Russian Military Strategy Development from 1991 to 2019

A Monograph

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Abstract

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The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union saw a realignment of the relationship between Russia and the United States. The animosity of the Cold War gave way to a tenuous period of disarmament, cooperation, and transparency. However, security and social conflicts of interest from 1991 to 2019 widened the rift between Russia and the US and its allies, resulting in significant shifts in Russian security partnerships and policy. Russia's current military strategy represents a notable change from the nuclear weapons and conventional combined arms focus that typified the Cold War and consists of a general strategy of active defense, limited action, and an adaptation towards the development of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operations and their employment. This monograph will focus on the Russian military strategy development from 1991 to 2019 through a review of the Russian understanding of war and military strategy from the Soviet period to the present and applying it to the Russian military campaigns in Ukraine and Syria. Additionally, the Russian understanding of war and military strategy provides some insights regarding the potential future direction of Russian military strategy development and implications for current and future US military policy and strategy.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EU	European Union
IRGC-QF	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VDV	Vozdushno-Desantnye Voyska
VKS	Vozdushno-Kosmicheskiye Sily

Introduction

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union saw a realignment of the relationship between Russia and the United States. The animosity of the Cold War gave way to a tenuous period of disarmament, cooperation, and transparency.[1] In an effort to establish good relations with the US and its allies, Russia reluctantly met the stipulations of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty by re-allotting nearly half of the Soviet Union's tanks, artillery, armored combat vehicles, combat aircraft, and helicopters to the former Soviet republics and consolidating the Soviet nuclear arsenal with the Russian military. The breakup of the Soviet armed forces resulted in the redistribution of four million Soviet military personnel and the creation of national militaries in the fifteen independent states that superseded the Soviet Union. The haste and disorganization of the reformation left the initial post-Cold War Russian military with a deteriorating force posture, limited infrastructure, unaffordable defense industry, and contracting defense budget. Thus, Russia struggled to develop and implement a national strategic concept that aligned with its international position and defined its interests, threats, and requirements. The subsequent Russian national security doctrines from 1992 to 2000 proved to be inconsequential in terms of influence on policy and failed to generate any significant military reforms. Rather, Russian political and military elites remained focused on maintaining Russia's status as a great power.[2] Russia's position as an internal sovereign state and a great power form the core of its national identity and security focus. Consequently, Russia's efforts to define the statuses of great power and sovereign statehood ultimately conflicted with the actions and interests of the US and its allies.[3]

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[1] Alexei G. Arbatov, "The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya" (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2000), v.

[2] Steven E. Miller, "Moscow's Military Power: Russia's Search for Security in an Age of Transition," in *The Russian Military*, ed. Steven E. Miller and Dmitri Trenin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 4-17.

[3] Anne L. Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Routledge, 2019), 4-5.

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Russia's security emphasis on great power status and state sovereignty serves to justify employing force internally, within its perceived sphere of influence, and in support of sovereign allied/partner governments.[4] Accordingly, Russian misgivings and objections to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement rounds during 1999 and 2004 generated a nascent shift in Russian foreign security policy. The improved US-Russian dialog that occurred towards the end of the Cold War included discussions regarding US efforts to develop pan-European security institutions that would not divide Europe and fulfil core Russian security interests. Therefore, Russia did not conceive nor expect NATO expansion eastward. Rather, Russia supported the development of pan-European multilateral security arrangements and organizations that respected its status as a great power and provided a public front for Russian influence.[5]

However, US efforts after 1991 included integrating institutions aligned with the US and its allies into the newly formed democracies of the former Warsaw Pact nations and Soviet Republics.[6] The efforts involved US recognition of concerns from the nations regarding their vulnerability, fear of Russia, and wish for the enlargement of NATO. Subsequently, NATO admitted the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999 and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004. Despite Russia's desire to build a new cooperative relationship with NATO through the negotiation and acquiescence of the NATO-Russia Founding Act to secure certain Russian interests, Russian officials strongly opposed the enlargement rounds and perceived them as an effort to isolate Russia. Russia noted that all twelve of the new NATO members admitted after the Cold War ended were former Warsaw Pact

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[4] Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 9.

[5] Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), 39-46.

[6] Alexander Vershbow, "Present at the Transformation: An Insider's Reflection on NATO Enlargement, NATO-Russia Relations, and Where We Go from Here," in *Open Door: NATO and Euro-Atlantic Security After the Cold War*, ed. Daniel S. Hamilton and Kristina Spohr (Washington, DC: Foreign Policy Institute/Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2019), 429.

members or Soviet Republics. Consequently, Russia currently believes the ongoing encroachment of NATO military forces on its borders is the primary threat to its security and erodes its influence in Eastern Europe. Russia's post-Cold War efforts and view of NATO underscores its desire to establish cooperation as an equal partner and to protect its sphere of influence.[7]

The US and NATO involvement in the former Yugoslavia from 1995 to 1999 further influenced Russian security perceptions and policy. Russia characterized the actions as repudiating its role as a regional and great power by repudiating its status as a protector of affiliated ethnicities and violating sovereignty within its sphere of influence. Specifically, NATO's military actions against Serbia denied Russia's perceived historical role as the protector of the Southern Slavs.[8] Russia also noted NATO's ability to act without the consent of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), allowing the alliance to employ military force wherever it deemed necessary.[9] Consequently, Russia shortly followed suit, initiating the First and Second Chechen Wars in 1994 and 1999. The conflict highlighted the Russian deductions from the NATO actions in the former Yugoslavia. The Russians inferred the preeminence of noncontact/remove warfare via massive and decisive force to solve problems and achieve goals in the Balkans. Russia discounted the value of negotiations and instead used them to mask military operations. The legality of actions, observation of laws, and humanitarian suffering became of secondary importance to the reduction of Russian casualties. Russia dismissed foreign public opinions and NATO government positions if state concerns were at issue; a focused and centralized media campaign became a critical component for success.[10] The subsequent Russian security policy shift towards counterterrorism aligned with the US counterterrorism focus during

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[7] Radin and Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, 39-49.

[8] Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 4-10.

[9] Marcel de Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52-53.

[10] Arbatov, "The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine," 20-21.

the early 21st century and muted criticism from the US and its allies over Russian security operations in Chechnya. The conflict served as the progenitor for the subsequent Russian initiated conflicts in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria.[11]

Security and social conflicts of interest in the early 21st century widened the rift between Russia and the US and its allies, resulting in significant shifts in Russian security partnerships and policy. Russia viewed the 2000-2005 anti-establishment colour revolutions in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Georgia, and Ukraine as a concerted effort by the US and its allies to undermine the concept of sovereign statehood and Russia's regional influence as a great power. In addition, Russia interpreted the 2008 NATO membership intention statements for Georgia and Ukraine as attempts by the US and NATO to further erode its influence within the former Soviet republics and threaten its national security. The actions galvanized Russian views regarding its security partnership with the US and NATO, leading to the Russian 2008 conflict in Georgia, executed under the guise of protecting human rights. Russia sought to reassert its great power status, influence, and authority within its sphere of influence. The conflict emphasized Russia's declaration that it could emulate the US policy of unilateralism and intervention, in the affairs of sovereign states, for the purpose of human rights. The 2011-2013 Arab Spring and Russian anti-regime protests intensified Russian concerns regarding internal state sovereignty. As a result, Russia initiated the 2014 conflict in Ukraine, annexing Crimea and invading Eastern Ukraine under the pretense of quelling the extremism of the Euromaidan uprising and protecting human rights. Russia further underscored its security emphasis with its subsequent 2015 intervention in Syria where it portrayed itself as a status quo power that sought to protect the sovereignty of states.[12]

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[11] Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 9-10.

[12] Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 9-11.

Russia continually perceives its military capacity and capability as an essential element to ensuring its great power status, policymaking autonomy, and ability to counter US hegemony.[13] The Russian military's performance during the Chechen and Georgian Wars revealed deficiencies; however, Russian leaders remained preoccupied with the notion that the resolution of current regional crises precluded the initiation of significant military reforms. Thus, following the conclusion of the Georgian War, the improved Russian economy and increased defense expenditures initiated Russia's 2008 'New Look' military reforms.[14]

The Russian military reforms derived from the Chechen Wars, the Russo-Georgian War, the conflict in Ukraine, and the Syrian intervention all underscore a shift in Russian defense priorities. The juxtaposition of the current Russian defense focus with the concerns following the end of the Cold War highlight the Russian efforts to re-concentrate on the US and NATO.[15] Therefore, the security environment in Europe and the Levant have altered considerably since 2008. Russia has emerged as a revisionist and revanchist nation seeking to challenge the post-World War II international order through the application of conventional, non-linear, and gray zone warfare to establish a multi-polar world order in which only states have international status and associated rights.[16]

Russia's current military strategy represents a significant change from the nuclear weapons and conventional combined arms focus of the Cold War. Consequently, an analysis of Russian military strategy development from 1991 to 2019 reveals the emergence of a general strategy of active defense, limited action, and a shift towards the development of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation and their employment.

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[13] Hanna Smith, "Military Might as a Basis for Russian Great Power Identity," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Routledge, 2019), 46-48.

[14] Susanne Oxenstierna, "Russia's Economy and Military Expenditures," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Routledge, 2019), 97.

[15] Arbatov, "The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine," 15.

[16] Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 11.

Methodology

This monograph will focus on the evolution of Russian military strategy from 1991 to 2019 through studying Russian actions and experiences in the current Ukraine conflict and intervention in Syria. The analysis begins with a review of the evolution of the Russian understanding of war, military strategy, military doctrine, associated terminology, and relevant definitions from the Soviet period to the present. The examination includes a review of Russian capabilities, military reforms, foreign security policy, and lessons learned. More specifically, the monograph concentrates on how Russia prioritizes the purpose and application of their military strategy, what conflicts and world events affected Russian military strategy development, and the current capabilities that Russia is focusing on now. The investigation will introduce Russia's current military strategy and its emphasis on a general strategy of active defense, limited action, and a shift towards the development of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation and their employment. Once the requisite concept, terminology, and definition analysis is complete, the current Ukraine conflict and intervention in Syria serve as case studies to underscore the presence, implementation, rationale, and purpose of each specified element of current Russian military strategy.

The analysis will discern cogent insights and lessons regarding the development of Russian strategy and infer lessons for US military policy and strategy. In addition, the examination will offer observations and implications regarding the lessons and future of Russian military strategy development. The study and information could inform future US and allied military policy, strategy, force structure, and capabilities development in the European theater.

The Evolution of the Russian Understanding of the Concept of War

To comprehend Russian military strategy development, it is important to review the Russian evolution and understanding of the concept of war and associated tenets and terms. The

foundation of current Russian military science and thinking stems from Soviet era thought and theories. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU) seventy-four years of governance provided a lengthy and stable period for the development for military thought. The CPSU's ideology formed the core of and deeply influenced the development of Soviet, and subsequently Russian, military concepts. A key tenet that shaped the foundation of Soviet military science is the concept of holism, the belief that a single synthetic system exists to connect everything. Thus, Soviet military science examined all issues and components with the function of the system as the consideration. This contrasts with the US analytical-logical tradition that focuses on individual processes and components before organizing the aggregate. Soviet military science also emphasized a strict reliance on the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism to guide action and development. In Soviet military thinking the philosophy resulted in an acutely scientific method that centered on the belief that new means of struggle always created corresponding counter-means that caused changes in military operations. Lastly, Soviet military science placed a considerable emphasis on historical analysis and the belief that strategy involves a contemplation of military history.[17] Therefore, discernable military, political, economic, and social components are prevalent in all Soviet and Russian military theory. A central tenet of Soviet and Russian military thought involves the concept of war, specifically the causes, character, and nature of war.

The Soviet view of the causes of war developed from Marxist principles regarding the inevitable conflict between political systems and class divisions; war was considered a tool of the exploitative ruling class to further its economic interests. Vladimir Lenin further developed Karl Marx's view of war and understood its utility as a necessary means to transform society; accordingly, war became instrumental and inevitable. The Marxist-Leninist concept of the inevitability of war reached a transition point with the Soviet development of nuclear weapons.

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[17] Oscar Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines Between War and Peace* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 23-25.

Recognizing the destructive consequences of a nuclear conflict, Nikita Khrushchev introduced the concept of peaceful coexistence in 1959, which asserted that states with conflicting philosophical, social, economic, and political ideologies would compete using their respective strengths in lieu of war. The Marxist-Leninist view that wars stemmed from economic causes also influenced the Soviet view of the nature of war.[18]

The Soviet interpretation of the causes of war derived from their conceptual development of the nature of war, which evolved from Lenin's interpretation of Carl von Clausewitz's maxim that war is a continuation of politics by other means. However, while Clausewitz believed that war involved acts of force to compel an enemy to do an actor's will, Lenin modified the maxim with the concept that violent means were the defining feature of war. Additionally, Lenin expanded on the notion of war as an instrument of politics, labelling it an instrument of class politics. As a result, armed conflict became synonymous with war in Soviet military thinking. With the introduction of Khrushchev's concept of peaceful coexistence, some Soviet theorists began to consider politics, economy, ideology, psychology, and other nonmilitary means to influence an enemy. Nevertheless, the Soviet definition of war remained unchanged and armed struggle remained the main and decisive means in war.[19]

Based on the Soviet interpretation of the causes and nature of war, Soviet military thought identified two factors that impacted the character of war. The first element involved the Marxist-Leninist belief that the cause of war is economic. The second factor included technology through the revolutions/stages of warfare. The Soviet classification of stages of warfare influenced the development of the current Russian military term of generations of warfare. Technology serves as a primary driver for the sweeping changes in the capabilities, doctrine, and organization that fundamentally transform the form of fighting associated with a new generation

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[18] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 22-28.

[19] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 29-42.

of warfare. Russian military general and theorist Vladimir Slipchenko defined the previous and current generations of warfare, which continues to serve as a definitive work for Russian military theorists. According to Slipchenko, the first generation occurred from 500 BC–900 AD and involved hand-to-hand fighting and primitive arms. The second generation spanned from 900–1700 and featured firearms. The third generation covered 1700–1800 and included increased firepower, trench warfare, and maritime battles. The fourth generation, between 1800 and 1945, encompassed the advent of automatic weapons, tanks, and air combat. The fifth generation introduced nuclear weapons while the sixth generation started in the 1990s and involved precision weapons and information and electronic warfare. Thus, the Soviet and current Russian understanding of the character of war centers on its dependence on the economy and technology.[20]

The duration and stability of Soviet military thought development deeply influenced Russia's current leaders, their understanding of the concept of war, and their initiatives.[21] The Soviet collapse left Russian military thinkers with the challenge of replacing the Marxist-Leninist ideology that provided the methodological and worldview foundations for military strategy development. Consequently, the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, and the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation became the three central Russian security policy documents. The Russian 1993 Military Doctrine and Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense 1994 Military Encyclopedia retained the Soviet view that war and armed conflict are synonymous. However, the Soviet belief in the inevitability of wars gave way to the concept of cooperation to resolve ideological differences, a reflection of the improving relations between Russia and NATO.[22]

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[20] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 28-29.

[21] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 22.

[22] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 43-53.

Russian observations of key post-Cold War events, such as the US and NATO involvement in the former Yugoslavia and US actions following the events of September 11, 2001, led to shifts in Russian military thinking. Hence, the 2000s become a period of renewed debate amongst Russian military theorists regarding the rising prominence of nonmilitary over military means to achieve political objectives and military security. Nevertheless, the debate did not deeply influence the generation of the 2000 Military Doctrine of Russian Federation, Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense 2007 Military Encyclopedia, and 2009 Russian National Security Strategy where the nature of war continued to be understood as involving armed conflict. However, the documents acknowledged the growing prevalence of indirect, nontraditional, and other forms and means of violence associated with the character of modern warfare. Thus, the 2010s became an era of notable change for Russian military thought.

The anti-establishment colour revolutions and Arab Spring deeply influenced Russian theorists and spurred debate regarding adjustments in the understanding of war. Theorists noted the blending of the boundary between war and peace and subsequently military and nonmilitary means during international confrontations. Accordingly, the 2010 Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation continued the link between armed conflict and war but also outlined nonmilitary threats that undermined sovereignty and interfered with the internal affairs of Russia and its allies. The 2014 Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation and 2015 Russian National Security Strategy increased the focus on the nonmilitary aspects of military conflict; specifically, the use of the information sphere to affect a population's protest potential.[23] The publications underscored the changing Russian view of war from something solely associated with armed struggle, and its associated means, to the consideration of nonmilitary means. While public security documents continued to emphasize the characteristic of armed conflict in war, they suggested that Russian theorists were debating the possibility of considering nonmilitary

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[23] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 53-92.

measures as violent in nature and potentially more effective than military means and wholly able to achieve strategic outcomes without the inclusion of military means.

The Russian Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, provides additional insight regarding the current Russian understanding of war during his 2017 address to the Academy of Military Science. He notes that there are several characteristics associated with contemporary military conflicts. Gerasimov states that NATO operations in the former Yugoslavia initiated the era of noncontact/remote warfare. He elaborates that the US and NATO imposed geographic and economic restrictions on the execution of military operations. As a result, weapons cost became an important consideration during the development of methods for executing military operations. Subsequent military conflicts continue the trend with the increasing employment of robotic complexes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to accomplish a variety of military actions. Gerasimov notes that US and allied actions confirm that information superiority has become an indispensable prerequisite for the execution of combat operations. He outlines that attaining information superiority involves the simultaneous use of mass information and social networks with psychological and information-technical effects. Gerasimov states that the conflict in Syria represents the use of hybrid methods of operation which involve the simultaneous use of traditional and nontraditional operations of both a military and nonmilitary nature. He clarifies that foreign actors transformed Syrian internal protests into assaults by organized armed opposition via advisors and information effects. The foreign actors then spurred the inclusion of foreign directed and supplied terrorist organizations to oppose the Syrian government. Gerasimov adds that the US and NATO do not classify hybrid operations as acts of aggression and are actively executing hybrid operations in the international domain. He declares his belief regarding the blurring of the boundary between war and peace when an actor is able to threaten or violate a state's national security and sovereignty without overt military actions. Additionally, he mentions that the reasons and approaches for the use of military force are broadening to include the

promotion of a state's economic interests while under the guise of protecting democracy or instilling democratic values.[24]

Gerasimov continues with his interpretation of the relationship between military and nonmilitary measures in contemporary military conflicts. He observes a trend regarding the shifting methods of confrontation to include extensive political, economic, diplomatic, information, and other nonmilitary measures employed in conjunction with the protest potential of a population. He notes that nonmilitary forms and means of struggle are becoming increasingly dangerous and violent. He adds that they are able to collapse a state's energy, banking, economic, information, and other spheres of quotidian activities. However, Gerasimov concludes that military force continues to remain as the one general feature that is inherent to all contemporary military conflicts. He states that the primary indicator and content of contemporary warfare and warfare in the foreseeable future is the presence of armed struggle. Consequently, Gerasimov maintains that the Russian Military Encyclopedia definition of war remains valid. Nevertheless, he caveats that the study of the nature of war is a continuous effort and must continue.[25]

The Evolution of Russian Military Strategy

An assessment of Russia's military strategy and operations requires an overview of Russian specific military terminology. During the execution of operations, Russia's military relies on the concept of the forms and methods of warfare. The terms originated in Soviet military thought and underwent progressive updates to match advances in military science and technology. As a result, the terms maintain a prominent position in current Russian military thought. The terms serve as the conceptual implementers of operations; an understanding of their definition facilitates a visualization of how Russia employs its armed forces. In addition,

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[24] Valery Gerasimov, "Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country," trans. Harold Orenstein, *Military Review* 97, no. 6 (November-December 2017): 22-27.

[25] Gerasimov, "Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country," 22-27.

statements from Russian military leaders imply that forms and methods include nonmilitary, indirect, and asymmetric methods. The 1983 Soviet Military Encyclopedia Dictionary states that the forms of military operations conform with the scope or scale of combat. The forms include operations, engagements, combat, and strikes as well as combat arms capabilities, the objectives of military operations, and the nature of assigned missions. The 2008 Russian journal *Military Thought* further developed the concept as the organization of the substance of the modes of combat actions. The concept represents the goal-oriented, organizational, spatial, temporal, and quantitative constraints associated with armed forces employment. Thus, forms of warfare denote the organizational side of armed forces actions. The Soviet Military Encyclopedia Dictionary defines the methods of military operations as the aggregate forms, modern techniques, and procedures employed in a specific logical sequence to achieve effective solutions for military science problems. The 2010 edition of *Military Thought* updated the concept as a specific way that troops accomplish their mission by employing actions characteristic of a method's essence, combination of processes, techniques, and rules of their use. Therefore, methods of warfare refer to weaponry and military art.[26]

The evolution of the Russian understanding of military strategy and doctrine provides further insight into Russian thought processes. The 1971 Officer's Handbook defines strategy as a division of military art which investigates the principles of preparing for, and waging, war and its campaigns. It is a direct instrument of politics and is common to and unified for all branches of the country's services. Strategy involves general theoretical and applied aspects. The former comprises the principles of war planning, logistical support, troop control, territorial preparation, and the forms and methods of armed combat. The latter involves specific questions on the

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[26] Timothy Thomas, "Russia's Forms and Methods of Military Operations: The Implementers of Concepts," *Military Review* 98, no. 3 (May-June 2018): 30-36.

preparation and execution of strategic attack, strategic defense, other types of strategic military operations, and the associated operational aspects of logistics and control.[27]

The Handbook describes strategy as a scientific theory that elaborates the fundamental methods and forms of armed combat on a strategic scale and produces the military guiding principles of war. Theoretical strategic arguments influence military doctrine while also directly implementing doctrine in the elaboration of war plans and preparation of the country for war. During wartime, military doctrine assumes a somewhat less prominent role as armed combat is subject to the military-political and military-strategic considerations, generalizations, and conclusions associated with the specific situation. Therefore, strategy governs war and armed combat, not doctrine. Lastly, the Handbook contrasts the offensive character of Soviet military doctrine with the aggressive and predatory tendencies associated with the military doctrine of US and its allies. The Handbook stresses that that Soviet Union did not intend to initiate attacks; rather, the doctrine refers to the character of the war waged in the defense of the Soviet Union and its allies.[28]

The 1983 Soviet Military Encyclopedia Dictionary restates the principles of strategy and doctrine outlined in the 1971 Officer's Handbook. The interlinking relationship between military strategy and doctrine and the role of strategy in the preparation for war and planning and execution of war remain. The ideological Marxism-Leninism foundations of Soviet military strategy are reemphasized with the primacy of the CPSU and politics over the organization of national defense, military organizational development, the employment of the Soviet armed forces, and how the factors develop and correspond to shifts in the military and political conditions around the world. The focus on offensive operations as the principal type of military

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[27] S.N. Kozlov, ed., *The Officer's Handbook: A Soviet View*, trans. DGIS Multilingual Section, Translation Bureau, Secretary of State Department, Ottawa, Canada (Moscow: Ministry of Defense Publishing Company, 1971), 57-58.

[28] Kozlov, *The Officer's Handbook: A Soviet View*, 65.

operation remains; however, the encyclopedia acknowledges the importance of the role of the defense.[29]

The Soviet definition of strategy continued to influence Russian military thought during Russia's political and social transition following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense 2003 Military Encyclopedia defines strategy as having tenets "based on an evaluation of the state and development trends of the military-political situation, scientifically sound objectives, principles, guidelines and tasks, and the objective requirements and actual functioning and development capability of a nation's military organization."[30] The encyclopedia elaborates that the theoretical and practical aspects of military strategy in the 21st century involve the nature of modern wars and military methods to avert war. This includes the objectives, tasks, and means of the armed forces during strategic military operations. To conduct military operations, strategy entails the content, methods, and conditions for preparing for and executing war and the associated forms of strategic actions. Also, operations require strategic planning for the integrated employment of the armed forces in war and the strategic, moral-psychological, technical, and logistical support of the armed forces. Thus, strategy must identify the strategic requirements to build and prepare a nation's armed forces, economy, and population for war. Lastly, the leadership of the armed forces during peacetime and wartime remains a pertinent characteristic of strategy.[31] The current Russian interpretation of strategy refines the Soviet era definition and reflects the shift of the Russian military away from the ideological Marxism-Leninism foundations of Soviet military strategy.

The military encyclopedia clarifies that a nation's policy and economy determine the military strategy's tasks. Policy sets war objectives, preparations, means and methods, and the

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[29] Timothy L. Thomas, *Russia Military Strategy: Impacting 21st Century Reform and Geopolitics* (Fort Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2015), 42-43.

[30] Thomas, *Russia Military Strategy*, 43-44.

[31] Thomas, *Russia Military Strategy*, 44.

favorable internal and external political conditions to develop military strategy. The economy progresses from and serves policy while affecting the composition and building of the armed forces to serve military strategy. The close relationship between military strategy and doctrine continues with the influence of doctrine on strategy and the framing of doctrine from strategy's theoretical conclusions. The encyclopedia continues the legacy and importance of the relationship between military strategy and politics via the statement that Russia's military strategy is revised as a result of socio-political, economic, and military changes in relation to the global balance of power, means of armed combat, and other issues.[32] While the current Russian understanding and purpose of strategy shares parallels with the previous Soviet period, the strategic direction marks a contrast. The Soviet era military strategy and doctrine emphasized the offensive employment of nuclear and conventional weapons in a united, armed services wide, effort to defend against imperialist aggression, the primary threat and focus of the period.[33] Russia's current strategy key tasks involve strategic deterrence, regional dominance, expeditionary operations, preparedness in the case of a major war, and domestic stability. The tasks reflect Russia's current security policy goals and threat perceptions.[34]

The evolution of Russian's military strategy and doctrine after 1991 affords an understanding of the initial Russian strategic direction following the end of the Cold War. The Soviet Union's collapse resulted in the publication of the Russian 1993 Military Doctrine and 1993 Foreign Policy. The documents noted the improved status of relations between Russia and the US and its allies. Remarkably, Russia did not identify the US and NATO as the main sources of danger and did not regard any state as its enemy. Thus, cooperation became the primary means to overcome the confrontation generated by ideological friction. The documents noted that the

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[32] Thomas, *Russia Military Strategy*, 45.

[33] Kozlov, *The Officer's Handbook: A Soviet View*, 61-66.

[34] Andrew Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military: Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), 14.

main sources of external danger to Russia were local wars on its periphery, territorial claims against the state, internal destabilization, international terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, the documents focused on the development of conventional military means to counter threats in the areas where Russia perceived capability gaps, specifically command and control, precision weapons, stealth technology, and advanced naval weaponry. Accordingly, Russian doctrine discarded the Leonid Brezhnev era policy of no first use of nuclear weapons against nuclear states and non-use against nonnuclear states; the shift likely stemmed from the loss of Russia's conventional forces superiority following the end of the Cold War.[35] Ultimately, the documents revealed Russian optimism regarding international security and military threats while underscoring its internal focus on the social and economic problems that arouse during the end of the Cold War.

The Russian 1997 National Security Concept continued the trend of international security optimism with the belief that the strengthening of international law virtually removed the danger of direct aggression against Russia. However, the document's focus on the resolution of internal issues associated with terrorism, ethnonational struggles, and the economy revealed growing Russian concerns regarding international cooperation. The concept observed increasing international competition for access to resources and markets. Thus, the document noted a trend regarding the growing threat of foreign intelligence service penetration of Russian governmental, financial, economic, scientific, and media entities. The penetration could weaken Russia economically, destabilize Russia through the targeting of interethnic and religious issues, and undermine Russia's policy goals and direction.[36] The beliefs stemmed from the degraded state of Russia's economy and uncertainty concerning its position in the multipolar world order.[37] In

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[35] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 50-51.

[36] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 52.

[37] Jacob W. Kipp, "Russian Military Doctrine: Past, Present, and Future," in *Russian Military Politics and Russia's 2010 Defense Doctrine*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2011), 95.

addition, the concept noted the prospect of NATO expansion eastward and considered it as a threat to Russia's security. Lastly, the document stated that international technological advancements allowed leading powers to develop a new generation of military weapons, leading to a new arms race.[38]

The first decade of the 21st century saw considerable shifts in Russian policy and strategy with the publication of the 2000 National Security Concept, 2000 Military Doctrine, 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, and 2009 National Security Strategy. The documents sustained the notion that the international situation, Russian peaceful foreign policy direction, and nuclear deterrent capability continued to effectively decrease the danger of a full-scale conventional or nuclear conflict against Russia. Additionally, some optimism remained with regard to the commonality of international security interests between Russia and the leading world powers, potentially increasing possibilities for international cooperation. As a result, the documents stressed the importance of ensuring Russia's position as a great power and to remain as one of the significant centers in a multipolar world order. The concepts also stressed a revaluation of Russian priorities commensurate with its increasing role in international affairs. However, the documents noted Russian disapproval of the emergence of an increasingly unipolar world order and the propagation of the concepts of humanitarian intervention and limited sovereignty that permitted nations to act externally from the United Nations (UN) Charter and UNSC. Russia perceived attempts from the US and its allies to create an international relations structure where unilateral actions would resolve key issues by circumventing the fundamental rules of international law. Consequently, the documents emphasized that the flaws of international mechanisms that allowed the unilateral use of force were a threat to international

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[38] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 52-53.

security and underscored the general decline in confidence regarding international security cooperation.[39]

The Russian 2000 to 2009 policy and strategy documents conveyed Russian concerns regarding the actions of the US and its allies and its view of global cooperation and conflict. The documents emphasized the importance of military power but viewed economic, political, technological, and information factors as the larger contributors to national strength. Notably, the concepts listed some of the primary components of national strength as information, intellectual, and communications capabilities. Consequently, the documents sustained the previous view that external powers were increasing efforts to weaken Russia politically, economically, and militarily. Thus, the concepts continued to identify threats to state security as the activities of foreign security services and organizations/structures that destabilize Russia's social and political order. The documents implied that internal social and political disruptions were the result of foreign actors and further propagated the Russian perception concerning the convergence of the internal and external methods of ensuring national interests and security. The concepts further emphasized Russian concerns regarding the growing technological capabilities of leading powers and the associated new arms race and radical alteration of the forms and methods of warfare. Specifically, the documents noted that the threats to Russian military security included the efforts of leading nations to achieve a preponderant military position via high-precision, information, and other high-technology means of conducting armed warfare. Also, the concepts viewed NATO expansion efforts involving Ukraine and Georgia as a violation of the principle of equal security. Accordingly, the documents stressed the employment of all military means, to include nuclear weapons, against an armed aggressor. Therefore, Russia updated its military doctrine to elaborate on the operational forms and methods associated with modern wars. The doctrine directed a shift of military force development priorities from the local and internal war scenarios of the 1993

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[39] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 63-67.

Military Doctrine to conventional forces capable of global reach. Additionally, the doctrine introduced the notion that modern war could involve a systematic method to target the full sphere of human activity via indirect and nontraditional forms. Specifically, Russian theorists identified information warfare as a threat.[40]

The changing discussions within the Russian military-theoretical community from 2010 to 2015 reflected negative international relations trends associated with the rise of global competition and ideological rivalries, resulting with the dissemination of the 2010 Military Doctrine, 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, 2014 Military Doctrine, and 2015 National Security Strategy. The concepts continued to focus on Russia's global role as a great power, regional concerns, NATO, and the UNSC's ability to ensure international security. The documents noted that economic, legal, scientific, environmental, demographic, and information technology factors had become as equally important as military power with shaping world politics. Thus, the concepts implemented the term soft power to describe means that exert political pressure, interfere in internal affairs, manipulate public opinion, and destabilize the political situation of a sovereign state. The documents elaborated that leading nations were threatening world peace and stability by applying concepts that allowed them to insight intrastate instability and conflicts. The concepts stressed the Russian belief that nations were increasingly working to oust legitimate political regimes in sovereign states under the guise of protecting the civilian population. Specifically, the documents included the accusation that the US and European Union (EU) were responsible for the armed conflict in Ukraine via their support of the anti-constitutional colour revolution elements that divided the Ukrainian society and precipitated the conflict. Accordingly, the term colour revolution entered Russia's strategic lexicon. The concepts identified that the main threats to Russia's state and public security were foreign organizations, intergovernmental organizations, radical public associations, financial and economic structures, groups using

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[40] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 63-67.

nationalist and extremist ideology, and individuals that target Russia's unity and territorial integrity. The documents elaborated that the threats could destabilize Russia's domestic political and social situation via colour revolutions and the dismantling of traditional religious and moral values. Consequently, the emergence of new methods to undermine state sovereignty spurred the introduction of the Russian belief that global competition occurs at the civilizational level.[41]

Russian disquietude regarding foreign involvement in its internal affairs resulted with the development of military doctrine that identified new military dangers and highlighted domestic threats to national security. The 2010 and 2014 doctrines continued to emphasize Russian concerns regarding NATO expansion initiatives and referenced new nonmilitary threats that undermined the sovereignty and internal affairs of Russia and its allies. Russian observations of the Arab Spring, situation in Ukraine, and situation in Syria spurred the belief that the use of radical organizations and population protest potential were representative of the indirect actions executed by leading nations. Hence, the doctrines stressed the importance of achieving strategic deterrence via nuclear and nonnuclear means to prevent military conflicts. Nonnuclear means referred to military-political, scientific, research, military-technical, and other measures to achieve nonnuclear and information deterrence. Correspondingly, the documents refined the characteristics associated with contemporary military conflicts. The characteristics involved the coordinated use of military and nonmilitary means, the increasing role of information warfare, and the employment of weapons based on new physical principles that would match the effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Specifically, the doctrines added the integrated use of military force, political, economic, information, and other nonmilitary measures by leveraging the protest potential of a population and special operations forces. Also, the doctrines included indirect and asymmetric methods from externally resourced and directed political forces and social

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[41] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 85-90.

movements as a characteristic of modern conflicts.[42] The documents reflected the shifting

opinion among Russian theorists regarding the diminishing importance of military means and rise

of nonmilitary threats during war and armed conflict.

The Russian doctrinal focus on nonmilitary methods, particularly colour revolutions, led

to further clarification regarding the information aspects of military conflict. Concerning

information warfare, the doctrines outlined the implementation of information warfare prior to the

initiation of military action to achieve political aims or shape global opinions in a manner that

would permit a nation to use military force. The documents underscored the ability of information

warfare to solely achieve political aims while acting across the spheres of peace and conflict. The

focus on the informational sphere and the incitement of domestic unrest continued with the

identification of internal and external military dangers. Internal military dangers included

information influencing to erode the historical, spiritual, and patriotic traditions of Russia's

population. External military dangers focused on the use of information and communication

methods to affect Russia's internal affairs, sovereignty, political independence, territorial

integrity, and the overthrow of friendly regimes on Russia's borders.[43] The attention on the

information sphere, specifically information influencing and a population's protest potential, as a

component of warfare and associated with military dangers and threats underscores Russia's

broadening view of war and national security. Additionally, the concerns regarding historical and

spiritual traditions reveal Russia's preoccupation with external efforts to undermine its culture

and civilization and the role of politics, economy, and information in war. The documents

reinforce the Russian premise that global competition occurs at the civilizational level.

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[42] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 85-90.

[43] Johnson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, 85-90.

Contemporary Russian Military Strategy Development

The concepts, principles, and direction of Russian military strategy development outlined above form the foundation for contemporary Russian strategy. Gerasimov provides insight into current Russian military strategy development in his 2019 address to the Academy of Military Science. He elaborates that military strategy development progressed through several stages of evolution from a strategy of annihilation, attrition, global war, nuclear deterrence, to indirect operations. Gerasimov mentions that even though nonmilitary methods precede the use of military force, the military continues to remain relevant as demonstrations of military might support the effectiveness of nonmilitary methods. Also, military force is necessary when the nonmilitary methods are unable to achieve the specified goals. Gerasimov states that Russia's armed forces must be prepared to conduct new-type wars and armed conflicts via classical and asymmetric methods. He notes that Russia has been preparing for several years and is ready to counteract US strategies. He specifies that the foundation of the Russian response is a strategy of active defense which draws upon the defensive nature of Russian military doctrine to preemptively neutralize threats to state security. Gerasimov shares that Russia's experience in Syria resulted in the identification of a new practical field. The field involved the execution of tasks to defend and promote national interests outside of Russia's borders while using a strategy of limited actions. The strategy of limited actions entails the use of a self-sufficient grouping of forces selected from a branch of the armed forces that has a high degree of mobility and can make the greatest contribution to achieving the objective. Gerasimov clarifies that the strategy requires the attainment and maintenance of information superiority, command and control readiness, logistics systems readiness, and the covert deployment of the force grouping.[44]

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[44] Valery Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions. Tasks for Military Science," trans. Harold Orenstein and Timothy Thomas, Online Exclusive Article, *Military Review* (November 2019). https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2019-OLE/November/Orenstein-Gerasimov/.

The counter strategies outlined by Gerasimov reflect Russian observations and deductions of US and allied policies and strategies. Russia perceives the actions of the US and its allies as representative of an aggressive foreign policy to depose nations that are not in-line with their interests. Russian leaders and theorists consider US and allied unilateral actions to undermine state sovereignty and change the legally elected authority structure within a state as a violation of international law. Additionally, Russia believes that the US development of aggressive military strike capabilities, such as global strike and multi-domain battle, support US and allied foreign policy and implementation of colour revolutions and soft power. Consequently, Russia perceives that the principal US method of achieving policy goals involves the use of a population's protest potential coupled with the employment of precision weapons strikes against key objectives.[45]

Gerasimov identifies trends that Russia should focus on during strategy development. He notes that, even with the increasing types of warfare and changing content, Russia must be able to seize and maintain the strategic initiative by quickly preempting adversaries with preventative measures, rapidly identifying adversary vulnerabilities, and creating threats and prospective damage that is unacceptable to the adversary. Accordingly, he asserts that Russia must be prepared to respond with mirror and asymmetric measures to emerging threats. Gerasimov elaborates that the policies of the US and its allies require Russia to be prepared to respond by focusing on the decision-making centers and cruise missile launchers that facilitate strikes on Russian territory. As a result, he states that Russia must continue to maintain its lead in the development and fielding of hypersonic missiles. He notes that Russia must establish and validate a unified system to integrate intelligence, forms of destruction, and command and control to facilitate the holistic destruction of the enemy. Gerasimov continues with robotics, counter UAV systems, radio-electronic warfare, and digital technologies as additional areas of focus for

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[45] Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions."

Russian military science and strategy development. He observes that territorial defense system development and improvement must integrate military forces with federal executive organs to protect critical state infrastructure. Gerasimov notes that future warfare will heavily involve military operations in the information sphere. He expounds that the sphere does not have clearly defined national borders and allows potential remote and covert actions to affect a nation's important information infrastructure, population, and security. Thus, he mentions that military strategy must study adversary efforts to destabilize a state's internal security and the integration of military strategy with the economy.[46]

The strategy development areas outlined by Gerasimov underscore the Russian belief that the US and its allies are pursuing military and nonmilitary measures to erode Russia's security. Militarily, Russia continues to consider the increasing US and NATO presence on its borders as the primary threat to its security. Additionally, Russia believes that the US is creating strategic instability by withdrawing from key Cold War arms limitation and reduction treaties and through the pursuit of military multi-domain operations. Non-militarily, Russia's focus in the information sphere outlines its belief that the US and its allies seek to execute diversionary and sabotage actions to affect and destabilize the domestic security of Russia and its allies.[47] Therefore, Gerasimov's strategy focal areas affirm that strategic deterrence remains an important component of Russia's military strategy development.

Russian Military Strategy During the Ukraine Campaign

The Russian campaign in Ukraine provides insight into its current strategy of active defense, limited action, and shift towards the employment of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation. The Ukrainian political and social events preceding the Russian intervention in Ukraine began in November 2013. Popular protests in Kyiv's Maiden

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[46] Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions."

[47] Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions."

Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) stemmed from Ukraine's pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych's decision, taken under strong Russian pressure, to reject the Association Agreement with the EU Eastern Partnership Program. The Ukrainian government's response to the protests and subsequent violence resulted in the ousting and departure of Yanukovych's government and aligned ruling elites from Ukraine in February 2014. Russia swiftly responded with two discrete and concurrent military operations. The operations involved the invasion and annexation of Crimea from late February 2014 to March 2014 and the instigation of a political protest movement and armed insurgency in Eastern Ukraine from late February 2014 to May 2014.[48]

The Russian operation to invade and annex Crimea initiated on February 20, 2014 as Ukrainian and Russian armed forces went on alert as the popular protests in Kyiv escalated into violence with government security forces. Russia operations in Crimea began with the mobilization of battalions of Spetsnaz, Vozdushno-Desantnye Voyska (VDV), and Ground Forces on February 22 and 23. On February 24, the first indicators of a Russian political and military intervention occurred with the decision of the Sevastopol city council to install a Russian citizen as mayor and deploy Russian Naval Infantry forces from Sevastopol into the city square. From February 25 to 26, Russia sequentially sent 200 special operations forces into Sevastopol and executed a snap inspection of 150,000 soldiers in the Western Military District. From February 27 to 28, Russian special operations forces seized the Crimean Parliament, deployed 300 Ground Forces into Crimea, surrounded the Belbek Air Base, deployed Mi-8 transport and Mi-35 attack helicopters into Crimea, and seized the Simferopol airport to initiate the airlift of VDV units into Crimea. During March 1 to 2, Russia deployed additional forces via heavy landing ships. These forces rapidly advanced across Crimea to encircle and seize Ukrainian military bases and facilities. With the Ukrainian fleet blockaded and armed forces encircled in

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[48] Michael Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), 1.

Crimea, Russian forces adopted operations that centered on ad hoc agreements with the besieged

Ukrainian forces to maintain the encirclement operations without violence. In addition, Russian

forces exerted heavy psychological pressure, propaganda, and promises on the encircled

Ukrainian forces with the hope of coaxing defections. From March 6, Russia began amassing

Ground Forces in vicinity of the Kerch Straight and Ukraine's eastern land border with Russia to

serve as a threat and diversion. Russian forces cut off the Crimean peninsula's crossing points and

land lines of communication with Ukraine. Additionally, Russian forces disrupted the Ukrainian

government's ability to maintain command and control over its forces in Crimea. Russian

intelligence elements organized local militias, cultural groups, and former special police forces

into self-defense units to facilitate local security and support the Crimean local government's

hastily organized independence referendum. From March 16 to 18, Russia supported the

independence referendum and formally annexed Crimea without any military resistance from

Ukraine or casualties. From March 19 to 26, Russia completed the seizure of all the Ukrainian

bases in Crimea, integrated defecting Ukrainian soldiers, completed the annexation, and initiated

the process to return seized military equipment to Ukraine.[49]

Russian military operations in Eastern Ukraine initiated immediately after the collapse of

the Yanukovych government. The decision by the interim Ukrainian government to repeal the

official status of the Russian language on February 23 coupled with Russian operations in Crimea

spurred leftist and right-wing organizations in Eastern Ukraine to initiate public protests. On

March 1, protesters seized the regional administration buildings in Kharkiv and Donetsk.

Protestors took control of the regional administration building and demanded an annexation

referendum in Luhansk on March 9. By March 10, local Ukrainian police regained control of the

captured administration buildings and arrested separatist leaders and supporters. The arrest of the

local political figurehead separatist leaders allowed individuals with links to Russian security

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[49] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 6-12.

services, military experience, and Russian associations and businesses to assume control of the protest movement and shift the focus away from politics to insurgency. From April 6 to 23, armed separatist groups seized administrative and state security buildings in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Ukrainian military operations to contain the separatists initially faltered as the separatists received short-range air defense systems from Russia and as Ukraine diverted a majority of its forces to react to the 40,000 Russian forces amassed on Ukraine's border with Russia.[50]

The piecemeal Ukrainian military efforts gradually increased from disparate to deliberate operations from April to May. By May 25, Ukrainian military gains against the separatists spurred the introduction of additional groups of Russian volunteers to reinforce the separatists. This marked the point when substantial Russian volunteers began to support separatist forces with growing quantities of Russian supplied mechanized equipment, armor, advanced munitions, and Russian operated air defense units. By August, the separatists were on the verge of encirclement and the Ukrainian military poised to regain control of the border with Russia. Consequently, Russia military operations transitioned from irregular and hybrid operations to conventional operations with approximately 4,000 regular forces crossing the Ukraine-Russia border, defeating the Ukrainian military at the Battle of Ilovaisk, and forcing the Minsk I ceasefire in September. The subsequent Russian military offensive in January 2015 resulted in the defeat of Ukrainian military forces at Debaltseve and resulted with the Ukrainian government's acceptance of the Minsk II ceasefire with terms that heavily favored Russia. As a result of the Minsk Protocol, Russian military operations continue to focus on training and equipping separatist forces to become a capable conventional force.[51]

Russia executed an extensive information campaign prior to, during, and following their military operations in Crimea. The campaign's primary focus was the Russian population with the

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[50] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 33-41.

[51] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 41-45.

Crimean population as a secondary focus. The campaign consolidated control by subsuming and marginalizing the remaining independent Russian media outlets. In addition, Russia shut down Ukrainian television channels in Crimea while leaving access to Russian channels on March 9. The campaign portrayed the Fall 2013 popular protests in Kyiv as a negative byproduct of closer ties to the EU. Upon the collapse of the Yanukovych government in February 2014, the campaign focused on discrediting the interim Ukrainian government as illegitimate, the dangers posed by events in Ukraine to Russia, the threats to Russians in Crimea, and supporting the narrative for Crimea to return to the safety of Russia. The campaign also leveraged an alleged anti-protest campaign from the Russian-speaking population of Crimea to portray the Kyiv protests as the products of foreign intervention and denounce the protestors and subsequent interim government as fascist extremists. Externally, Russia President Vladimir Putin stated on March 4 that Russia had no intention of invading Ukraine or annexing Crimea and that Russian forces were not on Crimean soil. However, Putin noted that Russian intervention could occur if the situation deteriorated in Ukraine. Additionally, he stated the hypothetical return of Crimea to Russia would not violate any norms nor create new precedents.[52] The Russian information campaign associated with its military operations in Eastern Ukraine consisted of cyberattacks, efforts to block access to pro-protest social media sites, and soliciting Russian recruitment and support for Ukrainian anti-protest and separatist groups. Also, the campaign reintroduced the concept of Novorossiya in an attempt to spur Russian nationalists to support the Ukrainian separatists; Novorossiya refers to the southern and eastern portions of Ukraine that were part of the Russian Empire from the 18th to the 20th centuries.[53]

An analysis of the Russian military operations in Ukraine reveals the presence of a strategy of active defense. The emphasis of the strategy on preemptively neutralizing threats to

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[52] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 12-16.

[53] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 50-54.

state security is apparent with Russia's rapid military response following the collapse of the Yanukovych government. Russia recognized the political, economic, and strategic consequences associated with the demise of the Yanukovych government. Rather than await the stabilization of the political situation in Ukraine, Russia sought to prevent pro-EU and NATO elements from filling the power vacuum and maintain the ability to control its strategic direction. The addition of another stable, independent, democratically oriented, and EU aligned country on Russia's western border was anathema to Putin's model of authoritarian state capitalism and created the potential for increased domestic unrest.[54] Also, Putin desired Ukraine's entry into the Eurasian Economic Union, a union without Ukraine would render the organization ineffectual.[55] Strategically, the potential loss of Russian access to the naval base at Sevastopol deeply affected its goal to control and influence in its southwestern flank and project power into the Eastern Mediterranean and Levant.[56] As a result, within forty-eight hours of the formation of the interim Ukrainian government, Russia enacted political and military actions to rapidly annex Crimea, maintain a strategic presence in Eastern Ukraine, and destabilize Ukrainian efforts to join the EU or NATO.[57]

Russian military operations in Ukraine also confirms the use of a strategy of limited action to defend and promote national interests outside of Russia's borders. The military operations to annex Crimea and foment a political protest movement and armed insurgency in Eastern Ukraine both emphasized the strategy's focus on the use of a self-sufficient grouping of forces selected from a branch of the armed forces that has a high degree of mobility and can make

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[54] F. Stephen Larrabee, Peter A. Wilson, and John Gordon IV, *The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security: Implications for the United States and U.S. Army* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 3-5.

[55] The United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men": A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013-2014* (Fort Bragg: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2015) 39-40.

[56] Stephen J. Flanagan and Irina A, Chindea, "Russia's Strategy in the Black Sea: How NATO Can Up Its Game," *The RAND Blog, RAND Corporation*, September 24, 2019, accessed 24 February 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/09/russias-strategy-in-the-black-sea-how-nato-can-up-its.html.

[57] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 45.

the greatest contribution to achieving the objective. In addition, the operations exemplified the strategy's requirement of attaining and maintaining information superiority, command and control readiness, logistics systems readiness, and the covert deployment of the force grouping. During the operation to annex Crimea, Russia organized the grouping of forces around the VDV. The VDV's mobility allowed Russian forces to offset the numerical and firepower advantages of the Ukrainian military forces. At the start of the operation in late February, Russian military forces in Crimea consisted of one incomplete naval infantry brigade and several hundred special-forces operators arrayed against 15,000 Ukrainian military forces. Nevertheless, Russian forces leveraged their mobility and completed the annexation within one month.[58] The Russian Ground Forces formed the grouping of forces for the Russian operations in Eastern Ukraine. During the operation, the forces initially provided diversionary action before executing irregular and hybrid warfare in support of the separatists. As separatist forces faltered, Russian forces transitioned to conventional warfare to defeat Ukrainian forces and compel the Ukrainian government to accept the terms of Minsk Protocol.[59] Lastly, both operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine successfully met the strategy's information, command and control, logistics, and covert deployment criteria. The strategy allowed Russia to destabilize the interim Ukrainian government and gain significant political concessions while committing a modicum of forces in active engagements.

The Russian operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine exemplify the emphasis in Russian military strategy to employ military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation. Both operations followed contemporary Russian military strategy and employed extensive nonmilitary information campaigns preceding, during, and following the campaign in Ukraine. The information campaign centered on ensuring domestic approval for the military and political

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[58] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 9-12.

[59] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 69.

seizure of Crimea under the pretext of justice. The campaign also worked to discredit the Kyiv protestors and the subsequent interim government as externally directed fascist extremists and illegitimate. Additionally, the campaign focused on messaging and themes to exploit the fears and stoke the anger of ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The synchronization of the campaign with Russian military operations generated deception regarding Russia's true political and military intentions. Furthermore, information efforts against Ukrainian forces resulted in the defection of 8,500 forces from the 15,000 Ukrainian forces in Crimea.[60] Ultimately, the campaign facilitated Russia's covert takeover of Crimea and support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

The Russian military operations in Ukraine exemplify elements of Russia's contemporary military strategy and understanding of war. Russian leaders perceived US and allied indirect and hybrid operations as responsible for the political turmoil in Ukraine. The situation aligned with Russian observations of previous US and allied actions abroad to blur the distinction between war and peace to achieve information superiority, spur internal protests, and undermine the concept of state sovereignty. Also, the situation further confirmed Russian beliefs regarding NATO's efforts to expand eastward and the threat posed to its national security. Thus, Russia believed that the collapse of the Yanukovych government represented the termination of its diplomatic efforts to resolve the political turmoil in Ukraine. Consequently, Russia chose to execute military operations that reflected its strategy of responding to emerging threats with mirror and asymmetric measures. In Ukraine, the measures involved nonmilitary operations in the information sphere to build domestic support and target the Ukrainian population's protest potential. The nonmilitary operations received support from precision military deployments and strikes against key objectives across Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The operations emphasized Russia's adherence to the theoretical and practical aspects of current strategy through the

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[60] Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 11-29.

planning and integration of military operations to support nonmilitary methods for the attainment of diplomatic, political, and military goals.

Russian Military Strategy During the Syria Campaign

The Russian military campaign and operations in Syria differ from the operations executing during the Ukraine Campaign. The campaign further highlights certain elements of its current strategy of active defense, limited action, and shift towards the employment of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation. The events preceding the Russian campaign began with public protests in Syria that stemmed from the regional unrest associated with the 2011 Arab Spring. The resulting actions from the ruling Bashar al-Assad regime to violently suppress the protests precipitated the 2011 initiation of the Syrian Civil War between the Assad regime and a coalition of Syrian opposition forces.[61] During 2011 to 2012, Russia supported Assad's regime via international diplomacy at the UN to prevent the regime change efforts of the US and its allies. In addition, Russia negotiated an agreement with the US to destroy the regime's chemical weapons and commit to a political transition as the final stage of the settlement process in 2013. Russia also initiated steady economic and military material support as Assad's regime began to face military reversals to opposition forces in 2012. However, Russian observations of Assad's degrading military situation, the failure of diplomacy to resolve the conflict, and belief in the regime's impending collapse led to the 2015 decision to intervene with overt Russian military force.[62]

The Russian military campaign in Syria initiated during August 2015 with the deployment of Russian forces to Syria. By September 25, 2015, the core Russian military forces were in position with the first airstrikes against Syrian opposition positions occurring on

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[61] Tom Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker: Russian Military Intervention in Syria, 2015-2017," *Middle East@War* 15 (2018): 4.

[62] Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), 3-14.

September 30. The Russian campaign consisted of three simultaneous operations to establish and secure Russian military bases in Syria, reestablish and retrain the Syrian military, and force concessions from the Syrian opposition forces. Russian planners opted to leverage existing Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) militia to augment Russian air power and facilitate the reestablishment and retraining of the Syrian military. As a result, the Russian campaign centered on Vozdushno Kosmicheskiye Sily (VKS) operations. Despite the international incident associated with the loss of a Su-24M to the Türk Havva Kuvvetleri on November 24, 2015, Russian operations from September 2015 to February 2016 allowed the Syrian Army and IRCG forces to inflict a decisive defeat on Syrian opposition forces in vicinity of Aleppo. Consequently, the Russian government negotiated an armistice with the Syrian opposition forces and their international supporters on February 26, 2015. However, neither the Syrian Army, IRGC-QF, nor VKS adhered to the terms and the conflict continued. Due to the Assad regime's victory over Syrian opposition forces in vicinity of Aleppo, Russia announced the withdrawal of some Russian forces from Syria on March 14. Nevertheless, VKS operations intensified after the withdrawal announcement.[63]

From March to September, Russian operations continued in support of Syrian military and IRGC-QF operations. However, international condemnation of Syrian military and IRGC-QF siege operations across dozens of major urban areas forced the Russian government to impose several ineffectual cease-fires to permit the delivery of international relief aid. Nonetheless, continued VKS operations allowed the Syrian military and IRGC-QF to seize Aleppo on December 22. The Russian government shortly announced the withdrawal of additional Russian forces from Syria on December 29. However, VKS operations continued across Syria as the Russian military intervention entered its second year in 2017. By April 2017, US military retaliatory strikes, in response to the Syrian military's use of chemical weapons in Khan

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[63] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker," 14-41.

Sheykhoun on April 4, crippled the Syrian Arab Air Defense Force's capability to execute operations. Thus, the VKS increased its capabilities and operations in support of the Syrian military and IRGC-QF. As fighting continued into the end of 2017, the Russian government announced the complete liberation of Syria from extremists on December 6. The government subsequently stated that the war in Syria was over and the initiation of another withdrawal of Russian forces from Syria. However, Russian operations continued and the Ministry of Defense announced, at the end of December, plans to form a permanent grouping of Russian forces in Syria. VKS operations continued through 2018 and facilitated significant Syrian military and IRGC-QF victories over Syrian opposition forces.[64]

An assessment of the Russian campaign confirms the presence of a strategy of active defense. Russia's emphasis on preemptively neutralizing threats to state security is apparent with the Russian view of Syria as a region that could threaten its strategic interests in the Middle East. It also views Islamic insurgents as a threat to the Assad regime and a potential domestic threat.[65] The defeat of the Assad regime would have represented a victory for transnational terrorism with significant consequences for regional and global stability. Russia perceived the Syrian Civil War as a struggle between disparate religious extremists and a secular state. Russian leaders saw parallels between the Syrian conflict and its previous conflicts in Chechnya. Therefore, they inferred the threat of potential domestic terrorism as disillusioned members of Russia's sixteen million Muslims, the largest indigenous Muslim population in Europe, were vulnerable to the ideology and aspirations of religious extremist groups. In addition, Assad's defeat from the US backed coalition of Syrian opposition forces would further legitimize the efforts of the US and its allies to implement the concept of regime change upon non-aligned governments. Russian leaders affirmed the trends identified in their Foreign Policy Concepts and discerned regime change

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[64] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker." 41-63.

[65] Smith, "Military Might as a Basis for Russian Great Power Identity," 53.

efforts from the US and its allies as a threat to the stability of the international system and the national security of Russia and its allies.[66] Consequently, Russia initiated its campaign to militarily intervention in the Syrian Civil War.

Russian military operations in Syria exemplify the use of a strategy of limited action to defend and promote national interests outside of Russia's borders. The military operations in Syria adhered to the strategy's focus on the use of a self-sufficient grouping of forces selected from a branch of the armed forces that has a high degree of mobility and can make the greatest contribution to achieving the objective. In Syria, Russia developed their grouping of forces around the VKS. The VKS served as the armed forces branch with the highest degree of mobility and ability to provide the greatest contribution to Russia's campaign to simultaneously establish and secure Russian military bases in Syria, reestablish and retrain the Syrian military, and force concessions from the Syrian opposition forces. The operations also exemplified the strategy's requirement of attaining and maintaining information superiority, command and control readiness, logistics systems readiness, and the covert deployment of the force grouping. Additionally, the campaign served as a testing ground for Russia's modernization efforts to reestablishing military capability with over 200 diverse new weapons tested in Syria.[67] Operationally, Syria allowed Russia to develop and test a new form of employing armed forces formations. Specifically, the humanitarian operation which involved the planning and execution of simultaneous operations to withdraw a peaceful population from a conflict zone while engaging extremists in combat.[68] Ultimately, the decision to implement a strategy of limited action, that focused on the VKS and the application of airpower, allowed Russia to prosecute the

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[66] Charap, Treyger, and Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria*, 4-7.

[67] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker," 61.

[68] Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions."

conflict and achieve major propaganda successes with relatively low economic and personnel costs.[69]

The Russian operations in Syria underscore the relationship between the employment of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operation in Russian military strategy. Russian nonmilitary efforts before and during the campaign in Syria concentrated on an international and domestic information campaign. The international information campaign focused on diplomatic efforts and propaganda to promote legitimacy and contradict reports and evidence that damaged Russia's image. Russia initiated military operations in Syria with an information campaign that portrayed its intervention as legitimate and the result of a formal invitation from a UN member state. The campaign sought to contrast Russia's claim of international legitimacy with the narrative that the US and its allies regularly executed illegitimate interventions that lacked UNSC sanction or host-state invitation.[70] During operations in Syria, Russian leaders stated that the VKS would only initially strike forces from the Islamic State in Syria before expanding the criteria to include all insurgent groups. To support the military operations, an extensive information campaign existed to divert attention away from the Russian military's reclassification of Syrian opposition forces and aligned noncombatants as insurgents and extremists. In addition, accompanying disinformation campaigns concealed VKS strikes on Syrian civilians and civilian infrastructure. The campaign also sought to divide international cohesion through efforts such as the campaign to portray Turkish defensive actions as an aggressive overreaction and to isolate Turkey following the November 24, 2015 downing of a VKS Su-24M.[71] Domestically, the information campaign created the perception of persistent military successes leading to the gradual reduction of Russian military forces and involvement in Syria. Additionally, the campaign portrayed Russian military operations and alleged triumphs as markedly more effective

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[69] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker," 15.

[70] Charap, Treyger, and Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria*, 8.

[71] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker," 24-45.

than the longstanding efforts of the US and its allies to combat terrorism. The nonmilitary campaigns allowed Russia to sustain its prolonged campaign in Syria by ensuring domestic support and dividing international unity.[72]

The Russian operations in Syria reflect aspects of Russia's contemporary military strategy and understanding of war. Russian leaders perceived US and allied operations in Syria as a continuation of efforts to execute indirect and hybrid operations against non-aligned states. Russia noted that the actions decreased the division between war and peace by employing information superiority and precision military strikes to support the dynamic use of a population's protest potential and further promulgate US and allied efforts to erode the notion of state sovereignty. The Russian assessment regarding the imminent military collapse of the Assad regime forced it to conclude its longstanding diplomatic efforts and execute military operations to protect its future regional influence, military access, and national security. The operations exhibited characteristics of Russia's current strategy to protect interests outside of its geographic periphery by implementing mirror and asymmetric measures. Russian actions in Syria centered on military methods supported by nonmilitary methods in the information sphere. The operations followed the theoretical and practical elements of strategy through the planning, support, and employment of integrated measures to attain diplomatic, political, and military goals.

Conclusion and Implications

The review of Russian military strategy development from 1991 to 2019 reveals the existence of a general strategy of active defense, limited action, and an adaptation towards the development of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operations and their employment. The contemporary military strategy resulted from the Russian evolution and development of the concepts of war and military strategy. Ultimately, the Russian understanding of war and military

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[72] Cooper, "Moscow's Game of Poker," 63.

strategy provides some insights regarding the potential future direction of Russian military strategy development and implications for current and future US military policy and strategy.

The Russian evolution and understanding of the concept of war provides the foundation for Russian military science and thought. Contemporary Russian military science draws from the Soviet military science tenets of holism, dialectic materialism, and history. As a result, Russian military science relies on elements of systems theory, scientific method, and historical analysis to identify the military, political, economic, and social components that comprise Russian military theory. The central Russian security policy documents of the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, and the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation articulate the components of Russian military theory and their influence on associated concepts and policies. The documents outline the Russian understanding of the concept of war as involving a combination of armed struggle and nonmilitary means. While armed struggle remains the primary indicator and component of war, the inclusion of nonmilitary means occurred due to Russian observations and interpretation of the noncontact/remote warfare and hybrid methods of operation executed by the US and its allies. Thus, the Russian development process and understanding of the concept of war formed the basis for its military strategy development.

The evolution of Russian military strategy emphasizes the processes and rationale associated with Russia's strategic direction. Russia's initial military strategy development following the end of the Cold War focused on its geographic periphery and internal threats. In addition, international security cooperation and international law became the primary means to overcome ideological friction and negate any threats of direct aggression against Russia. However, Russia's strategic direction shifted during the 21st century with its scrutiny of NATO's eastward expansion, adversary military technological developments, and the traditional and nontraditional operations of both a military and nonmilitary nature executed by the US and its allies. Russia noted the rise of unilateralism executed outside of international law, specifically

actions by foreign actors to use a population's protest potential and other nonmilitary methods to destabilize the internal stability of a state and undermine the concept of sovereign statehood. Additionally, Russia observed that contemporary conflicts involve spheres of confrontation that favor the inclusive use of political, economic, information, and other nonmilitary measures with military force. Therefore, Russia developed a military strategy that emphasized the concepts of active defense, limited action, and the development of military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operations and their employment. The execution of the concepts centered on the principles of strategic deterrence, the preemptive neutralization of threats to state security, and the advancement of national interests outside of its borders. The Russian military campaigns in Ukraine and Syria highlighted the implementation of the principles and concepts that define Russia's current military strategy.

The Russian understanding of the concept of war and direction of contemporary military strategy provides some insight regarding the possible direction of future Russian military strategy development and implications for US military policy and strategy. The underpinnings of Russia's strategic direction are its focus on maintaining its status as a great power and one of the centers of a multipolar world order. Accordingly, it will continue to actively counter any perceived threats or adversary efforts to undermine its sphere of influence, interests, security, stability, and its internal sovereignty or the sovereignty of its allies. Also, Russia will continue to interpret actions that circumvent or limit the ability of international organizations to enforce international law as a threat. The tenets and direction of Russian military science will continue its perception that competition occurs within a global system and at the civilizational level. Consequently, Russian actions and responses to perceived threats will match its observations and deductions gleaned from the military and nonmilitary operations executed by the US and its allies. The basis of the Russian response will stem from its actions to mirror US and allied actions, counter perceived threats, and the continued development of new military and nonmilitary forms and methods of operations and associated technologies. Notably, Russia intends to maintain a capability to the

target decision-making centers and cruise missile launchers that facilitate strikes on Russian territory. Russia also seeks to validate a unified system to integrate intelligence, forms of destruction, and command and control to enable the holistic destruction of an enemy. Nevertheless, the core focus of Russian strategy development remains strategic deterrence and the information sphere of conflict.

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