform of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation began.<sup>1</sup>

Today, most experts agree that Russian military reform succeeded, and recent Russia military is a new force, ranking among the best in the world. The success in a great part is a result of the Russian General Staff, who developed the reform plan and supervised the process. The Staff, which remains among few Staffs in Europa still appreciating a culture, philosophy and principles of Prussian General Staff well known for its efficiency and dedication for results.

### General Staff service, philosophy, and principles

The Prussian General Staff (also Great General Staff) was the supreme HQ of Prussian and later German Army. Since the official establishment in 1814, the Staff guaranteed the German armed forces a decisive strategic advantage over adversaries for more than a century. It was responsible for preparing plans, supervising campaigns and continuous studying all aspects of war. Differently from other Staffs of that time, the Staff preferred selecting its officers by intelligence and proven merit rather than wealth or patronage. It also became famous for exhaustive and rigorously structured training the Staff officers had to take.

In Russia, those features became especially appreciated by the tsar Paul the First who viewed his nobility (including military) as old-fashioned, non-effective and corrupt and wished to transform it into disciplined, principled, and loyal elite. Prussians served as the best example of how to organize things. He brought the Prussian General Staff ideas to Russia by establishing something similar under the name of the Inspection Department of the Ministry of War (1812-1815). Since then, the Prussian General

---

<sup>1</sup> Daivis Petraitis, Reorganisation of the Russian Armed Forces (2005-2015), Finnish Defense University, Working Paper 43, 2012, from: [https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/84363/StratL4\\_43w.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/84363/StratL4_43w.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Staff with its culture and norms remain as the main in Russia.

Let us to explore this particular military culture and see what differences it possesses compared to other General Staffs. One of the main differences - a new phenomenon at that time and an awkward remaining for some today - is an establishment and maintaining a caste system in the officers' ranks. The famous field marshal Helmut von Moltke the Elder "Four Officer Attribute Matrix"<sup>2</sup> demonstrates this difference the best.

<b>Field Marshal Moltke's Four Officer Attribute Matrix</b>		<i>Initiative</i> <b>Lazy</b> <b>Energetic</b>	
		<b>Smart</b>	<b>Dumb</b>
<i>Intelligence</i>	<b>Commanders</b> Make the Right Things Happen but in the Easiest Possible Manner  (Discover)	<b>General Staff Officers</b> Direct the Right Things to Happen  (Capture)	
	<b>Menial Tasks</b> Follow Orders to Perform Routine Tasks that must be Done by an Officer  (Maintain)	<b>Eliminate</b> Will Make Things Happen – but the Wrong Things  (Destroy)	

Picture 1: Field Marshal Moltke's Four Officer Attribute Matrix

According to prevailing traditions at that time, and almost a rule in majority of militaries today, all officers were and are supposed to be either commanders (leaders) or staff officers (supporters for leaders). If to try to use Moltke's matrix they are either "smart and lazy" but "making right things to happen" or "Dum and lazy" and following orders to perform routine tasks". The field marshal himself proposed another approach. He divided officers into four groups especially emphasizing those who were super-professionals streaming to perfectiveness in what they do. According to Moltke whose people could be good commanders, but they contribute better by being those who "direct indirectly". The Field marshal (and the Prussian military culture) assigned them to a separate group - the General Staff officers (GSO) and issued them certain privileges like a right to disagree with plans or orders of a commander and appeal to the highest commander to defend own stands.

The General Staff in former USSR had and Russian General Staff today keeps this separation in a form of General Staff Service (GSS). Before Russian officer becomes

---

<sup>2</sup> From: <http://old-soldier-colonel.blogspot.com/2011/07/field-marshal-moltkes-four-types-of.html>

a part of the General Staff Service, he or she has to pass through a selection process and get an additional training. All the General Staff Service officers are either highest commanders or executive agents of the commander at each echelon of a military hierarchy. Remaining, ordinary Russian officers (line and staff), like staff officers in other military cultures, have no command authority unless appointed a lower commander (a commander of sub-unit up to a battalion). Declassified CIA document on soviet General Staff<sup>3</sup> and analysis of recent Russian high commanders and military brass appointment practices allow to conclude that only the General Staff Service officers occupy high-level commander and staff positions in the General Staff and certain positions in Joint Strategic Commands (JSC) and Operational Commands (OC) HQs. In the troops at the JSC level they are the commander, the chief of staff (COS), the chief of operations (C of OPS), intelligence (C of INTEL), communications (C of SIG), logistics (C of LOG) and some other senior officers. At the OC level the General Staff officers are the commander, the chiefs of staff and chiefs of operations (C of OPS), intelligence (C of INTEL) communication (C of SIG) and logistics (C of LOG). At a Corp level General Staff officers are the commander, the chief of staff and chiefs of operation (C of OPS) and intelligence (C of INTEL). In a division, only the commander and chief of staff are from the GSS. The regiment or brigade commander is the highest post a non GSS officer might have. And this is the last selection stage because then selected one is sent to the General Staff Academy (GSA) and would become the General Staff officers. In certain special cases the GSS officer might also occupy a brigade or regiment commander's post.

An idea of having the caste of officers in Russia bear own logics. Especially if one keeps in mind that the last step before an officer entering the GSS is him/her going through an additional, and quite intensive, training. All General Staff officers must get a special training. The General Staff trains own officers in the General Staff Academy. As a result, all graduates (despite their service) appreciate and use the same military and General Staff traditions, culture, military values and operating principles.

The faculty of National State Security and Defense (*Рус. факультет национальной безопасности и обороны государства*) of the GSA runs a main, high-level command course. It lasts for two years, and students come from all Russian state armed services, not only from the MOD forces. This is very important thing, and the importance will be explained later. Differently from lower education institutions (like service academies or Military University) where officers mainly study own (Russian) military matters, the GSA studies concentrate on strategic military and state levels and foreign states' practices. All GSA students have mandatory, 3-6 months "internship". Recent announced losses of generals in Syria or elsewhere prove rumors of "students" having "internships" in combat zones like Syria, East Ukraine or other "hot spots" worldwide.

The GSS consists not of general only. There are other, so called "pure", GSS officers as well. Some of them might reach the top of military carrier and become Minister of Defense or Chief of General Staff. Some of them could transfer to the troops and join high commanders' pool but majority of them stay as staff officers in the positions named above or serve in the General Staff or General Staff Academy subsidiaries.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Soviet General Staff: A command structure for military planning and operations, CIA, May, 1982, unclassified on May 4, 2010 (CIA-RDP83T00233R000100170002-4)

Those officers usually retire as GSS officers (colonels mostly). Time-to-time hearing one or other retired colonel introduced as the GS colonel proves this being the case. “Pure” GS officers pass through so-called “Specialists courses” run by the GSA Special Faculty (специальный факультет)<sup>4</sup>. The faculty also runs a General Staff course for high-ranking officers from other countries as a separate international course.

The best and most recent example proving “pure” GS officers exist and could reach the top of military carrier is the Army General Yuri Baluyevsky. While comparing his CV with the CVs of the last two chiefs of the General Staff, Army Generals Nikolay Makarov and Valeriy Gerasimov one could notice a very interesting difference. The last two belong to the “lazy and smart” group. They passed through all command positions by commanding a platoon, a company, a battalion, a regiment, a division and were an Army and military district commanders. They were appointed as Chief of General Staff to be the “doer” implementing the directions (the reform) in the most efficient way. Army General Y. Baluyevsky is different. He was the chief of General Staff creating “the directions”. Under his command the recent reform of Russian military was designed. The only commanders’ positions he held during his service were a platoon and a company. Remaining appointments were non-command. He passed through an operation officer, a senior operation officer, a senior adviser, a special adviser, a deputy commander of Troops Group, etc<sup>5</sup> postings before getting to the General Staff and heading it.

There is a third faculty in the Academy. It is called the Faculty of Retraining and Professional Development (Rus. факультет переподготовки и повышения квалификации). This Faculty is responsible for professional development course for military (GSS officers) and high rank civilian state officials (governors, ministers, executives from federal bodies, etc.).

The caste has privileges, but it has to meet special requirements also. There are certain requirements for the GSS, and they are continuously updated. The latest known update happened in February 2018 where extra requirements for the General Staff officers were described in a manual “General Staff officer’s work style” (r. «О стиле работы офицеров Генерального штаба»)<sup>6</sup>. And this might be taken as a second proof the GSS as a caste exists.

One more strength of Prussian General Staff was the Staff remaining almost an autonomous institution dedicated solely to the efficient execution of war. In other countries politicians or government officials quite often intervened and influenced general staffs in their work. According to Field marshal Moltke highly trained and motivated General Staff officers were the men to produce success without outside interventions. They took as a main task to maximize an effect in any work (war or other activity). As a way to achieve this the GS culture advocated a division of any activity, operation or campaign into stages and synchronizing all activities designed to achieve tasks in time. All solutions supposed to be presented through a detail planning of any

---

<sup>4</sup> From the GSA homesite <https://vagsh.mil.ru/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri\\_Baluyevsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Baluyevsky)

<sup>6</sup> А. Круглов, Н. Сурков, А. Рамм: “Табу на соцсети включили в кодекс”, 28 февраля 2018, Izvestiya, from <https://iz.ru/714220/aleksandr-kruglov-nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/tabu-na-sotcseti-vklyuchili-v-koдекс>.

operation or activity. Those principles next to centralizing all management in one hand still remain valid in Russian General Staff today.

However, such an approach requires many long work hours of dedicated men. This, next to the strength, became as one of weaknesses or problems for the Prussian approach. Due to technologies and war waging becoming more sophisticated more details and more information to analyze appeared, more plans variants were needed. This required more GS officers and much more long working hours, so finally such an approach became “a straw breaking a camel’s back”.

Moltke named a second problem for Prussian General Staff culture in his famous quotation “No battle plans ever survives contact with the enemy”. Slow information circulation mostly as fast as horseman could go, quite often caused delivery of orders and instructions to be late and delivered orders or instructions already not suitable for the situation which had changed. Those two problems became even more unsolvable as time few and incoming new weapons and platforms increased a number of ways to act with the information exchange speed still lying behind and remaining slow or limited. As a consequence, little by little, a majority of staffs gave up detail, advanced professional planning and concentrated on an ability to work out courses of action while responding to situations.

### **A new Russian C4IR system**

Russian General Staff has found a solution to those two GS “problems”. It decided not to change the culture, but to employ technologies and digitalization to computing (analysis and calculations) and communication (transfer of information). Computers allow producing as many as necessary situational plans and in case of necessity help updating or upgrading them fast. Digital communications solved the second problem. Informational exchange became instant and overarching. Russian General Staff, while keeping culture and work principles, adopted this solution to the modernized military. Efficiency and success remained guaranteed by detailed planning, synchronization of activities and centralization but new technologies lifted all this to a higher level. Since April 2013 the General Staff worked out and introduced an enhanced C2 system little by little turning it into a new system – command, control, communications, computers, information, and reconnaissance (C4IR). This new system consisting of three main elements: institutions or “doers” (commanders/HQs), enablers (equipment for communication and calculation} and operational concepts (modus of operando for different levels}.

This solution has again proved how high-level professionals do business. The solution itself is not a Russian invention. The General Staff continuously studies all matters related to war waging around the world. It studied western network-centric warfare (NCW) theories as well and borrowed different NCW approaches to design different parts of Russian C4IR. As a result, the first element, the structure of institutions, „doers” was designed and built by using a Hierarchical Swarming approach of the NCW. It was introduced as a first step. Back in 2013, the Military Science Academy hosted its annual conference where the Army General Gerasimov spoke about a potential wartime C2 system for the entire state. Among other slides and tables supporting his presentation it was a slide showing the proposed system with the MOD, the GS and



a non-existing at that time element - the NDMC in the center<sup>7</sup>. The NDMC was a new body, but at the same time, it was a part of the General Staff. It is worth to add that next to the military the proposed system included numerous other (civilian) institutions like Ministry of Health, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of transport, etc. The NDMC (in fact the General Staff) in the scheme was shown as collecting all the powers in its hands and becoming an instrument for centralizing all activities.



**Picture 2:** The management system of the Russian military establishment (военная организация государства)

The second element, the enablers of the C4IR (communication and calculation equipment functioning system) was designed following a Distributed Swarming approach. It solved the second problem of the Prussian General Staff, the problem of speed of informational exchange and its volumes. Since new technologies allowed Russians to move to fifth (multiple) and sixth (Software Design SD) generation radios, all military information and data from sensors and weapons started to fluctuate between tactical and strategic levels simultaneously. Other equipment contributed to solving of the first problem – the huge workload as well. Computers and Automated Command or Data systems (ACS/ADS) helped to “digest” and share new data, analyze numerous situations, propose decisions and produce as many detailed plans as necessary. In soviet times, ADSs belonged to different military services (Land, Air, Naval, etc.) and

<sup>7</sup> Gerasimov (2013). Original - Доклад начальника Генерального штаба Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации генерала армии В.В. Герасимова, „Роль Генерального Штаба в организации обороны страны в соответствии с новым положением о Генеральном Штабе, утверждённым Президентом Российской Федерации“, Вестник Академии Военных Наук № 1 (46) 2014, [http://www.avnr.ru/attachments/article/639/AVN-1\(46\)\\_001-184\\_print.pdf](http://www.avnr.ru/attachments/article/639/AVN-1(46)_001-184_print.pdf)

worked independently at different levels so quite often were not interoperable. Now all they became interoperable and All in One.

In the real life, today it looks like this. In the field new tactical ACSs like Andromeda-D”, or ”ECY-3 Sozvezdya” or adequate naval and air ACSs not only united all tactical level players into one net but also made them accessible and interoperable with higher level ACSs like ACS “Akacya-M” in an operational level or a strategic level ACS. The first element, HQs and other “doers” with the help of the second one became parts of the C4IR net and were getting an information, situation awareness, directives and orders in a real time mode. Computing capabilities of the ACS installed in the NDMC and GSA (so called “Program Apparatus Complex - PAC”) allowed the General Staff to use previous historical cases or theoretic calculations to work out numerous decisions’ drafts. Close to 180 such draft decisions and situation response plans are available to the NDMC duty shifts today<sup>8</sup>.

The General Staff developed the third element, the different concepts for different levels. A concept of new generation war was designed for the strategic level. Operational level got a network centric warfare concept and network centric tactics were designed for tactical level. All they were designed following the Orchestrated Swarming approach. By providing and assigning different “Modus of Operando” to different levels those concepts foreseen and gave certain freedom of action by allowing a mission command at lower layers<sup>9</sup>.

### **General Staff goes wide**

Now it comes the time to return to the General Staff philosophy gain. It has been already mentioned that the GSA trains students coming not only the MOD forces but from all Russian state armed services as well. In addition, high-level civilians are trained in the GSA as well. It has been also mentioned that the NDMC has a number of state institutions incorporated. There are more than fifty different state institutions (ministries, agencies, companies, etc.) and hundreds of lower-level bodies (factories, training grounds, etc.) presented in the NDMC. Those two facts already demonstrates that after successfully implementing centralization and synchronization in the military the General Staff works to extend this philosophy to the entire state.

From organizational and technical perspectives, the General Staff received “a blessing” to go statewide as late as 2013. As a result one “smart and lazy” “doer” the Army General Makarov, after getting things done at the MOD level, passed the chair to another, the Army General Gerasimov who took implementing “the directions’ to the next, the state level. A small detail, the Army General Y. Baluyevsky since his retirement was appointed to the National Security council to continue developing “directions’ for a state reform. To start two presidential executive order appeared. The first - Presidential decree No. 648 from 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013 “To form a system of situational centers working under the same order”<sup>10</sup> and Presidential order No. 2308 from 3<sup>rd</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> TV Zvezda (2019), A documentary about NDMC, 2019,

<https://tvzvezda.ru/schedule/programs/201412231323-1cpc.htm/20191215953-HM9Ai.html>

<sup>9</sup> Dairis Petraitis (2019) Russian mission-command in VOSTOK strategic exercises, Defense & Security Analysis, 35:1, 100-102, 22 Jan 2019,.DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2019.1565672

<sup>10</sup> Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 25 июля 2013 г. № 648 «О формировании системы распределенных ситуационных центров, работающих по единому регламенту взаимодействия»

October 2013 “To develop a concept to create a system of situational centers working under the same order”<sup>11</sup>. Empowered by those two decrees the General Staff moved to civilian side of the state. Military culture and General Staff principles began to be introduced to civilians. General Staff officers from the NDMC began visiting federal administrations explaining military way of organizing things and operating.

On 25 April 2019, the NDMC organized a conference presenting and proposing a civil version of a military management center to federal administrators. Tula region was selected as the region to check this new, regional management system and the center. In the center opening ceremony Tula region governor Aleksiy Diumin acknowledged the center being as the MOD pilot project for civilians. This center, like a regional military center, became a part of the system managed and headed by the NDMC. At the end of January 2020 President Putin visited Tula and saw how computerized management helps municipal authorities solve (or at least to account) problems reported by citizens almost instantly. President left satisfied and encouraged other regions to follow this good example. Now this experience is being expanded to other regions and more similar management centers appear. We are witnessing a creation of a huge, integrated state managing net, which finally might turn into one military-civilian C4IR covering the entire country.

However, how to get military culture incarnated into the civilian part? As we know, the GSA educates or better to say familiarizes top federal administrators with the General Staff philosophy. There they get common understanding which helps the top of the system to operate according to General Staff principles which as we know are oriented to make everything faster and more efficient. Nevertheless, the number of civilians the GSA could train is limited. The solution to this challenge the General Staff proposed consists of two parts. As a first – to get more former or recent GSS officers accepted in the civil management and, as second, to train and produce civil managers the military way and according military (General Staff) culture and philosophy. Both ways were adopted.

Since early 2001 one could observe more and more former militaries joining civilian areas as managers. Russian analyst Dr. Olga Kryshstanovskaya noted this phenomenon at the same time bringing a new term of “militocracy” into political glossary. Simultaneously country’s political leadership (the president in particular) began appointing retired and even serving GSS officer to high federal management posts like post of representative of the President in federal region or head of federal subject (republic, region etc.). Here are some examples. The GSS officer, a former deputy commander of Russian National Guard “Rosgvardya” general S. Melikov became a senator in the state council and recently was reappointed to be an acting head of Dagestan Republic. A former commander of the Russian Special Forces, the GSS officer General A. Malikov became the presidential representative in the North Caucasus Federal region and after successfully performing was rotated to a position of the deputy commander of Russian Ground Forces. By the way, Tula region where the experiment started is since 2016 headed by the GSS officer General Lieutenant A. Diumin. Another example, the longtime president of Ingushetia, previously a deputy chief for intelligence in the North Caucasus military district major general Janus-Bek Evkurov returned to the

---

<sup>11</sup> Распоряжение Президента Российской Федерации от 3 октября 2013 года № Пр-2308 «О концепции создания системы распределенных ситуационных центров, работающих по единому регламенту»

MOD, promoted to a General Lieutenant and appointed as a deputy defense minister. There are much more acting GSS officers appointed into the civilian management and returning to the active service.

However, there are no such numbers of GSS officers even in Russia to rotate to civilian management. How to make the military and General Staff culture statewide and standard? To “fix” the situation Russian political leadership decided to adopt military educational practice to civilian training and “to bread” new civilian managers and politicians similar to militaries ones. Since last few years Russian leadership has initiated projects designed to train new country elite administrators. One of those projects called “Leaders of Russia” is designed to prepare loyal and the same-minded people for the state governance. A great part of training methodology (especially the leadership training) is taken from the military. The military principle of cadre selection is also presented. Statewide recruitment allows everyone to register, so everybody could apply. This gives thousands of motivated man and woman who want to try. It is very similar to the system of thousands of young people applying to military schools. Winners, after passing a number of project’s test and trainings are assigned to the presidential cadre pool. Others are offered different state positions so the best could go to Russian State Service academy. This is very similar way to the way an ordinary military officers has to pass before being selected to be the GSS candidate. Some winners are already appointed and work as governors or high-level administrators by this meaning them passing through the GSA training. Last year Putin himself initiated a subproject of “Leaders of Russia” called “Leaders of Russia. Politics”. Here, instead of administrators, future politicians are trained. They follow similar training programs and winners are invited or encouraged to join different political activities or parties.

## **Conclusion**

Prussian General Staff is different compared to what the majority of western countries have today. And looks like quite efficient, because the Treaty of Versailles ordered the Staff to be dissolved and may not be reconstituted in any form. After Second World War, during which the General Staff culture and principles were presented, this culture was abolished and little by little forgotten so today in western militaries not so many even bother to study it.

Russia remains among those few countries which appreciate and maintain Prussian General Staff. Russian military kept working and developing such General Staff culture, philosophy, principles etc. Since Putin getting into Russian political Olympus, the military organization became the main supporter and assistant to him. With the help of the military (General Staff) ideas and proposals Russia reformed armed forces and now moves forward modifying the state to operate according military (General Staff) principles. Application of those principles might make the entire state management and ability to act inside and outside the country more efficient, by this allowing Russian to achieve its declared geopolitical goal - to become a real global power.



# 11

## DISSECTING RUSSIAN DELIBERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS OF DETERRENCE

Stephan De Spiegeleire

**T**he presentation made by Stephan de Spiegeleire in the Russia Seminar 2021 can be found on FNDU Youtube-channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgYMoBQ4OH8>.

The presentation made is a part of a larger publication and an integral part of this publication, and awchich can be found from: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2021110153138>.

### Questions and answers – panel discussion (Petraitis and de Spiegeleire)

**Q:** How is it possible to gain balance between Russia not to feel threatened and Europe showing the willingness to use power?

**AP:** It's always a delicate balancing act, but I think that important thing here is to go beyond the traditional narrative – that the Russians are aggressive, and they are just out there and just evil or whatever - and realize that they have legitimate security interests just like we do and there is this common fallacy that we have tend to have a bening self-image of seeing ourselves as good and the other as inherently bad. I think that's what so important about – now expanding NATO eastward because this whole counterfactual that I mentioned is very useful way of thinking because then we can see ourselves from the other person's or other actor's shoes. If we were threatened by NATO or we'd feel threatened by Warsaw pact expansion if we'd lost the cold war, then we can imagine that they are not very happy either. So, in those kind of situations I think it's important to not do any unnecessary provocations and the NATO expansion eastward is I think a example of that but at the same time it's important to put our foot down and just basically make it clear to the Russians that we are not willing to tolerate any kind of behaviour for instance if they get out of the line, thing you mentioned about this information or trying to impact political elections in the West or if there are any cyber attacks then we have to put out foot down and say now you have gone too far and we have to chase them and then we have to basically punish them because that's not legitimate way of acting and dealing with other at the international level. I think we need to make a clear distinction what is legitimate security interest and accept that while they go overboard, we have to show willingness to use power for instance if they use cyber attacks or they do disinformation campaigns in the West and so on. So, we make distinction between legitimate and illegitimate behaviour.

**SDeS:** I can have a comment on that. I feel distinctly uncomfortable with some of the sweeping generalizations that we sometimes make about these things. A lot of us is still sort of in the thralls of the “-isms”-debate that we've had and then you pick one of the -isms and you try to interpret the evidence based on that particular thing and then you draw policy conclusions. I wonder in which other discipline this would

be accepted where you do not look at it from a number of different angles and not only theoretical because you should. I mean this idea that the role of fear plays in realism which was well synthesized by Arash but there's a lot of other perspectives on fear and not only in political science but also in a lot of other fields. You mentioned a part of neuroscience, there's a lot more work on neuroscience not only about fear but about the strategic manipulation of fear for a variety of different purposes. I referred to that last week, so it seems to me that the right approach is for us as analysts is to first of all start textbinding these things for people who have claimed that Russians have fears about certain things - to list those and then start parsing the evidence which of these fears can relate to actual phenomena that we have observed – how can they be interpreted differently, like was already mentioned, some fears are just political entrepreneurs, are essentially and on both sides by way, are essentially blowing up some of these fears for political entrepreneurship and how do we parse the evidence on that, that's what our task should be and incidentally I forgot to mention that during my presentation we should be doing this not on our own but I think our Russian colleagues would play a great role in that. That's why I think it would be great if Finland would play a more proactive role on some of these issues in bringing people together not about spin, like someone mentioned before, around trying to get it right and right now us analysts because we have not done our homework, have often no alternative but to resort to these sweeping claims that are based on some partial evidence and on sort of, from my point of view, greatly undertheorized points. So, I think it's an important example of really how, if you want to be honest in recommendations to your academic or policy audience. You really have to take a hard look at how much we really know about this and there is a great gap that I hope we can finally start bridging a bit.

**Q:** A short intervention - originally the question was for **SDeS** and you mentioned in your presentation that one of the big findings you've done from the metadata is that Ukraine is in such a big amount of discussion on deterrence, so that the meaning of this concept for Russian debate on strategic stability is far greater than we have actually appreciated. So, the question is how do you interpret your finding because I think it has to do with the discussion, we're now having about how to see the conflict from many perspectives?

**SDeS:** Let me be very clear on this – the main reason why it scored so high because we also had newspaper articles in there, so we looked for things like “sderzhivaniye” (сдерживание) and “ustrasheniye (устрашение) and things around, so, the point I'm trying to make here is that maybe just looking at theoretical journals and not looking at other forms of information and even knowledge, we may have a distorted view of the real epistemic evidence which is out there both on theories and on the reality. I would say, and this was not just on the metadata, this is really on the full text, we analyzed the entire text and I indeed was surprised by the high prevalence of Ukraine in that. To me this is a sort of a call to look a lot more deeply at the other literature that we don't usually look at, because we think it's too fluffy or it's just journalists' day-to-day kind of things that's sexy and that's not really deep and I wonder whether we haven't been too callous in our assessments of that other stuff and whether taking some of these other sources more seriously might not help our real understanding not just of how they think about things and how they think about very differently, because to me that's the main finding so far – how many different views there really are in the Russian discourse. We always have an incentive because our customers as us what the

Russians really think and they don't want to hear that there are 15 different views in that, but if there are, we as analysts should try to make sense of it. I think that it's a very interesting finding that sort of shows a potential weakness of the type of research that we do and the sources that we use and it might encourage us to widen the analytical aperture of our efforts.

**AP:** I agree with SDeS that we should take in as many perspectives as possible and bring in as much data and analyze it as well as we can but at the same time, I think these kinds of theoretical constructs whether it's realism, fear or liberalism or whatever "ism" it may be, are very useful because the problem today is that we are so overwhelmed with so much data, so much is going on in the world and we need these kind of tools to make sense of all this data. Otherwise, I think we'll just be overwhelmed and don't know what to do. So, it is important to take different perspectives and data, but I think just getting more and more data is not the solution, we need to have these kinds of tools to make sense of this data, otherwise I don't think that we will be able to act in this very complex world where we are overwhelmed with things, so, we need sometimes also simplify things in order to get to the essence of things and just get rid of the things that are not as important in this context – we need to do both issues.

**Q:** One of your **(AP)** lessons learned was more European cooperation. Could you elaborate: what type of cooperation, and, to what extent can Russian actions be a motivation for European cooperation, given that the fear (if that is the motivation) for Russia seems rather unevenly spread among European countries?

**AP:** A good question – I was talking mainly about security and military cooperation of course because that's the context of our discussions here and you're definitely right that the European motivations defer - Finland is in different strategic position than France is and so on. But I think that the issue of the United States is something that will affect pretty much all of these Western or European countries and that will give us more incentives to come together because if China's growth continues and the US starts to pull away from Europe then we all European countries in the region will have a shared interest cooperation more in security and military affairs because then we can't rely on the Americans as much. So, I think in this situation even though the Russian threat or fear of Russia might defer, the simple fact that we can't rely on the US, gives us a common base and a common interest to cooperate more with one another but as I mentioned things are not necessarily going that direction at the moment with Brexit and hardline nationalists. Eventhough, I think, it's our enlightened interest to cooperate more, I'm not saying that will actually happen because sometimes we make decisions that are in my opinion counterproductive, so we can't guarantee that will happen but I'm hopeful that it will happen in the future.

**Q:** We've been discussing about fear, motivation and the future effect on the human behaviour, according to your research can you tell us how the Russians are playing with this emotion and perceptions of fear in its security policy or even in the military policy?

**AP:** I should mention that in my research I didn't focus on Russia per se, so I look at realism and how fear is used in realism in this particular presentation I tried to bring in Russia and how it might play out their, but I haven't done any research pieces in particular on Russia and how they use fear. But what I have seen in more general terms there are these two elements – there is this "real fear" about the security threats



that are posed by some other actors, in Russia's case mainly from NATO, but this whole devised fear that you use to further your agenda that Stephan was also talking about. In this case it becomes of course, as we mentioned earlier, hard to distinguish what is real and what is not, I think basically we just have to look at the data and see which is the most plausible interpretation we can make on basis of data with the tools that we have. It will be imperfect but that's our best way of doing this, I think for instance you could see after 9-11 that the fear of terrorism that was there, I think in that case Putin and Russia did definitely exploit that to advance their own interests in the region and tried to frame their subsequent conflict for instance in Chechnya as a part of this. I think in that case they definitely use their fear of 9-11 islamic terrorism to advance their political agenda but I think in the case of NATO it is quite real and sincere because we would feel the same way if Warsaw Pact was acting that way.

**SDeS:** In general, the role that fear plays in Russian strategic thinking is of course indubitably much higher than it does in ours and I think that 's not even just in international relations that's even in everyday life, I mean – you remember that Robert Cooper , one of the EU's top people, talked about the difference between pre-modern, modern and post-modern states – Russia is verry much a modern state, even older than the United States, which is very much a modern state in the sence that they still think that being feared is indeed better than being respected or being loved on whatever and that irradiates their entire strategic posture and their strategic behaviour, but the question always remains how do we - more and more postmodern states - deal with that and here I think what you see is quite interesting because you see a wide variety of, like Arash mentioned, reactions to that. Some of this backfires and sort of undermines Russian positions, some of it is interpreted very differently across the EU for instance or across NATO but to me that's not a negative, that's a positive thing because some of the healthy elements of fear that comes from the Eastern side of the Alliance can guard us a little bit against a tool a ease approach but also the reverse to the fact that France, Spain or Italy look more southward is also very healthy balancing act for us Europeans and ultimately it seems to me should never forget that what is all about – it's about balance of investment – how do we know that Russia is behaving in a particular way that I think we should still parse it better on find out more why and how and the dynamics behind that. From my point of view is fear something that we should also try to instill, how much does that cost, that's why I don't think that the sort of military cooperation is the only solution to that. What we really need is a more strategic assessment, a sound strategic assessment of the advantage and the disadvantage of different options, also in financial terms, also in effectiveness terms and unfortunately our field barely does that. We often write something and then we come out and say we should do more of this, we should do less that, it seems to me that a normal, real strategic analyst should really list the options, have a couple of criteria against which we can adjudicate which options are more attractive than others and then we can go to our policy makers. So, again it seems to me there's a whole layer of analysis that's really missing from our debates and which leads us to very facile policy prescriptions and policy actions as opposed to doing it the smart way. Let me put out the final point - Europe lived manipulated and tried to manipulate fear for centuries prior to Wold War II, we tried to deter our neighbors from invading us and we found out that there are much smarter ways to secure our countries, to make our people thrive other than through fear, so I think that we should never forget the basic insight that there alternatives to fear and to manipulation of fear and we should have a hard nose without being too theoretical or without being too pro or anti, whatever. Just

put things next to each other and do our homework and that's why we went out and got money to do this sort of stuff more in depth because I feel we have not punched out at the weight that we could be punching, and I think we can, and we should.

**Q:** Could you DP comment from your perspective so we can get your view also as part of the discussion?

**DP:** I have to accept that I'm not a good expert on this field as my colleagues who just commented, so I leave the floor for them.

**AP:** Can I add just this final point about fear – as I mentioned in my presentation their preferred response to fear is restrained rather than aggression, so I think that could be used quite productively if Russia for instance is fearful of Western power then the preferred option would be restraint rather than aggression and that would of course be in Western interest but at the same time, as I mentioned, we can't like corner them and push them too far because fear is also compatible with aggression, so it's also there a balancing act, if we push them too far, if NATO goes too far to the East then we might get an aggression on our hand but if it's more moderate and they still have the option for restraint, they will offer restraint and I think the case of Georgia with the US military aircraft show that Putin is actually capable of a restraint in those kind of areas where the West shows resolve.

**Q:** How do you see the role of General staff academy in the research establishment of the Russian Ministry of defence and how did the Prussian Art of War i.e the ideas of Moltke the Elder effect on the Russian Art of War during the 1800s?

**DP:** I'll start with the second question and like to have a clarification of this "nut-shell". If you talked about the Russian art of war in the 1800s, at that time those ideas were just entering the force, as I mentioned that who brought the ideas to Russia, were very much concerned with the mobility and with the military being so very relaxed. At that time the French, Napoleonic approach to the military, to the war waging was very popular. The genius surrounded by the smart, but the most important, loyal officers were waging the wars, so at the 1800s kept that as the best example but because as you know Napoleon failed, Prussian ideas started to enter Russian military especially in the younger ranks. I guess that Russian-Turkish war was the war where Russians finally realized that how important it is to do a proper planning, a proper thinking about the whole waging a war. But according to my personal understanding the times when the Prussian ideas got adopted, the most started with 1900s, is the World War I when the Russian military suddenly realized that how efficient the German military could be being surrounded by overwhelming enemies. Later then the Bolsheviks came, then they adopted those principles, they moved them not only into the military but also to all the secret services, all the Communist party apparatus was operating with and appreciated those principles and of course over the time the military did a lot of those things.

About the General staff academy is the leading academy in the Russian military science. Russia is one of those few countries which have so called Military science academy and system, they are leading in and educational process, they are covering their supervising so-called service academies and several service military institutions but at the same time they do a lot of research. They have institutions and other research think-tanks established which contribute directly to certain tasks or requests from the General staff but at the same time they are involved in providing the coordination

and information to the wider society, for example organizing conferences and presenting military estimates on certain issues. You have to bear in mind that by the Russian military entering wider and wider, they got a very smart approach for example the minister himself is the chairman of the Russian geographic association, the Chief of the Russian Foreign intelligence service (SVR) is the chairman of the Russian historical association and they both are from the military organization, they are familiar with those ideas presented by the General staff academy and the last thing – the General staff academy annually holds a big conference partly open for the outsiders and partly closed. So, we have been participating in the country's educational system and they have, I would say, a big impact.

**Q:** Can you (**SDeS**) say more about your concrete plans for making publicly available the datasets and tools you are talking about?

**SDeS:** Our plan is to make everything we can, that's not copyrighted, available broadly in the second half of this year probably. But in the mean while anybody who reaches out to us already now, so what we have just to tell people a little bit what that is. So we have quite detailed descriptions about the tools like if you want to do bibliometrics on our topic or on this topic we'll show you where to find it, what tools there are, the pros and cons of these tools and we'll show examples of how we have used them so far and so, all that stuff like for instance bibliometrics we already have, we are constantly restructuring this stuff, we are very eager to stress test our current documentation by having people use it. We will also publish our own stuff about this, but we'd be extremely eager if somebody else would step in and do something themselves and hopefully in an open way, not taking the stuff, locking themselves up somewhere for a year and a half and then publishing something, but really do it in the sort of fly. Especially to all of you, if you have any young PhD-students or post-docs or even junior faculty, there is no doubt in my mind that we'll be seeing a lot more of this and we can do it either very slowly or we can try to expedite it. We are fortunate that we have some money now to do this for money for ourselves, we can't pay the other ones, but we can actually keep building documentation, so if you know any of these people – have them reach out to us, we are most eager for people who are still trying to find a topics, because they would then have access to more information, they could work with us on this and they could still write their own dissertations, but that's on the documentation. We are easy to find on internet - The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies: <https://hcss.nl/>.

**Q:** Then about the data, you (**SDeS**) mentioned that the Russian debate focuses on means and there is a lot of discussion on the informational and other means etc. Do you have an explanation for this, and I would suggest that, could it be part of the explanation that Russian debate on deterrence or in general the strategic thinking is not that super theoretical as perhaps the Western discussion is, or is this just my experience with the Russian theories and articles?

**SDeS:** I don't have the answer to this either, I realize that just like to pick up a little bit on the discussion we had before, I mean that a lot of Russian thinking is still very modern, even the structure of the General staff, even some of these structural issues still reflect the way in which Western European thought at the beginning of the industrial age and that is Clausewitz and Jomini on the planning side, that is general staffs and ministries of defence in a very linear way on the government side. So, the Soviet Union had a huge time eventhough Ogargov and others came up with the idea

of network centric warfare in some sense, they did not have this sort of where with to leverage that and I think the same is happening now. I think a lot of what we see in the Russian literature is a reflection of what they read in the West, they of course have made some progress but they are way behind on the civilian side on almost everything. I feel we're in a similar situation like in the 80s and until the 90s where they heard something, they tried to play with it, and they also try to emulate some of our stuff. SO, I found it interesting that the general staff people then get sent to civilian jobs basically enhance their training but it's still a very bureaucratic way of doing that. One country that I respect most on this is actually Singapore who have these military scholars who are real scholars, and, in their careers, they will also go to the other side, so, I think there are more advanced ways of doing what Russia is trying to do now but to answer your question – if anybody is interested in that country - look at our stuff and try to figure out what's behind that, how they respond to these things, this all could be empirically investigated in ways that we wouldn't have been able to do up until even a few years ago. So, reach us and we'll make sure that you can get access to whatever would be of use to you.

**SDeS:** The deterrence is back with a vengeance, in every national debate across the Western alliance, it's back - my personal pretty well documented feeling on this is that we miss an important part of what we would need to be able to make judicious and good-value for money decisions on some of these big issues, a lot of the costs involved in trying to ensure deterrence both in financial but also in other ways are very high and I would certainly not be the one who says that we should get rid of the deterrence but I do think that we should take a much harder look at the alternative of deterrence, why do we have the deterrence theory and not like a seduction theory in international security or strategic timing – there's so much stuff that we're missing here both at the deterrence level and at the higher level where I think we've been doing some more work and again the plea I've already made a couple of times - we really can do better on this, we had excuses for a long time not to do this stuff, we could not read everything, we still cannot read everything, but now things are changing quite dramatically and I feel frustrated that we have not able to jump on this more quickly. So, the combination of increased importance of deterrence, the lack of knowledge that we still have on some aspect of it and the increased opportunity for also collaborative knowledge-building on this really led to a unique opportunity, I think, to act together.



## 12

### THE OGARGOV PERIOD: SOVIET ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN VIEWS ON DETERRENCE

Michael Kofman

The presentation made by Michael Kofman in the Russia Seminar 2021 can be found on FNDU Youtube-channel:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v0uTxigJ\\_c&t=4825s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v0uTxigJ_c&t=4825s).

#### Questions and answers

**Q:** You mentioned that Ogarkov is maybe one of the most significant drivers of Russian military thought in contemporary setting, but has this been acknowledged in a way that he's been referred to continuously or not referred to, is there significant criticism towards him, how would you say his thinking is visible in the current Russian discussion?

**MK:** I think most of the people that drove the Russian military debates particularly in 90s after Ogarkov they really took off his ideas and they generally credit him - some really lionize him, like Gareev, other built a much better framework around some of his ideas, like Slipchenko's sixth generation war. The thrust of what Slipchenko's talking about are discussions being had in the early 1980s by the Soviet General staff, Kokochin as well and certainly people we've come to know like Baluevsky who were huge fans of his. Ogarkov is not quoted or cited necessarily that commonly by senior Russian military officials because if they're going to cite someone they'll throw away. In some way Ogarkov had a more interesting conversation about the how and not necessarily that influential in shaping the debate between the three main strategies that you see often discussed – strategy annihilation, strategy of attrition or strategy of exhaustion. He doesn't play as big role in this discussion, but in terms of military strategy when we look at force structure, force posture, capability investments, concepts of operation, what matters for war-fighting, what matters for the terms I think Ogarkov has probably the strongest influence and this is pretty logical because people served with him and his ideas came from practical times of 1980s which directly drove the evolution of character of war and concepts of operation in the 90s and 2000s. Nobody served frustration to Tuhatchevsky and they were writing a interwar period, obviously there are some technical dissimilarities, strategy – you can always look back for lessons on strategy but nonetheless I do think that he has by far more significant influence and that subject is debatable and most importantly if you want to debate it – I'm not advancing Ogarkov in competition for those of you who are deeply excited about Svechin or Snesev or anyone else. We all have pictures of the puzzle – I'm simply suggesting there are more contemporary, more recent influence and perhaps more practical one. So, it's not a competition for who influenced contemporary Russian military thought the most, and I'm sure Russian military is well read but in terms of ideas, I thought that a lot that Ogarkov proposed during his time was in fact implemented and if you don't agree with my thesis, then you must believe that this is a tremendous coincidence.

**Q:** How much, if any, did the communist ideology inform the writings of Ogarkov? Did he put the whatever imprimatur in there in his writings in this house, that his writings somehow conformed to the communist ideology?

**MK:** What really influenced him was not the ideology but the dialectical tradition under communism which is principally Hegelian, which is that, first there's a progress in terms of technology and theory – as new theories come to compete with the existing theories, they are counter-posed against the existing theory, they are just like kind of the angles posit that you see is a consistent interaction between quantitative and qualitative one transitioning to the other, another transitioning back to it. The second is the concept of negation, which is that you have counters that negate existing technologies and existing organizational concepts. One thing that influenced Ogarkov really in the late 70s was the belief that nuclear weapons had negated themselves, that even though there was no technology that could effectively negate nuclear weapons, there's a counter to the nuclear weapons, a defence against nuclear weapons, that nuclear weapons have fundamentally negated themselves because they made war politically unwinnable and this is what drove a big part of the conversation on the emphasis for the independent conventional war option, so, in this regards – yes. I don't believe that the communist ideology per se was a strong influence but the tradition of dialectic that communism existed from Hegelian philosophy definitely did.

**Q:** Basically, I concur that Ogarkov was this thinker who is definitely ahead of his time, and so, he was ahead both of technology, which at least in the Russian case is, like it has been in the last 15 years or less that they've really been able to feel the technologies that made some of his operational concepts practical possibilities but also that he was just ahead of his political and institutional context too. My impression is that the defence secretary Ustinov and the military services and to a certain degree the military-industrial complex, which was threatened by the notion of like – we're going to constrain spending on these things we're currently building and we're going to build these new things - of course there are people who are interested in building the new things but there is also a sense of very threatened about moving away from the things that we're invested in. So, my sense is that there were actually a whole lot of hostile activity to Ogarkov's ideas in the late 70s and early 80s and I was just wondering what your sense of that was?

**MK:** Yes, there was. There's no more precarious place to be in an institution or bureaucracy than being ahead of your time for a whole number of reasons. So, he had quite a number of fights, some people legitimately questioned his thesis on automation of war in general and the sort of Deus ex machina – notion that they would have automated systems of command and control and recon-strike, recon-fire-complexes and these things were to be to such an extent automated and other people questioned the military strategy approach of trying to compete with the United States in qualitative conventional capabilities and the utility and efficacy of that arms-race giving the economic constraints of the Soviet union of that time as well. Some people argued that he was playing into US strategy essentially and engaging on top having checkmated basically US nuclear advantage as a tactical operational of strategic level that you're pushing the Soviet Union towards a conventional competition which could be economically realistic. Some of those were fair criticism although on the mighty question – yes of course you want more money for those reforms, and he has strong opposition to that but then the Soviet Union ended up increasing the military budget anyway under Gorbachev by several percent.

Political institutional contacts - yes of course you have to fight people who want legacy things, here the big fight with people who wanted to feed civil defence, he had fight with people who wanted to procure lots of legacy force and infrastructure, one of his argument for example was with Gorshgov because Ogarkov basically was yelling at Gorshkov for the fact that the Soviet Navy liked building ships and didn't like to buy the infrastructure actually to maintain them and he was also annoyed at Gorshkov's idea that the Soviet Union should spent money on carriers, but this is one of accurate examples of the different fights that he had with other people.

But he got a lot of done – it is fair to say, the things that he didn't get done for example his idea of integrating the Airforce and Airdefence, but nonetheless Russia ended up going in this direction down the line, he did get quite a bit done in terms of what he was able to introduce in military thought, but when we talk about automated systems of command and control, testing things and strategic command staff exercises, developing and deploying these sort of recon-strike-recon-fire-complexes which was the idea back then, that Russia actually finishes off in the last 15 years. I think that there is a tremendous amount there, so it's more that the people followed him are able to accomplish many of his ideas vs. how much he was able to get done himself. Ultimately, he was relieved and pushed into being the commander of the Western TVD but a lot of that is also because of the numerous fights he picked. He had to deal with in-transition interests and the defence sector and all that.





# 13

## RUSSIAN VIEWS ON COFM (ASSESSED CORRELATION OF FORCES AND MEANS)

Clint Reach

The presentation made by Clint Reach in the Russia Seminar 2021 can be found on FNDU Youtube-channel:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v0uTxigJ\\_c&t=4825s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v0uTxigJ_c&t=4825s).

### Questions and answers

**Q:** To what extent will Russia substitute non-nuclear returns, a conception of strategic conventional capabilities nuclear in the different types of war conceptualizations given that there is a very strong belief in the Russian military that nuclear weapons fundamentally offer a different psychological effect than the conventional weapons and they cannot be substituted for just by conventional capability in full even in regional war scenarios, plus they are important as a coercive contributor to ideas about limited use of conventional capabilities against critical objects and the like, that is sort of belief that limited conventional employment will have much more added course of effect if there's a perception that you're going through an escalation ladder.

The big thesis that I'm trying to advance here is, that to what extent is it really a question of how much conventional capability you have, or can we clearly see, that's obviously where I'm leaning, some theoretical left and right boundaries on how Russia is never going to become the United States and even if you came tomorrow with a giant truck loaded with a long-range conventional weapons, as many as Russians would like to have, they would never substitute completely theatre nuclear weapons at their role but this is not the answer because there are theoretical boundaries of how they see this thing.

**CR:** I think that it's like 2050 when they're talking about the role of nuclear weapons being subverted by some new technology. I don't want to oversell this idea, it's not that the Russians are going to get rid of all their nuclear weapons. They've said repeatedly that they see their non-strategic nuclear weapons as a counter to their deficiency in PGMs (precision-guided-munition), so, it's not going to happen any time soon. My question would be - how do they achieve one of their missions, which I think, is to impose the Russian way of war on NATO, if it ever came to that. If they have such a strong reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons, if they are not able to get the truckload of PGM, this is the open question. In my mind it's the non-nuclear or strategic nuclear weapons have a lot of utility from a deterrent standpoint but they are highly problematic from a war-fighting perspective which is the point that Ogarkov made and so, it's just a question to me of how they would be able to do that, if they didn't have a substantial conventional capability to get them there.

**Q:** I think that one thing that they create - a bit of a realistic nuclear scared environment that lacks some of the stability, that you have with strategic nuclear weapons and strategic nuclear deterrence, it's kind of strong belief coming back from

Ogarkov's timeperiod, or strategic nuclear deterrence at the global level it has so much stability in it that actually affords you a tremendous amount of conventional war and that maybe it is that non-strategic nuclear weapons actually create interesting left and right boundaries for US conventional force operations because they create a nuclear scared environment but this environment actually isn't all that stable because of both qualitative changes in theatre nuclear weapons but also the fact that you have just differences in concepts of operations and forces and credibility and the like. So, that makes any sense that could be basically, it has a shaping effect if that makes sense not by using it, but it has a deterring effect by being a force and the existence of said capabilities and perception of credible plans to use them has a shaping effect on NATO operations without them necessarily being used.

**CR:** Absolutely, I think that that has to be the case when Russia has so many of them and they do rely on ambiguity of course in their nuclear policy and in their nuclear strategy, but they certainly hint at the fact that this is a part of their warfighting strategy, so, we have to take it into account. I think we agree.

**Q:** The regional level of war and whether or not nuclear weapon had a role to play, I just had to go back and look at this definition then from the Voroshilov-lectures because I was curious and I mean the definitions that you find in the Soviet period as well of regional wars are leaning heavily on the role of nuclear weapons then as well, so, that was why that comment that you had on how the regional level of war was not really playing a similar role as we've seen in the Russian period, sort of spurred my interest. My impression would be that the role of nuclear weapons has certainly changes in the post-cold-war period on the regional level of war, but that the definitions of the types of war seem to be quite similar as well as the role that the nuclear weapons may play in them but the role that nuclear weapons play in Russian strategy may have changed on that level. Maybe we are in disagreement or maybe I just didn't clearly understand what you said.

I also had a question for you – if you could say a little bit more about Russian deliberations of this logic behind this delineation, that you described in your slide as well, between the counter values versus the counter force targeting of non-nuclear and nuclear assets and what they say about the logic behind that sort of clear delineation, I could imagine that you could argue both ways, so I was wondering if there is a discussion about that or whether it's stated just as a fact that this kind delineation will have a less escalatory effect?

**CR:** The first thing I should say is that the slide is taken from Burenok and Pachadinov's book, it's not meant to represent the consensus within Russia on that issue. In their book they don't say exactly, they're not explicitly clear on why they came to that conclusion, they just imply the fact that if you are going after these counter-force, counter-military targets which again they're not superclear on what those are, but they imply that the amount of munition required to do sufficient damage to those targets is simply too large to use conventional PGMs for when you don't have that many to begin with. SO, my takeaway from their discussion was that they just were trying to figure out ways to get more bang for their buck with limited munitions and also it's important to point out that it was in 2011, so, the things have changed since then.

I have not seen that discussion and I'd certainly be interested if others have, I haven't seen that discussion so explicitly out there in Russian military literature – so, I can't answer your question as to debate. One other thing I'd say though is, if you look back

to the slide on Russian actions that was from Burenok 2009, they were sort of envisioning to disrupt the aerospace attack, there's certainly long-range attacks against traditional hard military targets and that's why I think this is just a theory and some practice, but it's still in the theoretical level at some point, in some ways for the Russians are trying to hash out how do we develop a plan and strategy that most effectively uses the resources that we have and I don't think it's crystal clear yet how it all works together, how they are targeting these things, what's the priority and so forth. I'd be interested if others have thoughts on that.

### **Questions and answers – panel discussion (Kofman and Reach)**

**Q:** Based on your knowledge and understanding how much did the Soviet Union's leadership in the 80s believe to the credibility of the Ronald Reagan's defence initiative, starwars, nuclear missile defence system? Did the SU believe that the SDI system was a possibility to become a functional system and negate the SU's nuclear arsenal or did they at the same time understand that the SDI was not a realistic project with that technology of that time?

**MK:** I'm not an expert on SDI, I'd say that one of the Soviet Union's long-standing concern had been a parallel missile defence race alongside a nuclear armsrace on a tactical and strategic level and that they always sought to avoid this via the 1972 ABM-treaty. On technical feasibility I think this was well debated and undoubtedly many people believed that SDI was meant to be a US instrument of coercion against the SU by essentially challenging the credibility of Soviet nuclear deterrence back then, much the same was written and conceived about US doctrinal writing on prospects of limited nuclear war. This is what Ogarkov and others are saying the limited nuclear war is an American canard, that's not realistic and it's meant to actually distract people from the nuclear armsrace and on that new limited nuclear war was fundamentally a fantasy. This is ironic because you see history kind of rhyme quite a bit in terms of people's conceptions on the prospects for the limited nuclear war and damage limitation strategies. But back to SDI – yes, they were concerned, I don't believe that Gorbatshev fundamentally would have proposed new complete disarmament in Reykjavik to Reagan and SDI would ended up essentially as one of the hang-up points if that wasn't the case, because the SU political level asked the US to give up the SDI and Reagan didn't want to. So, to me it remained a concern in terms of not that the SDI itself was realistic but sustained US investments in missile defence could eventually lead to breakthroughs that's always been a Russian concern, that led to a lot of Russian investments in these asymmetric counters because fundamentally they couldn't bank on the fact that after 20-30 years of investment the US would not reach some technological breakthrough in missile defence, little do they know the nature of our defence procurement but that's a separate story.

**Q:** My point was basically that Putin himself has re-emphasized only in a speech in December the importance to the Russian military and to Russian strategy of the nuclear arsenal of Russia. He was basically saying to the military that it's your first priority to make sure that the high-combat-readiness is maintained of the nuclear arsenal. This was not a question; it was a point.

**CR:** I would just follow up on that, to reiterate. Putin also gave a speech where he said that Russia's was assured for decades to come, as a result of their modernization efforts and of strategic nuclear weapons. So, again, just to hammer it home, I'm not

trying to insert some kind of narrative that Russia just doesn't care about their nuclear weapons. Not at all. We are talking about decades into the future here.

**MK:** I wasn't trying to insert the narrative that everything in Russia military development though really stems from Ogarkov, only most of it. But I'm to subvert the thinking that it's all Cvetschin and Tuhatchevsky and these other people. Ogarkov, I do think, is essential to understanding the origins of the more contemporary developments.

What could be the relationship between asymmetrical actions and means of operations and the correlation of forces and means? Are the Russians trying to incorporate the asymmetry into the correlation of forces and means calculations? What could be the role of asymmetric actions or means for Russian deterrence in the future?

**CR:** Good question. I've actually gone all over the place on this question about indirect action and asymmetric actions and these kind of things. What are the Russians talking about, because they are talking about it in sort of a vague way? They say we're the technologically inferior side and we don't have the economic resources, so we have to come up with asymmetric actions to level the playing field. And I had all kinds of thoughts about what that might mean. I think it does mean, in peacetime, going after things like societal cleavages and so forth, within Western societies to weaken them in some way. But in terms of warfighting and deterrence, what I've settled on is that, I think, it's this discussion of going after the enablers that allowed the system to function, with your conventional precision munitions. I think that may be what the Russians are referring to, like in Kartopolov's speech in 2015 where he talked about this. I think it's those types of actions and having the capability to credibly conduct those types of operations, is sort of part of their thinking on a non-nuclear deterrence and asymmetric actions. It's necessarily any sort of magical sort of, futuristic type of thing. This is my view anyway. In terms of correlation of forces, what that could mean is that your munition requirements are less if you're not expending one hundred or fifty missiles going after airbase but are expending less to go after targets that you think, that the Russians think, are sort of more consequential for the overall airspace operation or that you think might have a more psychological effect on the leadership. That could reduce the amount of munitions you might need to do the job if you're Russians and it would be technically asymmetric, I think.

**MK:** My sense of it is just, I think, there's two different things: one is asymmetry, and one is asymmetric actions and so the person asking about asymmetric actions versus asymmetry in Russian military thought which is more of a competitive strategy like conversation. Whereas asymmetric actions, if you think about symmetry complex, one side has a conventional intervention, other has a conventional intervention, or one side is engaged via proxies and the other side is engaged via proxies and the like. To me, kind of how I split asymmetry and indirect, because they're both a bit of nebulous and they overlap at times. Asymmetry, the pawns engage in conventional warfare, then you engage in various forms of indirect warfare in the conflict, so then you're the one that goes on with proxies and political subversion and the like, essentially, to exhaust them. You don't intervene conventionally alongside them. Alternatively, consider your opponent is engaged in the forms of proxy warfare and arming these different groups, then you intervene with aerospace forces, and you kill everyone by bombing them via conventional means. This is a symmetry that if one side takes one strategy, then you take an asymmetric strategy. The one that's indirect, I

think, is more of a base game conversation that your forces and opponent forces are not in direct conflict, contact in the conflict space, so, if one side is intervening in a particular conflict, you are intervening in that conflict too, but you are doing in such a way that your forces are not meeting. So, they are already deployed, you are likely to intervene in a very different manner, that why you're not in direct conflict or contact with their military forces.

**Q:** How does the objective for the forces and military power affect in Ogarkov's time and today in current Russia, affect to the ideas which Ogarkov mentioned or how does it affect the correlation of forces nowadays? What is the meaning of the objective, goal of the military at the moment? As Clint mentioned that the non-military effects are in a growing tendency, in relative terms, it will squeeze the conventional and the nuclear capabilities, how the objective is dealt with in your research? How does the objective affect to the calculations?

**CR:** I think, this issue of force disposition in the theatre is a thing I've thought a lot about, and the challenge, so, it gives the Russians both opportunities and it creates challenges. I think, when I say, "force disposition", what I means is that there are no longer these prepared defenses across from the Russian border, that they would need to break through, surround force groupings and destroy them and the things like that. And the primary operation is sort of the strategic land offensive supported by naval and air forces and airdefence. So, the theatre is different now in that sence, that the forces are arrayed much differently. I does raise a questions about Russia's ground forces, so, you have permanent-ready groud forces, if they were to seize a territory right across from the Russian border then that becomes, in my view, more of an occupation that it does a military fight at least from the perspective of the ground forces. So, it creates opportunities for Russia, in the sence that it has this territory that's arguably undefended, that they could take if they felt like they had to, if there was some, of there were some political reasons for doing so. But, it also still forces them to engage in this sort of non-contact war because all of the military potential of NATO or at least a large portion of it is either in Western Europe or in the United States. So, regardless of what Russia does in sort of the initial period on the ground, it's still going to have to tackle this challenge of disrupting a NATO counterattack, let's say, that's largely based on aerospace forces. So, that's sort of how I think about the military aspect of the theatre. I'm not sure if that's where you're going with your question or not.

**MK:** I'll just add to Clint's answer that it really depends on the type of war you're talking about. So, the military's job is to answer the prospects of armed conflict or conflict like in Chechnya, let's say local war, a Russia-Georgia or Russia-Ukraine war, regional or large-scale war that involves multiple theaters and multiple powers and of course a strategic nuclear exchange. Much of that begs the question of what do you think what would be the Russian political objective in the war, right? And what we tend to discuss is a hypothetical war with NATO. So, naturally it would not be to conquer all of Europe or to head to the English Channel as fast as possible, right? So, to me that all comes with consideration, there isn't one easy answer, depends on the type of war, different wars create different contexts with different types of objectives and the military has to del with the range of these fights. Yes, I have to prioritize large-scale regional first, but it has to do with a spectrum of these prospective fights. That doctrinally involves the application of different types instruments, both for deterrence and for warfighting and they create different cinsiderations. Part of the challenge I

think with NATO is both the fact that the war could initially have fairly limited scope or more purely limited political stakes and that has big advantages but also has big disadvantages for NATO as well in terms of the stakes and for all the different countries that may have to be involved in a NATO coalition.

**Q:** If we simplify things now, we can think of the correlation of forces as a theory or method for calculating how much hardware you need to get to your objective in a way. But Russians are also famous for another theory which is the theory of reflexive control, that in a way gives some ideas or models for calculating the sort of the informational objectives or targets of the adversary's political system. SO, my question is: are these two spheres of thought in a way integrated? Have you seen any discussion on reflexive control theory in the context of your study?

**CR:** I wouldn't say that they're at least in the literature directly related. The way that I would say that they're related intuitively is that reflexive control is all about convincing your adversary to basically do what is in your interest. So you want to crawl inside their head, think about what makes them tick and then take actions that you think will play on their weaknesses or biases or whatever, in order to get them to do what you want. In the research that I've done reflexive control is really about convincing the adversary that any conflict with Russia would result in sort of consequences that would outweigh any potential benefit. And so, the Russians, sometimes reflexive control, and this is something I've seen in the Russian literature, is Putin making a statement about how Russians are prepared to be martyrs if there were ever to be a war with NATO. He's basically sending the message that there is no sort of military solution to the Russia problem for NATO and don't even consider it. So, having, I guess, where correlation of forces comes in, is that you have to have a capability to make those types of statements credible. The credibility problem for Russia before was, if your only answer is to nuke you no matter what the situation might be, then that's not enough. We have to have credibility down the sort of escalation ladder that will allow our attempts at reflexive control to be more effective, if that makes sense.

**C:** Yes, that makes sense. Thank You!

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Kristin Ven Bruusgaard**, PhD, is a Postdoc/Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at University of Oslo, where she is part of the Oslo Nuclear Project. Previously she was a Nuclear Security Postdoctoral and Predoctoral Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University and before that, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies and a defence analyst in the Norwegian Armed Forces. Her research covers Russian nuclear strategy, military doctrine, deterrence and crisis stability in Europe. Her publications include “Russian nuclear strategy and conventional inferiority (2020) in *Journal of Strategic Studies*”, “Russia killed arms control. Why does it want to keep New START” (2020) in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, “The myth of Russia’s lowered nuclear threshold” (2017) in *War on the Rocks*, and “Russian Strategic Deterrence” (2016) in *Survival*.

**Pentti Forsström**, DScMil, Lt Col (ret.), is a member of the Russia research group and a Senior Researcher at the National Defence University. He has a General Staff Officer’s Degree from year 1997 and he served in the Finnish Defence Forces till 2017. Forsström’s military experience includes several positions in Military Intelligence and Strategic Research in Finland and five years abroad. In 2009 he graduated from the General Staff Academy of the Russian Armed Forces. During the last two years in active military service, he finalized his doctoral dissertation on the development of Russian military strategy. In 2019 he was appointed as a senior researcher in the Russia research group. His current research interest focuses on Russian Military in general and the Art of War.

**Stephan De Spiegeleire** has worked as a defense and security analyst at the RAND Corporation for nearly 10 years, interrupted by 3-year stints at SWP (Germany) and the WEU’s Institute for Security Studies (France). Since 2004 he has been working in the Netherlands, currently as Principal Scientist at HCSS and Senior Advisor Defense and Security at TNO. Stephan also teaches at Webster University and lectures at military academies across the world. He is furthermore a Non-Resident Scholar at Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey. Stephan’s main research area is international defense and security planning, with a special focus on security foresight, risk assessment, (comprehensive) capabilities-based planning, strategic balance of investment, performance management, human-centred defense design. He is co-PI of two large multi-year research programs funded by the US DoD and the Carnegie Corporation of New York that try to bring data science to the analysis of Russia's foreign, security and defense policy. Recent publications/books include *Assessing Russian Assertiveness - Letting the Data Speak*. (2020), *Reimagining Deterrence: Towards Strategic (Dis)Suasion Design* (2020), *Implementing Defence Policy: A Benchmark-‘Lite*.(2019), *Things May Not Be as They Seem. Geodynamics in the International System* (2018), *Playing to Your Strengths: A Different Perspective on Future Capabilities for the Royal Netherlands Army* (2018).

**Gudrun Persson**, PhD, is a Deputy Research Director at FOI and associate professor at the Department of Slavic Studies in Stockholm University. She holds PhD from London School of Economics. Persson’s research focuses in Russian foreign policy and Russian military strategic thought. Among her latest publications are “Russian thoughts on hybrid war and colour revolutions”, *Russian Studies Series 1/20*, Nato Defense College (2020), and "Conflicts and contradictions: Military relations in the post-



Soviet space” in Moshes, Arkady and Racz, Andras (eds) *What has remained of the USSR – Exploring the erosion of the post-Soviet space* (FIIA, Helsinki 2019). She is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences.

**Rod Thornton**, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at King’s College London and he teaches at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Previously Thornton served in the British Army for nine years in an infantry regiment. His research focuses on international security issues, developments in the Russian military and Russian security structures. Thornton’s latest publications include *Towards the ‘Third Revolution in Military Affairs’: The Russian military’s use of AI-enhanced cyber warfare*, in *RUSI Journal* (2020), *Detering Russian cyber warfare: the practical, legal and ethical constraints faced by the United Kingdom* in *Journal of Cyber Policy* (2019) and *Countering Prompt Global Strike: The Russian Military Presence in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean and Its Strategic Deterrence Role* in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (2019).

**Lester W. Grau**, PhD, Lieutenant Colonel (ret.), (absent from the seminar, contribution included) is a Senior Analyst for the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO). Grau has served the U.S. Army for 52 years and his military experience includes, for instance, service in Vietnam War and later teaching and research. Grau’s research focuses on tactical, operational and geopolitical subjects and Russian military. His latest publications include: *Russian Engineer Reconnaissance in Icy River-crossing Conditions*, published by *Engineer* January-April 2020; *Activities of the Russian Ground-Based Contingent in Syria*, *Russia’s War in Syria: Assessing Russian Military Capabilities and Lessons Learned*, co-authored with Charles Bartles, Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 2020; *The Russians Train for Arctic Riverine Operations*, published by *Marine Corps Gazette* November 2019.

**Anya Loukianova Fink**, PhD, Dr. Fink is a research analyst at CNA and a research associate at the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland (CISSM). Previously she was a fellow in nuclear security policy in the U.S Senate. Fink’s research focuses on Russian strategy and nuclear issues. Her latest publications include CNA reports on Russian approaches to escalation management, co-authored with Michael Kofman, and a chapter on Russia’s perception of the 2030 strategic balance in Brad Roberts, ed., *Fit for Purpose? The U.S. Strategic Posture in 2030 and Beyond* (Lawrence Livermore National Lab, 2020).

**Edward Geist**, PhD, is a Policy Researcher at the RAND Corporation. Geist’s research interests include Russia, nuclear weapons, artificial intelligence and civil defense. His latest publications include *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in United the States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019) and RAND publication *Exploring the Role Nuclear Weapons Could Play in Deterring Russian Threats to the Baltic States* (2019).

**Daivis Petraitis**, a Chief Adviser in the International Relations and Operations Group at the Ministry of Defense of Lithuania. He started his service in Lithuanian Armed Forces in civil defense and rescue forces back in nineties. His last military assignments were a deputy NMR at SHAPE and a chief of Information analysis (J2) Defense Staff of Lithuanian MOD. After his retirement he works in the MOD in a field of international affairs mostly dealing with non NATO, non EU countries and Arms control issues. Petraitis holds a master’s degree in International Security and Economic policy. He’s research focuses on Russian military, defense and security issues. “Russian mission-command in VOSTOK strategic exercises” in *Defense &*

*Security Analysis* 2019 35(1) and “The Anatomy of *Zapad*-2017: Certain Features of Russian Military Planning” in *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 2018 16(1) are examples of Petraitis’ latest publications.

**Michael Kofman** is a Director of the Russian Studies Program at CNA and a Kennan Institute Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center. Previously he served at National Defence University as Program Manager. Kofman’s research focuses on security issues in Russia and Eurasia, and he has published numerous articles on the Russian military, Russian strategy, doctrine, combat operations, and security issues in Russia and Eurasia. “The Ogarkov Reforms: The Soviet Inheritance Behind Russia’s Military Transformation”, *CCW Russia Brief* 2019: 5, p. 10–12 is one of his latest publications.

**Clint Reach** is a policy analyst at RAND. Reach holds Master’s degree in Political Science from Kansas State University and Master’s degree in Russian and Eurasian studies from Johns Hopkins SAIS. Reach’s research focuses on security and Russian military issues. Previously he has served for nine years as a Russian linguist in the U.S. Navy and in various positions at the Department of Defence. Reach’s latest publications include *Russian Assessments and Application of the Correlation of Forces and Means* (Reach, Kilambi, Cozad, 2020), *Alternative Worldviews: Understanding Potential Trajectories of Great-Power Ideological Competition* (Watts, et al., 2020), and *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security* (Flanagan, et al., 2020).

**National Defence University**

Department of Warfare  
PO Box 7, 00861 HELSINKI

+358 299 800

[www.mpkk.fi](http://www.mpkk.fi)

ISBN 978-951-25-3249-0 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-951-25-3250-6 (pdf)

ISSN 2343-5275 (print)

ISSN 2343-5283 (web)



**Puolustusvoimat**  
The Finnish Defence Forces