



ARMY

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## BAR Special Report: The Soviet Union and Russia

- Volume 2



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# Editorial

Here is the second of two volumes of the British Army Review Special Report: Russia and the Soviet Union. This volume is primarily about Russia and all of the material within these pages has been taken from the recent archives of British Army Review (BAR) and as such, the material deals with the post-Cold War era up to the present day. Many of the articles examine Russia's resurgence and the build-up of its military forces.

So why publish articles that have already appeared in recent issues of BAR? The main answer to that is to provide the reader with a 'one-stop-shop' of information and opinion on Russia and the earlier Soviet Union with both of these volumes. The first two articles of this volume written in the late 1990s, aside from dated references, chillingly reflect current events happening across Eastern Europe as Russia builds up its military might.

Of course, it is up to the reader to take what they want from this volume. For me, if one person downloads one or all of the articles onto their phone, tablet or computer and uses the information to inform their own knowledge of Russia and the Soviet Union then putting all the work into this has been worthwhile.

While the first volume dealt with the Soviet Union this second volume looks at the military resurgence of Russia in the 21st Century. Taken together, both volumes should provide the reader with an interesting and informed look at one of the key players of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

In order to make both volumes as accessible as possible it was decided that this Special Report would be online only, enabling the reader to download both volumes from the Army Knowledge Exchange web pages on the Defence Gateway onto whatever device they choose, anywhere at any time.

Graham Thomas  
Editor, British Army Review

*The 202nd Air Defence Brigade in the Western Military District in Russia. This air defence brigade is equipped with S-300V-SAMs. This brigade received these systems in 1989. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, This file is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net>*



# Application of Technology to Russian Control Theory

*This article by Brigadier (Ret'd) John Hemsley was originally published in BAR 100 April 1992.*

Who would, or indeed could have predicted that the Soviet Union would have collapsed so quickly. It is a time of great change on the global political scene although, remembering that the last seventy years represent no more than a brush stroke

on the vast canvas of Russian history, there is always the danger that our perception of change may be greater than the change itself. Nevertheless, recent events have shaken the very foundations of the political systems in the East to the extent that many historians are already looking back over the past four decades and viewing the Cold War with its accompanying bi-polar super-power alliance, as representing a comfortable predictability from which emerged a strange kind of stability. But whatever emerges from the present uncertainty we can be sure of two things: first, that there will be no more return to the status quo and second, and much more significant, there will be no fundamental change to the Russian social psyche.

This is because Russia is more than just a geographical entity - it is a way of life; indeed it can almost be termed a concept in itself. From the earliest history of Imperial Russia, there has never been an occasion when the Russian (Soviet) Empire has disappeared. Russia needs to be perceived in a geo-ethnic context, transcending political systems. However, what it did have in common with Communism is centralism. The very size of both old Imperial Russia and the recent Soviet Union dictated a strong centralised system of control. The total area outside the former Soviet Union was one fifth of the world's land surface, the present Russian state represents one sixth. It was no accident of history that Russia was the one country in which Communism took hold at a time when, as a political concept, it was on the decline through the remainder of Europe. By its theoretical nature, Communism took the place of a creed, a faith, a religion - whatever you like to call it; but its ideology was open to interpretation which could be subtly adapted to meet changing circumstances. This dialectic philosophy makes Communism a more flexible ideology than its opponents frequently give it credit for. Therefore, it is important that we in the West should not misunderstand or underestimate this capacity for what the Russians term *adaptivmost*. In particular, we need to appreciate the Soviet understanding of the nature of change. Change is regarded as part of the inevitable process of historical materialism. Nevertheless, it was part of the Soviet paradox that the Politburo in the Kremlin was always a highly conservative body. It preferred change to be gradual. Abrupt and rapid change was seen as invariably leading to political uncertainty, resulting in events and situations, which, more often than not would be characterised by a degree of unpredictability and loss of control.

An appreciation of contemporary Russian political philosophy is fundamental to our understanding of Russian control theory, since the latter is an institutional matter and responsive to political doctrine; and institutions are more important than weapon systems. There has been a great deal of discussion and speculation in the west about the recent break-up of the Soviet Empire and the extinction of Communism. Disarmament euphoria gripped many western countries and former Soviet republics were suddenly perceived in a benevolent guise. This view was already being encouraged in Gorbachev's time by a series of exceptional Soviet international propaganda coups in the disarmament

field that had the effect of resting the initiative from the United States, leaving them in the unaccustomed position of having constantly to react to events. Whilst scenarios for the future of European security into the next century must necessarily remain conjectural, there is an economic and potential political power vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe. Added to this, many Russians view another Russo-German conflict as inevitable as German economics and political expansion moves eastward, threatening Russian long-term ambitions of becoming a Eurasian power. Whatever the nature of stated political futures or the short-term state of the economy, the core of military R&D is likely to remain distinct from the civil sector, and it would be foolish to ignore developments in the Russian military system.

The present Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Russia in particular, is currently beset with social and economic problems of daunting proportions. However, this is a sub-continent where such events have been experienced before on many occasions throughout history. There is a close parallel with the late nineteenth century when Russia became over capitalised and experienced severe economic difficulties. Circumstances do have a habit of changing rapidly and new orders can emerge overnight (as recent political events have proved only too vividly); therefore we need to look to the more permanent institutional structures to point the way to the future. In the same way that the Russian Federation dominated the old USSR, the present Russian state will continue to call the shots in the CIS, in so far as this is likely to last. Meanwhile, one does not have to be a militarist to remain sceptical of Russian intentions until conclusively proved wrong. Russia is the most powerful state in the CIS, with the strongest institutional base, and is unlikely to have any scruples over taking what it wants, by force if necessary. Therefore, we must ask ourselves the question(s) the Russians ask themselves; what are the determinates of military power? What strategies are required and what command and control systems are needed to support them?

As with the former Soviet Union, one of Russia's major pre-occupations is the search for acceptability through recognition of legitimacy. Whatever the colour of the glass western analysts use through which to view them, Russia's political leaders are by conditioning still Marxist/Leninists. Their long term political strategy will be to make Russia eventually into a political and economic power as well as a military power. In the light of the probable development of a multi-polar global scenario for the next century, the vision is for a socialist Europe, dominated by Russia and its satraps in the long term, having hopefully shifted the economic burden of developing the peripheral former COMECON countries to the West in the medium term.<sup>1</sup> This, together with the fifteen year breathing space required by all members of the CIS to attain some semblance of economic viability and high tech implementation, is almost certainly the prime motive behind the

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<sup>1</sup> Erickson, J., *Some Speculations on Soviet Military Re-structuring*, Unpublished Paper, Edinburgh University February 1989, p 1



*A brigade command and control post of 202nd Air Defence Brigade Western Military District as part of the S-300V air defence missile system. This unit trains for the air defence of Moscow and is one of the few units in Land Forces that spends several months a year training at full strength. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, This file is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net>*

current apparent softer attitude towards traditional Russian imperialism.

However, this cannot disguise the fact that an economically resource-poor civil sector produces little prospect of supporting a strong economic expansion. Therefore Russian expansionist imperatives can, in the short term, still only be expressed in politico-military or territorial terms. Either way this requires underwriting by credible military power, and the strength and sophistication of recent Soviet military potential, coupled with the growth of its real strategic capability over the past fifteen years has given the Russian state the foundation on which to base a significant potential increase in global political influence, once current international problems have been resolved. The implications of this for the West were aptly summed up by a sometime SACEUR, General Lemnitzer, who said:

*Military planning must be orientated only to the capabilities of a potential enemy, not his assumed intentions. Intentions can change overnight.*

The Council of Defence for the CIS today is engaged in doctrinal revision affecting all branches of the armed forces. Therefore when addressing military developments in Russia tomorrow, it will be important to look beneath the surface to determine what it is that we are really seeing, and then to evaluate the technological significance in relation to former Soviet military doctrine and control theory under the rubric of *upravleniya salami* [the main Russian term for C3 Command, Control and Communications], or perhaps more properly *upravlenie voiskami*.<sup>2</sup> The development of future Russian command technology

<sup>2</sup> Erickson, J., Mountbatten Lecture, Edinburgh University, 8 November 1989. Here distinction is made between the terms automated control of weapons systems (ASUO) and automation of command and control systems (ASUV).

can then be properly placed into the practical context of current military doctrinal development.

In order to do this, as well as understanding what is happening to control theory inside the Soviet Union, we really need to go back in time to trace the evolution of Soviet doctrine since the end of the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> What we see now, is the practical implementation of the last four distinctive and clearly discernible phases of military developments since 1945. The first of these occurred during the period 1945 to 1953, which represented the immediate aftermath of the war. During this time all military operational thinking was conducted under the pervasive constraints of what was known as Stalin's five 'permanent operating factors'. Weapons and equipment were still those of the 1944-45 era, although nuclear weapons were being developed behind the scenes. Nevertheless, doctrine inevitably remained tied to the same dimensions of technology and tactical thought that existed at the end of the war. On this basis there was neither the requirement nor incentive to upgrade C3 structures.

The period 1953-1960 saw the establishment of strategic nuclear weapons with the accompanying philosophies of intercontinental strikes, together with the first introduction of a tactical nuclear battlefield concept that resulted in the development of combat operations designed to cope in a nuclear environment. At this point it was deduced that a robust and redundant operations C3 hierarchy was required to maintain any sort of continuity of control on the nuclear battlefield.<sup>4</sup>

This was followed by the period 1960 to 1970. This was a decade that saw some radical changes to the basic structure of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, largely brought about as a result of the concept of an operational and tactical nuclear battlefield insofar as the Ground Forces were concerned. The emphasis was firmly based on widening the technological base, with the priority almost exclusively geared to armaments, and there was a large qualitative improvement in equipment generally. It was during this time that the T-62 main battle tank, the BMP tracked armoured personnel carrier and the M-1970 main battle tank were produced - the latter two vehicles being designed particularly for a nuclear campaign in Europe. Concurrently, some far reaching steps were taken in the field of aircraft design and the development of aircraft technology, and perhaps most significant of all was the expansion of the Soviet Navy under Admiral Gorshkov. Inevitably, this evolution brought about accompanying changes in command and organisational structures along with an overhaul of training methods. However, not least, the importance of the application of science to every facet of military

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3 *Derevyanko, P.M., (ed) Problemy revolyutsii v voennom dele, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1965 – contains a series of essays involving the automation of specific weapons systems concerning the PVO and certain functions of the C3 process; also in Maltsev, Y.E., (ed.), The Communist Party of the Soviet Union – The Organizer of the Defence of the Socialist Fatherland, pp 392-393, translated in Strategic Digest, Spring 1976, pp 132-133*

4 *Although MSU Sakarov started systems analysis and ADP technology in 1967, the real groundwork was laid in 1973 by Kulikov who came close to understanding the full scope of the problem.*



*The Topol Nuclear Weapon Delivery System is one of the most recent intercontinental ballistic missiles to be deployed by Russia, and the first to be developed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, This file is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net>*

work and thinking was about to permeate Soviet society, and during this period a number of high technology projects were undoubtedly on the drawing board. This was the largely unrecognized nascence of an engineering culture that was to assume such institutional importance in the USSR. It was also a time of some national satisfaction in achieving parity with the USA; albeit there was a degree of foreboding for the future, especially regarding what was seen as deterioration in the strategic environment.

The final, and to some extent, continuing phase started in the early 1970s. In 1973 the Soviet High Command suffered a severe shock as a result of Egyptian C2 failures in the Yom Kippur War. These were largely due to systemic rigidities throughout the whole command and control matrix, which directly reflected Soviet C2 doctrinal teaching. For the rest of the decade, the main volume and weight of Soviet discussion and work was on the technicalities of command and control, which has been systematically examined and mathematically modelled. The result was a complete rethink and restructuring of the military system that has been taking place since 1980 and was well advanced by the time Gorbachev was ousted as President.

This period has been dominated by two main occurrences that have been developing in parallel; the first being the emergence of the theatre war concept, together with a non-nuclear or conventional as opposed to global nuclear war strategy. Here it must be emphasised that until the mid-to-late 1980s, and insofar as any operations against NATO in the European Theatre were concerned, any conventional option would almost certainly be conducted against what might be termed a nuclear back drop. During this period we saw some major associated restructuring of some of the Soviet services, principally in the air and air defence forces, to meet the new strategic requirements resulting from the implantation of the TVD high command structure.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Teatr voyennykh deistvii (TVO) translates to Theatre of Strategic Military Action*

The second important factor lay in the impact that new and developing technology, particularly in electronics, had made on Soviet theory and practice of warfare. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in the field of C3 and here, in terms of field technology, the USSR had until the late 1980s maintained a distinct lead over NATO. Indeed, their first generation of automated C3I systems were operating down to divisional level in the 1970s whilst the British, Americans and French were still at the design and testing stage with their WAVELL, TOS and SYCAMORE systems respectively. During the last twenty years automation has been introduced into the Soviet military command and control network extending into the operational and tactical headquarters in the field, as well as into a wide range of weapon systems. Sophisticated equipment has come into service with all branches of the Soviet forces, along with computers providing information technology to every branch and level of the military organisation.

Though this last phase has been a continuing period of doctrinal development, it might equally be described as a period of transition reaching into the mid-1990s. Before the dissolution of the Union there had been much debate over what has been interpreted by many in the West as the emergence of a new Soviet doctrine of 'defensive defence'. It was always difficult in any analysis of sequential development to make a clear demarcation between the ending of one phase and the beginning of another; and never more so when one is attempting a contemporary commentary without the benefit of hindsight. However, the pleonasm 'defensive defence', which is in fact really a Western invention, actually describes the logical culmination of a doctrinal revision that has been going on with the Soviet Armed Forces for a long time. Evolving Soviet philosophies of C3 must inevitably be linked to doctrine; the USSR always regarded its strategic doctrine as a prescription for national survival.

Soviet military doctrine was essentially predictive. It is concerned with the nature of future conflict, whilst military science is seen as both shaping and validating the theory by providing the means for practical achievement and future technological development. Soviet military doctrine was political in essence and defined the nature of war by establishing principles of organisation and prescribing methods for accomplishing missions once military goals had been determined. The Russians consider military doctrine to be scientifically founded, reflecting the objective laws of armed conflict. The conclusions of military science concerning the theory and practice of war are key factors in determining its development. Therefore, this is the context in which we need to examine the Russian theory and practice of C3. In this context it may well be that they are better prepared than many of the countries of the NATO alliance to meet the military structural implications arising out of a major shift in the confrontational centre of gravity away from North West Europe, with all that this implies in terms of collective security

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6 Erickson, J., *Some Speculations on Soviet Military Re-structuring*, Unpublished Paper, Edinburgh University, February 1989, p 3

measures, restructuring forces for a rapid reaction role, and global geo-strategic C3 capabilities.

When considering 'defensivism' and its implications for Russian C3, it is important not to confuse this with the idea of '*razumnaya dostalochnost*' that is 'defensive sufficiency', or 'reliable defence,' which is not, and was never intended to be, a formal military doctrine,<sup>6</sup> although this is certainly a key issue to be considered when determining the degree of force multiplication that should be attributed to Soviet C3I (Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence) systems. In this connection it is worth noting that, for all the ostentatious Soviet propaganda in 1990 regarding troop reductions and withdrawals, the actual military capabilities were reduced by as little as 5%, and in fact were actually improved through organisational restructuring and rationalisation. In any case, all this would have been offset by improved conventional and bio-chemical weaponry, with the future being taken care of by the enormous effort being put into space as the decisive 'fourth dimension.'<sup>7</sup>

This needs to be examined in a little more detail. First of all, what is the essence



*Inside Russian Command Vehicle R145BMA at the 16th International Exhibition Interpolitex-2012, October 2012 in Moscow. The Exhibition was organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Federal Security Service, Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation and Exhibition Companies Group BIZON. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, This file is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net>*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p 13

of the debate on the 'offence/defence' relationship? This is by no means new and goes back to the late 1960s when, despite impressive force modernisation, the Soviet military was increasingly subjected to budgetary constraints, civilian theoretical restructuring of defence policy and, in the view of the Soviet General Staff, other intrusive political interference by the Party. Therefore there is a critical disparity between the Gorbachev and now Yeltsin public announcements on 'defensive restructuring', and the true military objective which entails the total integration of technology into a comprehensive strategic military framework with a global dimension. This fully integrated model specifically includes a space component and will provide the basic element for both defence and offence; all operating within the high-tech environment that has for so long characterised Soviet military thinking.

In many ways this substantiates the thesis regarding consistency and continuity of Russian/CIS strategic thinking. Current political imperatives apart, what we are seeing today in Russia in military terms are some contemporary adjustments to the logical continuation of a process of equipment rationalisation and organisational restructuring to meet a long-term strategic requirement; the emphasis being on conventional warfare fully integrated within the TVD, with space as the key to the future. This doctrine had its theoretical genesis in the mid-to-late 1970s when it was formulated and agreed. Its practical implementation started in the early 1980s and is still going on subject to necessary fine turning.<sup>8</sup> Military restructuring started down at the strategic and operational levels; and is now at the tactical level looking bottom up in order to improve flexibility and adaptability at the lower levels. But C3 underpins the whole system. It is highly time sensitive, and remember that the High Command sees time as the principle measure of effectiveness.

Russian military modelling would relate the relationship of effectiveness with time in the form of an equation such as:

$$Time = C3I = Effectiveness = efficiency = defensive efficiency$$

The relevance of this lies in its affinity to established original Soviet strategic aspirations; therefore it could be said to establish a rationale, as well as a degree of provenance, for Russian military C3 praxis. For the past thirty years there has been a continuing

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8 Paterson, P., and Hines, J., *The Warsaw Pact Strategic Offensive*, *International Defence Review*, No 10, 1983, pp 1391-1395; also *The Soviet Conventional Defence in Europe*, *Military Review*, April 1984, p 10

9 Kipp, J.W., *From Foresight to Forecasting: the Russian and Soviet Military Experience*, *Stratech Study SS88-1*, Centre for Strategic Technology, Texas A&M University, 1988

10 Alekseyev, V., *Characteristic Features of Contemporary Naval Battles*, *Morskoy sbornik*, No 10, October 1986, pp 17-22; Fritz F., *Soviet C2 Information Systems Theories, Concepts, Evaluations*, reprinted in *Signal Journal (AFCEA)*, December 1988, pp 35-42; Grinkevich, D., *The Time Factor in Battle*, *Voyennii Vestnik*, No 11, November 1986, pp 2-5; Krasnov A., *The Cost of Lost Minutes*, *Aviatsiia I kosmonavtika*, No 10, October 1986, pp 18-19; Morozov I., et al., *Opportunities and Problems in Mastering Computer Technology*, April 1987, pp 41-46

recognition of the urgent need to improve decision-making techniques, particularly in the military sphere, both at the higher echelons as well as at the lower executive levels. To take one instance, the adoption of automation at all levels throughout the command hierarchy and management process has facilitated scientific forecasting<sup>9</sup> thus leading to the application of operational research as the main means of balancing the requirements for military growth against expenditure.

However, in order to consider the implications in terms of operational control, one only has to follow the Russian approach to the IADA cycle (information/analysis/decision/action), which will be familiar to most Western analysts.<sup>10</sup> Computers now play a vital role in all four major functions of this cycle. Initially they manage the automated reception, filtering and correlation of information, which is then fed into a fusion centre. Here all-source information is subject to a continuous cycle where it is automatically cross-referenced, supplemented, revised and matched against existing data and the current situation to produce a coherent intelligence evaluation for the commander. These fusion centres necessitate high rates of processing using arrays and simultaneous processing techniques, larger memory capacities, faster access and better data retention. The commander's analysis is fed into a computer, where decisions are tested against algorithms of combat models and effectiveness criteria. The staff produce and promulgate the detailed operational plan. This work may be carried out in a number of networked 'battle planning centres' involving regrouping (*perigruppirovka*) implying both cross-posting and resubordination), weaponing, integrated artillery fire planning and air support tasking, the co-ordination of the recce-strike complex<sup>11</sup>, logistic planning, movement and rear area real estate management. All these staff planning functions readily lend themselves to automation in order to enhance C3 in terms of increased firepower and mobility, facilitating the breakthrough and encirclement operations which, in turn, are fundamental to the effective employment of follow-up or deep penetration forces. All this accords with Russian doctrine whilst at the same time placing very high demands upon C3I systems, particularly in a rugged and demanding military environment, which makes the whole subject of the application of information technology to military tasks extremely esoteric.<sup>12</sup>

Mention was made earlier regarding the tendency for Soviet planners to opt for fielded technology that frequently represents a lower technological state of the art than that reached by Western R&D to meet the same specification. Similarly, the CIS has a reputable signal processing capability with a mix of optical and electrical, and we in the West tend to forget that the Russians will design and install equipment to meet their

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11 Reznichenko, V. G., et al., *Taktika* (2nd Edition), Moscow, Voenizdat, 1987, p 9

12 Altukhov, P.K., et al., *Osnovi Teori Upravleniya Voiskami*, Moscow Voenizdat, 1984. In this context much might be deduced by looking in detail at the operational rear area and what happens when this is disrupted in war. In other words at the significance of Soviet damage control and C2.

particular purposes. Therefore it by no means follows that Russian perceptions and requirements will necessarily match the Western approach towards a similar problem. There is a very well-established relationship between engineering design and practical application; we should consider carefully whether this should not be the bench mark against which we need to evaluate and judge their C3I architectures.<sup>13</sup>

For example, the technical application of their information systems can be clearly illustrated by the underground strategic electro-optical communications links that have been in operation for several years between Moscow, the military districts and groups of forces outside the former metropolitan USSR. These fibre optic links are capable of accepting large data packages with a very high degree of security.<sup>14</sup> Due to the fact that there is less attenuation on fibre optic cable than metal, fewer repeater stations are required - of the order of only one for every 100 km for low capacity channels. The data flow can be increased by using a multi-light laser (i.e. by transmitting red, green and blue light.)<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting that Soviet technology has been criticised in the West for its reliance on analogue systems which, until recently, have been considered inferior and less accurate when compared to digital systems. For instance, back in the 1970s Soviet airborne synthetic aperture radar was translating radar pictures to film that was then scanned optically. In fact, the USSR was using dumped film in the interim until they were able to make a laser or other more suitable, more high capacity, downlink in real time. Although analogue systems may be less flexible, they have a high rate of processing, and the capability for holographic reconstruction gives them a degree of jam resistance.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet SALYUT satellite is currently relaying holographic transmissions from orbit to ground.

In addition, we should perhaps remember that despite their supposed technological inferiority, Russian research and development (and in some places application) is well advanced on such projects as: artificial intelligence and expert systems, laser communications and electro-optics, advanced sensors especially AD radar sensors, laser radars and netting of radar systems, again especially for air defence, genetic engineering, robotics and machine intelligence, directed energy, hypersonics, aerodynamics and advanced materials, kinetic energy weapons<sup>17</sup>, and signature reduction (i.e. STEALTH).

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<sup>13</sup> Pollock, M.A., Stubbs, K.D., Thomas, R.E., and Waddell, S.R., *Soviet Optical Data Processing and its Suitability for Troop Control*, Centre of Strategic Technology, Texas Engineering Experiment Station of the Texas A&M University System, College Station, January 1990

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp 171-172

<sup>15</sup> Some Western analysts have speculated whether there is a shortage of copper in the USSR, hence the move towards fibre optics and ceramics.

<sup>16</sup> Pollock, M.A., *op cit.*, pp 141-142

<sup>17</sup> *Soviet investigations into directed energy covers a wide range of research, including particle beam, very low frequency acoustics, and electrical discharge, gas-dynamic, chemical-pulsed lasers. See Bogart, P., Soviet Military Space Programmes, International Defence Review, Vol 23, No 1, 1990, pp 23-26*

In short, we have been witnessing the development of a large engineering culture, which points to future doctrine being based firmly upon technology.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, deficiencies in command and control at the tactical level of the Ground Forces is another of the major concerns facing the High Command. This is an organisational problem presented by the span of command, reflecting the overload on the staff at regimental level and a lack of well-trained officers and senior NCOs at battalion level. New organisational structures at the tactical level will provide a better base for an integrated combined arms formation, with the ability for the rapid concentration of mass at the higher level as a result of improved C3 responsiveness.

Notwithstanding all this, as the Soviet Group Forces discovered in the 1970s, at the level of battlefield management both cybernetic and ergonomic problems impose a practical limit on the proliferation of very sophisticated C3I systems. It requires little imagination to appreciate that the difficulties inherent in macro-systems, such as strategic missile forces and major air defence systems, are immeasurably more tractable than those relating to tactical handling. In terms of battlefield information technology, the Ground Forces see the greatest area of difficulty lying first and foremost in the reporting system with anomalies between generation and automated evaluation. In addition, there are some clearly recognised vulnerabilities in a number of other areas regarding the maintenance of high-tech equipment, professional and technical training, headquarters' structures,<sup>19</sup> handling procedures coupled with the volume of data for processing, as well as EW and ECM.

In conclusion, the aim of this article has been to demonstrate that command technology (*voennaya sistemotekhnika*) will be totally integrated into any future Russian military doctrine, and has therefore become a major dimension in the Russians' perception of their system's effectiveness. They see the measure of the control cycle as a measure of efficiency. Operational research is now an eclectic mix of ergonomics, military engineering psychology and cybernetics.<sup>20</sup> Overall C3I structures display some undoubted strengths as well as weaknesses; however, the effectiveness can only truly be assessed by evaluating the whole, rather than by comparing specific technology levels with those of the West on the basis of comparing like systems. In general terms the High Command C3 architecture at the strategic and higher operational levels has a high degree of flexibility, redundancy, security, interoperability and survivability. However, at the lower military tactical levels, whilst weapons control systems are generally successful, there are still many problems to be overcome. For a variety of reasons, it is unlikely that

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18 Erickson, J., *Victory Cannot be Computed*, Unpublished script for lecture to Royal Corps of Signals, Blandford, November 1989

19 This refers particularly to the size of signals support units, in addition to those employed in HQ staff functions

20 Erickson, J., *op. cit.*

the present system will be unable to translate effectively the direction from a flexible, highly automated, higher command attempting to conduct a fast moving battle, to form tactical coherence out of a confused, real-time battlefield. Their operational and doctrinal concepts are essentially dynamic; the question is whether the systemic deficiencies will allow them to achieve the performance or effectiveness they desire.

Nevertheless they have certainly had more 'hands on' experience at this level than the NATO equivalent. Vulnerabilities cannot be identified with individual equipment. The crux is whether the 'system' will work on the day. The only real test can be the result of military operations against an enemy also employing a sophisticated C3I technology.



*The Combat Robot MRK-002-BG-57 displayed at the tactical exercises of internal troops, special and rapid deployment units at ODON division training ground. Internal Troops of the Ministry for Internal Affairs celebrated the 204th anniversary of foundation on March 27th 2015. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, This file is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net>*

# Do We Still Need International Defence Co-operation now that the Cold War is Over?



*A Kuwaiti M-113 armored personnel carrier crosses a trench during a capabilities demonstration at a Kuwaiti outpost during Operation Desert Shield. Photo Technical Sergeant H.H. Deffner, US Army, Released.*

*This article by Major RR Smith was originally published in BAR 106, April 1994.*

Whilst the end of the Cold War was greeted by a sense of optimism and welcomed as an opportunity to restructure international relations, its aftermath also witnessed a growing diversity amongst the nations, which had previously been united in a sense of common purpose. In a period characterized by the perception of a greatly diminished threat of global war, economic restraint and a wide desire to focus on domestic matters, the path of international defence co operation became increasingly less easy. The difficulty was

trying to achieve consensus in a much changed security environment, and arguably a far more complex one than the clear-cut and bipolar framework of the Cold War. If the risk of a cataclysmic and global war has receded, then the danger of regional uncertainty has increased, which if left unattended could threaten to reverse many of the benefits obtained in bringing about the end of the Cold War. The West cannot afford to be complacent in its success or opt merely to preserve the status quo, for there can be no lasting peace and security while the risk of instability remains both in Europe and in the world in general. It is in this climate that the continuing requirement for international defence co-operation must be fashioned. Primarily it will need a more flexible and expansive approach to meet the new challenges posed by the altered situation of the prevailing international order. The whole question of defence co-operation must be viewed in its widest sense to include not only purely military issues, but also to encompass the associated political, economic and social implications. Moreover, this approach will require the commitment of the principal nations in the West to overcome parochial aspirations and to redefine their common interests and objectives, with the aim of projecting a coherent policy of stability and confidence initially in Europe and then beyond it. This should be fulfilled by implementing the existing range of defence organizations, which will need to be adapted to reflect their new roles whilst remaining complementary to each other. The task of achieving this web of security architecture should not be underestimated. The alternative, however, of not persevering with the need for international defence co-operation would be a gradual return to an unpredictable international community with a diminished sense of order.

*UK Troops lead Exercise VENERABLE GAUNTLET with more than 3000 troops from 14 different NATO countries taking part on the Sennelager Ranges in Germany for the NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Photo Dominic King, Crown Copyright*



### **Dilemmas of International Defence Co-operation After the Cold War**

The premise for international defence co-operation during the Cold War was founded on the need to counter the monolithic threat of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO). This allowed for the development of the Western Alliance, based on the principle of collective defence, to deter the outbreak of a catastrophic war involving nuclear weapons on the continent of Europe. Co-operation in this context was possible because the ideological threat of the Eastern bloc, portrayed as an expansionist and militaristic opponent, generated a sense of unity and common purpose amongst the Alliance's members.

Subsequently, in the wave of optimism that greeted the demise of the Cold War, it was adjudged that the opportunity existed to restructure the international order beyond the linear confrontation in Europe of the previous forty-five years. President Bush called for the creation of a New World Order, which would be reliant upon 'a set of principles that underpin our relations, peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals, and just treatment of all people.'<sup>1</sup> Such an ideal might have been interpreted as offering a shared vision for the international community of finally achieving its most cherished values of peace, stability and justice. In addition to this development, the European Community sought to reinstate progress towards closer political and military integration. Through the Treaty of Maastricht in December 1991, it agreed to 'the implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence.'<sup>2</sup>

The problem for international defence co operation in this period has been, however, that idealistic rhetoric has tended to advance ahead of reality. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, President Bush's vision of a New World Order may have been prone to exaggeration. With Saddam Hussein still in power, evident signs of frailty amongst certain Arab members of the Coalition as the war reached its conclusion, and international attention focused on the more discreditable aspects of the post-war condition of Iraq, a more pragmatic vision of the emerging international order might have been a greater awareness of the need to maintain an orderly world,<sup>3</sup> yet without the agreed means to achieve it.

Equally in Western Europe similar restraining factors became apparent. Primarily, in view of the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the perception was of a greatly-reduced threat that no longer warranted the maintenance of significant military forces deployed in a role of Forward Defence in Europe. This perception was further compounded by the atmosphere of economic recession throughout the world at the turn of the decade, leading to a common desire to spend less on defence

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<sup>1</sup> Bush, G., *Speech at Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base on 13April 1991. (US Information Service)*

<sup>2</sup> *Article 13, Title One of Treaty on European Union, (Brussels, European Communities, 1992), p 7*

<sup>3</sup> *Friedman, L., The Gulf War and the new world order, Survival, Vol 33, No 3 (May/June 1991), pp 196-7*

and to concentrate instead on domestic issues. The net result has been a perceptible erosion of the sense of unity evident during the Cold War, reflected by a tendency towards a greater diversity of opinion aired with less inhibition and the risk of a return to states pursuing policies based on a more narrow conception of national interests.<sup>4</sup> The signs of this diversity have gradually become evident. America found it difficult to reconcile her desire to see Europe assume a greater responsibility for its own security, while remaining suspicious of the potential competition posed by a more united Europe. Within Western Europe, Britain mooted that she would accept a move to a stronger European defence identity so long as it did not undermine the position of NATO as the ascendant organization for collective security. In contrast, France retained her traditional Gaullist desire for autonomy and her wariness of an American-led NATO. She preferred to place greater emphasis on promoting the Western European Union (WEU) and proceeded to cultivate bilateral links independently with members of NATO. In part, the consequence was the creation of the Franco-German Corps, arguably in direct rivalry to NATO's Rapid Reaction Corps headed by Britain<sup>5</sup> and as a means of ensuring the future commitment of Germany in the European process. As for Germany, she has sought to play a tactful

*M-109 155mm self-propelled howitzers of the Egyptian army's 3rd Armored Brigade move into a holding area prior to decontamination during a field demonstration, part of Operation Desert Shield. Photo Technical Sergeant H.H. Deffner, U.S. Air Force, Released*



4 Brenner, M., *Multilateralism and European Security*, *Survival*, Vol 35, No 2, (Summer 1993), p 142

5 Menon, A, Forster, A., and Wallace, W., *A Common European Defence*, *Survival*, Vol 34, No 3, (Autumn 1992), p 104 and pp 107-110

role between France and America, but has remained hamstrung by her constitutional restrictions preventing her from assuming a truly global role with its associated military risks.<sup>6</sup> Thus there is a danger that the optimism emanating from the end of the Cold War is slowly being eroded, reflecting the difficulties of achieving defence co-operation at a time when states' priorities lie elsewhere.

### **Changed Security Environment after the Cold War**

The crux of these difficulties is the problem of applying a system of defence co-operation in a markedly different security environment from that prevailing during the Cold War, and one in which the international community must recognize both its strengths, and more importantly its weaknesses. In Europe the changes have been most obvious and perhaps because they were largely achieved without recourse to violence, a sense of complacency has begun to emerge within the West disguising the sources of potential danger that still remain. The combined effect of the collapse of Communism and the break-up of the former Soviet Union has left a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, with the risk of future uncertainty and potential instability in that region (now seen by the crisis in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia; Ed.) If communism has failed, then it must be remembered that the process to develop democracy and market-regulated economies in its place is firstly still very much in its infancy, and also is occurring in states more used to operating under central direction and under the predominance of military influence over their civil institutions.

Central to this assessment remains Russia that continues to possess a significant military capability, which she is currently in the process of reallocating to new roles within her own borders. Of further concern is the state of her nuclear armoury, particularly those strategic weapons located in the successor states of the former Soviet Union; namely Belarus, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan, who now seem intent on retaining control of these weapons for use as bargaining counters in future negotiations.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the region of Central and Eastern Europe will be exposed to a number of specific sources of instability. First amongst these will be the threat of intra-state conflict, based upon the re-emergence of bitter religious, ethnic and nationalist rivalries previously held in abeyance by the authoritarian control of the former Soviet Union. Furthermore this region is likely to be prone to economic fragility and a resulting trend towards a destabilizing migration of refugees from the former East to the West. If these dangers are less cataclysmic than during the Cold War, they are potentially more difficult to address for they do not necessarily threaten the vital interests of the West. Yet if they are left to fester, they might

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<sup>6</sup> Bluth, C., *Germany: Towards A New Security Format, The World Today*, (November 1992), pp 197-8

<sup>7</sup> Winkler, T., *Central Europe and the Post- Cold War European Security Order, European Security, Vol 1, No 4, (Winter 1992), pp 18-19*



*Two U.S. Marine AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit fly over the live fire range at Glamoc, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on April 2, 1998. Assigned to the Strategic Reserve Force of the Stabilization Force, the Marines are taking part in Exercise Dynamic Response 98, a training exercise designed to familiarize the reserve forces with the territory and their operational capabilities within this region. Photo Chief Petty Officer Steve Briggs, US Navy, Released.*

begin to pose wider security implications to which the West would be forced to respond, possibly in less than favourable circumstances.

Nor should this overview be confined to Europe for if the changes outside Europe have been less dramatic, potentially they could have even greater implications for the security environment. The demise of the influence of superpower bipolarity has created a power vacuum paralleling the security vacuum postulated above. This is being filled by the emergence of a number of regional powers with greater access to a sophisticated military capability through the recent growth of the international arms industry. Within this framework, many developing countries of the former Third World in Africa and the Middle and Far East, which are already prone to political and economic frailty, will be uniquely vulnerable to the external attention from the emerging regional powers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sayigh, Yezid, *Confronting the 1990s Security in the Developing Countries, Adelphi Paper No 25, (Summer 1990), p 39*

### Requirement for Future International Defence Co-operation

Against this background the requirement for international defence co-operation remains, albeit in a different form. The problem will be how to move from a bipolar system of closely controlled alliances, dominated by the threat of nuclear destruction, to a freer and yet stable framework.<sup>9</sup> Maintaining cooperation will be more complex in a multipolar environment away from the clear structure of the Cold War, in which the rules of conduct were tacitly understood by both sides. In essence, the aim must be to build on the achievements of the past, but then also to amend existing concepts and practices to reflect the new realities in the international community. While during the Cold War the emphasis was placed on containing the threat and maintaining the status quo, now the focus should be on a positive reshaping of the international order, starting within Europe as a baseline and then reaching beyond the confines of Europe.

The field of defence must be seen in its widest context as contributing towards an overall security policy. This will mean the consideration not just of purely military



*More than 30,000 soldiers from 24 participating nations deployed on Exercise Anakonda 2016 a Polish-led joint multinational exercise designed to test the interoperability of the Polish forces and its NATO allies. Members of 23 Amphibious Engineer Troop, Royal Engineers, alongside German soldiers from Pionierbattalion 130 demonstrate the unique capabilities of their M3 Amphibious Rig to enable the US Army's 2 Cavalry Regiment to quickly cross the River Vistula. Photo Dominic King, Crown Copyright*

9 O'Neill, Robert, *Securing Peace In Europe in the 1990s*, cited in Heuser Beatrice, and O'Neill Robert, (ed), *Securing Peace In Europe, 1945-1962*, (London, Macmillan Academic and Professional Limited, 1992), p 313

matters such as equipment, training, operational strategy and logistics, but also the associated-political, economic and social implications. There will need to be flexibility to accommodate disagreements between members of the same defence organization, and even the ability for a state to opt out of a certain military option should it so chose. Yet at the same time there must be a strong political will to achieve cooperation and make difficult political decisions, overriding the temptation for national parochialism. In a period of reduced defence expenditure and rationalized military capabilities, the way forward must be through multilateralism. Indeed, few Western countries would now envisage using force beyond their borders except in a multilateral context, for such an approach helps to neutralize domestic political opposition and reassure the international community that operations have limited and legitimate goals.<sup>10</sup> Flexible, yet coherent, multilateralism will be the realistic means for resolving future conflicts, but its foundations must be laid now before the opportunity passes. Within these parameters, it is vital that the international community, led by the West as the principal beneficiaries from the passing of the Cold War, should identify areas of common interest from which to fashion the basis for future defence co-operation.

### **Common Security Objectives**

Primarily, this co-operation will be dependent upon the continued health and existence of the Euro-Atlantic relationship. It will remain the bedrock upon which stability in the West is based and will also provide the ultimate guarantee of Western security against the possibility of a resurgent Russia or even ominous instability in Central and Eastern Europe. It is important that the West is stable, for signs of dissonance or alienation, either between Western Europe and the American continent or indeed within Western Europe itself, will diminish its ability to act as a model for the East. Finally, the EuroAtlantic relationship will act as a platform for contingency planning and force projection outside Europe. Thus it will still be the linchpin of Western security and will also have significant global implications, but it will need to adapt in its character.

The essential premise of this relationship will be the continued presence of American troops in Europe. As history has shown, it will not only be in Europe's interests to retain a permanent American involvement,<sup>11</sup> but it will also serve American interests to be in a forward position to influence both European and global security issues and to act as a counterbalance to Russia.<sup>12</sup>

Equally, with America seeking to reduce her standing commitment in Europe, the EuroAtlantic relationship will need to evolve into more of a partnership in which Western Europe assumes a greater responsibility for the provision of its security. A manifest sign

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<sup>10</sup> Roberts, A., *The United Nations and International Security, Survival, Vol 35, No 2, (Summer 1993), p 6*

<sup>11</sup> Heisbourg, F., *The European-US Alliance, International Affairs, Vol 68, No 4, (1992), p 669*

<sup>12</sup> Snider, D., *US Military Forces in Europe, How Low Can We Go, Survival, Vol 34, No 4, (Winter 1992-93), p 26*

of this requirement will be the need to obtain greater co-operation in the area of the arms industry, both in terms of achieving a higher degree of collaboration on common weapons programmes and in imposing a degree of control on a proliferating export market throughout the world. It cannot be sensible for states to pursue their own independent projects, with their associated costs of research and development, when the future emphasis must be on a multilateral capability. At the same time, there is a moral obligation to control the sale of arms to countries and regions which might prove to be inherently unstable.

From this foundation, it will be possible for the West to project an atmosphere of stability and confidence into Central and Eastern Europe, with the overall aim of creating an integrated continent assured in its security. It is important that the West should play a primary role in the restructuring and reshaping of Central and Eastern Europe for two reasons, Firstly, it would be prudent to ensure that the states in this region do not pursue their own foreign policies independently of any Western influence, and also because the West cannot afford for the process of transition to democracy and market-regulated economies to fail. The onus must be on providing initiatives to embrace both security-related matters and political, economic and social issues. Of paramount significance is the need to avoid the creation of a new East-West poverty line. Ultimately, it will be necessary to include Russia in this process, even if on a more graduated timescale. The objective

*Members of the Coalition forces drive a T-72 main battle tank along a channel cleared of mines during Operation Desert Storm. Photo Staff Sergeant Dean M. Fox, U.S. Air Force, Released.*




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<sup>13</sup> *Traditional Peacekeeping was developed by the UN as a non-coercive instrument of conflict management to separate the opposing armies of two states by patrolling a buffer zone and thus creating an atmosphere more conducive for negotiations*

must be to involve her within the European structure rather than risk her acting in isolation outside it.

A further common interest lies in a desire amongst developed nations to contribute towards the maintenance of peace and security throughout the world. In the prevailing sense of optimism after the Cold War, there has been a growing interest in the provision of assistance to a range of peace support operations. Of particular note is that while there has been a continued commitment to support traditional peacekeeping operations,<sup>13</sup> increasing attention is being paid to the problem of finding a peaceful solution to the rising incidence of intra-state conflict throughout the world. Under the pressure of the media and world opinion, highlighting the cases of humanitarian hardship and abuse often associated with these conflicts, the international community is finding it progressively more difficult to ignore a moral obligation to intervene. The ability to resolve these crises or better still to prevent their outbreak, is proving to require a significant degree of international co-operation.

Ultimately, there is a requirement to maintain a multilateral ability to respond to an international crisis or contingency crisis anywhere in the world. This response could be to counter an unacceptable act of aggression or to protect a perceived vital interest. As Professor Lawrence Freedman has noted:

*There are now very few national interests that are both truly vital and truly unique. There will always be small-scale operations that a single country undertakes by itself in support of secondary interests, but the truly vital interests are collective, and they will require a collective response.*<sup>14</sup>

The international community's reaction to Iraq's unacceptable invasion of Kuwait and the threat she posed to vital oil resources was a case in point. In order to project this capability, the West will need to develop a multinational, flexible and highly-equipped force that is ready to intervene at short notice.

### **The Role of Institutions for International Defence Co-Operation**

The means of fulfilling these common objectives will be through the application of the existing range of security-based organizations, which will serve to integrate the international community towards a co-ordinated response to arising security issues. Given the diversity of the current multipolar environment and the need to accommodate a wide membership of states of different political and economic status, there will be a requirement for a span of institutions to build up a gradual process of stability and confidence. These

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<sup>14</sup> Freedman, L., *Escalators and Quagmires*, *International Affairs*, Vol 67, No 1, (1991), P 30

institutions should seek to maintain continuity with past practices, while adapting to the new security circumstances. The key aspect, however, is that they should provide a complementary framework with a clear understanding on how each organization ties in with the others. The recent tendency towards rivalry, evident between Western institutions, must be avoided.

At the heart of this framework will be NATO for which, as its Secretary-General has observed, 'there is no immediate or near-term alternative in resolving the dilemma that each Western democracy faces; to reduce force levels in response to the end of the clear and present danger but still preserve the long-term basis of its security in an uncertain world'.<sup>15</sup> Yet it will also have to adapt, perhaps in a fairly radical manner, if it is to survive. Primarily, it must seek a more even partnership with its European members and encourage the creation of a more united European defence identity in support of this partnership. Equally, NATO will have a critical role in the process of the integration of Europe. Through its use of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC), it has achieved an important dialogue with the states of Central and Eastern Europe. The NACC, however, should only be the apex of its efforts. NATO will have to consider expanding in the future, probably beginning with the initial offer of associate membership to the more established countries of Central Europe. This will require careful handling to ensure that the Alliance firstly does not isolate Russia by spreading eastwards, and also that it does not become a convenient repository for resolving internal issues that the newly joined states do not wish to tackle themselves. Ultimately, NATO will have to contemplate developing its ethos beyond the basis of Article 5 enshrined in its Charter, to encompass a more expansive role for the resolution of conflicts outside its traditional territory.

Again it has made a start in this direction, when during 1992 it pledged its active support to the operations of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and then the United Nations (UN). Similarly, however, this may not be enough by itself. A recent study from the Rand Corporation in America has even gone as far as to suggest that the Alliance must 'go out of area or out of business'.<sup>16</sup>

Closely associated with NATO, particularly in Europe, will be the role of the WEU. With the move of its Council from London to Brussels and the establishment of its Military Planning Cell in April 1993, the WEU has received a new impetus to its existence in recent years. It is critical that this regeneration should be guided in the right direction. It must seek to create a European defence identity, but one which is complementary to NATO. It should act as the European pillar of the Euro-Atlantic partnership and should provide the essential link between the European Community and NATO. Above all, it cannot afford to set itself up in direct competition to NATO nor look to duplicate the Alliance's capabilities. In any event,

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<sup>15</sup> Woerner, M., *The Alliance in the New European security environment, NATO's Sixteen Nations, Vol 38, No 3, (1993), p 10*

<sup>16</sup> Kempe, F., *NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business, The Wall Street Journal Europe, (9 August 1993)*

Europe is likely to remain dependent upon America's military capacity in the foreseeable future, specifically in the areas of strategic airlift, logistics and satellite-based intelligence. There are few circumstances in which the WEU should seek to intervene without having first consulted NATO, yet there may be circumstances in which America does not wish to become involved but is prepared to allow the WEU access to her infrastructure and facilities committed to NATO.

The CSCE will continue to work towards the integration of Europe through the maintenance of an essential dialogue with the states of Central and Eastern Europe, and through the resulting projection of confidence and stability. The severe limitations in its executive powers may also be seen as a strength. Since it is essentially a forum for discussion, it is able to attract a wide membership. The significance of the CSCE is that it acts as a precursor for other more formal institutions such as NATO and the WEU. As such, it fulfils a critical task in the graduated process of creating an interlocking security structure in Europe.

Finally, the UN is likely to play a pivotal role in the future, in contributing towards the maintenance of peace and security in the international order. The aftermath of the Cold War heralded a resurgence of interest in the potential capabilities of the UN. In the resulting atmosphere of international collegiacy, particularly amongst the Permanent Five members of the Security Council, the UN was able to launch as many peace support operations in the period 1988-92 as it was in the first forty five years of its existence. Moreover, following its central part as an objective broker in the Gulf War, growing international attention has been focused on the UN as a means for conflict resolution. Herein lies a major difficulty, however, for it is by no means certain that the UN is yet ready to take on this burden. There are growing signs that excessive demands are being placed upon its finite resources. It is being called upon to prevent the outbreak of conflict, as well as having to defeat aggression and tackle the after-effects of war.<sup>17</sup> As Richard Connaughton noted, 'a wave of enthusiasm exists for the UN but it will have to work very hard to rise to the challenge before the moment passes'.<sup>18</sup> The task of equipping the UN to meet this challenge should be at the top of the international community's agenda.

## Conclusion

This assessment has presented many of the difficulties confronting the current task of achieving effective international defence co-operation, and has suggested that a conservative approach of either maintaining the status quo or implementing piecemeal change may not be sufficient. There are, however, some welcome signs that these difficulties have been recognized and that progress is being made towards the fulfilment of

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts, A., *The United Nations and International Security*, p 3

<sup>18</sup> Connaughton, Richard M., *Peacekeeping and Military Intervention, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, The Occasional*, (1992), p 12

common objectives. Notably, in May 1992 the current Secretary of State for Defence made an important contribution to the process of redefining the Euro-Atlantic partnership, when he called for the WEU to be responsible for threats to European interests in Europe but to do so in support of NATO. He envisaged a system in which forces could be double-hatted to both the WEU and NATO, but that their use by the WEU should first be cleared through the North Atlantic Council.<sup>19</sup> Shortly afterwards France responded to this offer of a compromise, and declared that her forces committed to the Franco-German Corps could be made available both to the WEU and NATO in the event of a crisis in Europe. Equally important is that, with the recent deployment of her troops to Somalia in support of the UN, Germany may be prepared to make a more active contribution towards global security in the future. Thus there is a requirement for the continuation of international defence co-operation, not



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<sup>19</sup> Rifkind, M., *A Decade of Change in European Security Speech to the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London, 14 May 1992, (Verbatim Service, Foreign and Commonwealth Office)*

only to build on the principal achievement of the Cold War in preventing the outbreak of a Third World War, but also to respond to the uncertainty in the new security environment. It will need a different form of co-operation. It will involve the development of a comprehensive security structure, in which defence co-operation must be seen in its widest context. Purely military matters will have to be considered in conjunction with associated political, economic and social initiatives. Perhaps above all, it will require a strong political will to make some difficult decisions now to build for the future. The alternative to this complex process should be borne in mind. A failure to achieve this cooperation could mean a gradual return to the predominance of parochial national interests, and the reversion towards an anarchic international order without any sense of conformity or coherence.



*The tires of an Iraqi BRDM-2 amphibious scout car continue to burn as an FV432 armored personnel carrier of the 7th Brigade Royal Scots, 1st United Kingdom Armored Division, advances east into Kuwait from southern Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. Photo PHC Holmes, U.S. Navy, Released.*

*Rusting Soviet T54 and T55 or T55a Main Battle Tanks left over from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. US Navy*



# Leaving Afghanistan: Soviet Withdrawal and British Transition

*This article by Captain Mike Stevens, originally published in BAR 153 Winter 2011/2012, looks at the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the security environment and how the Soviet experience informed the British transition away from combat operations.*

*When in early 1980s the Soviet deputy foreign minister pointed out to his boss, Andrei Gromyko, that three previous invasions by the British had failed, Gromyko asked sternly: 'Are you comparing our internationalist forces to those of the British imperialists?' 'No, sir, of course not,' answered his deputy. 'But the mountains are the same.'*

*On February 15, 1989, Commanding General Boris Gromov was the last Soviet soldier to leave Afghanistan, walking across the Friendship Bridge that connected the war-torn country with what was then Soviet Uzbekistan.<sup>3</sup>*

So ends the popular account of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The reality is that as Gromov, commander of the 40th Army, crossed the bridge that day he was by no means the last Soviet to leave Afghanistan. He was not the last soldier and he was not the last to see combat. Behind him he left embassy staff, technical advisers, military guards, special forces, missile operators and even deserters who had taken up arms with the mujahideen.<sup>3</sup> For those soldiers who returned to Soviet soil, the *Afgantsy*, many



*An Afghan Border Policeman stands watch on the Freedom Bridge crossing the Amu Darya River. US Navy Wikimedia*

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- 1 Franchetti, Mark, *Can the West avoid Russia's fate in Afghanistan?*, *The Times*, 3 January 2010.
  - 2 *Afghanistan: Lessons from Soviet Withdrawal*, *Voice of America News*, 11 February 2009.
  - 3 Braithwaite, Roderic, *Afgantsy*, (Profile Books, 2011), p.321.

remained brutalised by the conflict and the 'bleeding wound' did not heal until years later when their country finally began to understand their experience. The message is clear: leaving Afghanistan is not clean and it is not easy.

### The Soviet Helmand

For the Soviets, Helmand province was 'a relatively self-contained theatre of operation'.<sup>4</sup> Resistance activity in Helmand was based more on clan loyalties than it was on affiliation to mujahideen parties and so did not often reach outside the provincial boundaries. A crucial point in analysing the security picture immediately before the Soviet withdrawal is the extent to which the Afghan army had already become side-lined in favour of government-sponsored militias. This catalysed the rise of men who would eventually become the warlords of the civil war. These men were themselves a product of the Soviet occupation as the old *khan* families were usurped. Security became the foremost concern and this led to a generation of leaders who wielded power manifested in armed force.<sup>5</sup>

To characterise these men as on the government or mujahideen side is only one way of looking at conflict in the south. Though useful, it more often than not conceals the interwoven nature of power alignments based upon the advancement of personal ambition. Loyalty to the government was just one amongst many competing loyalties and was based on money rather than ideology in most cases.

To help identify trends that resonated with commanders in Helmand prior to the withdrawal of combat troupes we can look at two illuminating case studies immediately before the Soviet withdrawal - the mujahideen group commanded by Nasim Akhundzada and the government militia commanded by Khan Mohammed.

### The Akhundzadas

An Alizai originating from Musa Qala, Mohammad Nasim Akhundzada became a prominent commander in the Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami, the leading mujahideen party in Helmand. His reputation for conducting many successful attacks against Soviet and government forces has been exaggerated and he was in fact responsible for sustained fighting against other mujahideen groups. Jihad gave Nasim a vehicle through which to surpass the land-owning khans, the traditional empowered elite of Helmand. Two other mujahideen families competed with the rising Akhundzadas. The old khan family of Abdul Rahman Khan around Gereshk formed an alliance with that of Abdul Wahid around Kajaki in order to combat Nasim. This reveals the inter-mujahideen clashes in Helmand as a rivalry between the Akhundzada family and forces aligned to the old khans he had come to surpass.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Orkand Corporation, Afghanistan: The Southern Provinces, (Silver Spring, Maryland, 1989), p.164.*

<sup>5</sup> *Giustozzi, Antonio, Ullah, Noor, Tribes and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan 1980-2005 Working Paper no. 7, (Crisis States Research Centre: September 2006), p.5.*

Nasim's most significant achievement was his monopolisation of the narcotics trade. Though the northern Helmand river valley had a tradition of poppy cultivation, Nasim encouraged the spreading of poppy south into the irrigation canals of central Helmand. Nasim's 'salam' system contributed to poppy proliferation,<sup>6</sup> making this profitable and robust crop a sensible economic choice. Nasim catalysed this process as he continued to expand his territory across Helmand to secure poppy trading routes.

### **Khano**

Central Helmand was less receptive to tribally-based groups such as Nasim's. Though the traditional population still dominated along the central green zone, the irrigation project to the west of the river was tribally mixed and made up of recently arrived and relatively disenfranchised groups. Conditions here favoured the recruitment of militias based upon other sources of cohesion, whether ideological or economic.

The government militia of Khan Mohammed, known as Khano, recruited from unemployed youth around the Canal Zone and Lashkar Gah. He paid well and was a charismatic leader, which was enough for most of his followers. Khano, originally from Farah province, was joined by Allah Noor, a Barakzai commander from Nawa district. Forming an alliance, the success of the Lashkar Gah militias attracted money and resources, a self-reinforcing cycle that encouraged further recruitment as the Afghan government relied on anyone who would fight in their support. As the Soviet departure became imminent, these pro-government militias must have been increasingly uneasy at the prospect of a post-Soviet Helmand.

### **Soviet and Government Forces**

The Soviets had two main objectives in Helmand. The first one was to protect the vital highway; the second was to control the corridor that followed the power lines from the dam at Kajaki down the river valley to Lashkar Gah. Control was limited in most areas to a small geographical patch around the municipal buildings of the district centre, though Gereshk and Lashkar Gah were considered relatively secure with Soviet garrisons in both towns until 1988. Immediately prior to withdrawal, fighting reached as far north as Kajaki as part of a joint Soviet-Afghan offensive in February 1988. The intent was to reinforce the regime's position and contemporary sources noted that the campaign had a major element of what might now be called stabilisation activity, for example the extension of electricity supplies to several villages.<sup>7</sup>

This development activity was a strand of the Soviet withdrawal strategy and complemented economic incentives for communities and militias to join the government side. At the same time, the government reached out to seven major mujahideen

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<sup>6</sup> Rubin, Barnett, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, Second Edition*, Yale University Press, 1995.

commanders nationwide to seek reconciliation, this included Nasim Akhundzada but he refused and so the military campaign shifted to exert increased pressure on his network.

The campaign involved a high proportion of tribal militias. This demonstrated another strand of the Soviet withdrawal strategy, whereby locally recruited militias were increasingly relied upon in combat operations. Some were militias recruited for ideological or monetary reasons, whilst others were former mujahideen kinship groups whose allegiance had been directly purchased. The operation coincided with violent fighting between rival mujahideen commanders in the area, as Nasim Akhundzada fought



*Afghan resistance fighters return to a village destroyed by Soviet forces. Wikimedia Commons*

with Abdul Wahid's forces around Kajaki. The fighting reached such intensity that locals reportedly welcomed Soviet troops as a pacification force in the area.<sup>8</sup>

So this snapshot of Helmand before withdrawal reveals a province comprehensively

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<sup>7</sup> Urban, Mark, *War in Afghanistan* (Macmillan Press, 1990), p.240.

damaged by conflict. As the drugs war between the mujahideen groups grew in intensity, so the Soviet attempts to secure the province with money and military force cast further fractures in Helmand's human landscape. Bombing missions devastated the irrigation canals on which the farms relied, which led to widespread depopulation, contemporary estimates placing the figure at one-fifth of the population leaving the area.<sup>9</sup> The prospect of Soviet withdrawal seemed to offer hope that the fighting would cease, and few would have anticipated the civil war that came in the wake of departing Soviet forces.

## Back to the Future: Predicting Withdrawal

### International Opinion

In his authoritative account of Afghan history, Thomas Barfield states that in 1989 it was 'universally believed that once the Soviets left, the mujahideen would overrun government outposts, take the regional cities, and then march on Kabul in triumph in a matter of months, if not weeks.'<sup>10</sup> *The Orkand Report*, commissioned by the United States and published in 1989, stated that Kandahar City 'will probably succumb within a month. After this occurs, the province capitals of Qalat in Zabul and Lashkar Gah in Helmand will most likely surrender. Then, at long last, peace will come to this area.'<sup>11</sup>

This assessment focused too heavily on the presence of the Soviets as a source of violence and did not take into account two key factors. First, that the absence of Soviet forces removed the enemy presence, which meant that after an initial mujahideen surge, the resistance was deprived of its unifying purpose and broader jihad justification. Second, in the longer term the assessment misses the latent capacity for violence that conflict had ingrained in the south, a capacity that found a fratricidal outlet in civil war once Najibullah fell. This tendency to overestimate mujahideen unity was emphasised further by speculation in international media that the southern mujahideen might unite and move north, chasing the withdrawing Soviets. The reality was that, particularly in the south, the resistance was based on territorial and clan allegiances that could not be transplanted elsewhere.

### CIA Assessment

In a special estimate from March 1988, the CIA stated that 'the Najibullah regime will not long survive the completion of Soviet withdrawal even with continued Soviet assistance. The regime may fall before withdrawal is complete.'<sup>12</sup> This represented the consolidated opinion of US intelligence agencies at the time and demonstrates the extent to which observers underestimated the resilience of the regime, the fractious nature of

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<sup>8</sup> Giustozzi and Ullah, *op.cit.*, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Orkand, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Barfield, Thomas, *Afghanistan A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton University Press, 2010, p.241.

<sup>11</sup> *Emphasis mine.* Orkand, *op.cit.*

the resistance and crucially, the unifying force of Soviet presence. Offering balance to the main assessment, the same document presents two alternative scenarios. Firstly, that 'the Kabul regime manages to survive for a protracted period after withdrawal, due to an increasingly divided resistance.' Secondly, that 'fighting among resistance groups will produce so much chaos that no stable government will take hold for an extended period after the Afghan Communist regime collapses.'

As it turned out, both assessments materialised over time, with Najibullah's regime initially surviving and successfully fracturing the resistance, followed by the chaos of civil war once the government fell. As is often the case with the business of intelligence, simple predictions cannot be made with any surety. Instead, complicated scenarios play out over time as the balance of contributing factors shift. Crucially, all predictions are subject to the tyranny of events. The CIA may have hoped for the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it was thought too improbable to factor into any assessment.

### **Soviet Outlook**

Colonel Tsagolov, a Soviet officer serving in Afghanistan, sent a letter to the Soviet Minister of Defence in 1987 in which he laid out a stark and uncomfortably honest account of his opinion on the progress of the Soviet campaign.<sup>13</sup> He stated bluntly that the regime was 'moving toward its political death... efforts in this respect can only prolong the death throes.' His statement ultimately proved correct, but the death throes of the regime transformed it almost beyond recognition. In contrast to its communist origin, by 1990 the new constitution confirmed Islam as the religion of the state and held sharia as the ultimate authority above state law.<sup>14</sup> This again highlights the extent to which the survival instinct of those who benefit from an imposed system are reluctant to give up the power they have gained by virtue of that system. In holding on to that power, the system may transform beyond recognition and not in a direction favoured by its architects.

### **Soviet Withdrawal**

*By January, 'optimize' had become the most popular word amongst the Soviets in Kabul... It meant to reduce the number of Soviet personnel to an optimal level. The question 'How's it going?' was typically answered, 'They haven't optimized me yet. What about you?'*<sup>15</sup>

The popular perception today is that the Soviets were chased from Afghanistan by the victorious mujahideen. Lester Grau states the reality quite forcefully: 'When the Soviets

<sup>12</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *USSR Withdrawal From Afghanistan, Special National Intelligence Estimate 11/37-88, March 1988, p.1.*

<sup>13</sup> Tsagolov, Colonel, *Letter to USSR Minister of Defence Dmitry Yazov, August 13, 1987.*



*Pullout of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. 1988. Photo by Mikhail Evstafiev. Wikimedia*

left Afghanistan in 1989, they did so in a coordinated, deliberate, professional manner, leaving behind a functioning government, an improved military and an advisory and economic effort insuring the continued viability of the government.<sup>16</sup> By mid-1988 the total Soviet force numbered around 100,000. The basic plan was to withdraw around half by 15 August 1988 and the remainder by 15 February 1989. Yet as early as January 1987 the Soviet effort consciously shifted towards minimising casualties and ensuring route security in order to prepare for a successful withdrawal. This further damaged the already fragile morale of the Afghan armed forces, who resented bearing the brunt of casualties.

When it came to withdrawal, the Soviets reversed their invasion routes and folded outlying garrisons into larger garrisons as the main body of forces moved back to the north. After the official withdrawal order was given, the Soviets withdrew 50,000 troops from ten major garrisons including Lashkar Gah in the summer of 1988.<sup>17</sup> The few remaining Soviet-held district centres in Helmand were abandoned and Lashkar Gah was ceded to its militias. The last remaining regular government force to leave Helmand was a Soviet spetsnaz battalion, which left Kajaki to Nasim in October 1988.

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<sup>14</sup> Rubin, *op.cit.*, p.166.

<sup>15</sup> Borovik, *op.cit.*, p.241.

<sup>16</sup> TGrau, Lester W., *Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos*, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2007, Volume 20 Number 2, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Grau, *op.cit.*, p.10

## The Immediate Aftermath of Withdrawal

*The moment our troops leave... groups of local mujahideen with diverse leanings but consolidated by the struggle against our troops - the 'infidels' - instantly fall apart and begin competing with one another, if not militarily, then at least politically and economically.<sup>18</sup>*

### The Akhundzadas

By the time the Soviets came to withdraw from Helmand, Nasim Akhundzada controlled around 1,200 core mujahideen. As soon as the Soviets left, several government militia groups switched allegiance to Nasim as the now pre-eminent power in the area. Despite calls from previously pro-resistance clergy to suspend hostilities in the absence of the Soviets, Nasim set about consolidating his position and began to clear up his mujahideen rivals. In 1990 he was assassinated in Pakistan, allegedly by Hizb-e-Islami associates over a drugs-related dispute.<sup>19</sup> The Akhundzada clan rode out this assassination as Nasim's brothers, Rasul and Ghafar, took over the business, though they did not really manage to extend their power base beyond their own Alizai tribe. Abdul Rahman was forced to withdraw to Gereshk, which he held until 1990 when the Akhundzadas took his last stronghold.<sup>20</sup>

### Khano

For Khano the withdrawal of the Soviets saw his fortunes take a significant downturn. Confined to Lashkar Gah by the time Najibullah fell, Khano relied on Allah Noor to use his Barakzai kinship ties to gain support in holding onto the town.<sup>21</sup> This alliance managed to resist the Akhundzada's encroachment long enough to establish relationships with the new Rabbani government in Kabul, which provided a new source of patronage and supplies. It is clear that Khano's economically motivated militia required the addition of traditional tribal support to survive the shocks of the Soviet exit and the fall of Najibullah. Though Khano had initially gained agility by transcending tribal basis, he was forced to resort to tribal links when under pressure from the Akhundzadas. His downfall became inevitable when the Akhundzadas attracted support from the formidable Ismail Khan in Herat and were able to crush Khano and Allah Noor's resistance to their expansion into Lashkar Gah, with Khano finally ceding control in 1993. Khano's network was based on money and personal charisma, making it far more vulnerable to a decisive defeat than the kinship based Akhundzadas.

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<sup>18</sup> Prokhanov, A., *Afghanistan, International Affairs*, (Moscow), Aug 1988, p.21

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.12

<sup>20</sup> Giustozzi and Ullah, *op.cit.*, p.10

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.16

## Helmand's Soviet Legacy

The Soviet campaign depopulated rural Helmand. For those Helmandis displaced south of the Durand line, the breakdown of social structure was complete and it was here that the Soviet legacy remains today by creating a basis for Pakistani involvement. Moving from the isolation of the kishlak or village to the massed humanity of the refugee camp was a journey during which all the certainties of social order were broken. Here young men were politicised by Pakistani intelligence, which asserted control over the Pashtun refugee population. Though Pakistani involvement is significantly reduced today, proximity to Helmand means that mid-level commanders who exert considerable influence in the districts of Helmand are able to retreat south of the border to escape targeting by ISAF.

Also during the Soviet campaign many young men began to earn a living from war. Mullah Zaeef, a former member of the Taliban government, found himself unable to do anything other than fight once the Soviets left.<sup>22</sup> The same trend is seen in Helmand today - a Taliban mullah from Garmsir described the younger generation of Taliban fighters as 'war addicted'.<sup>23</sup> Violence has become an alternative source of loyalty ties, known as *andiwali* or brotherhood of arms. These networks of old comrades are extremely difficult to decipher as they transcend tribal and social divisions. This information is still vital today for commanders seeking to understand the allegiances of the Afghans with whom they interact.

Another strand of the Soviet legacy originates from Nasim Akhundzada spreading poppy cultivation south down the river valley into what remained of the irrigated areas of central Helmand. The trafficking system that the mujahideen fought to control has now become a multi-million dollar industry. Today, the interests of the Taliban and of

<sup>22</sup> GZaeef, Abdul Salam, *My Life With the Taliban*, Hurst & Company, 2010

<sup>23</sup> Coghlan, Tom, *The Taliban in Helmand, Decoding The New Taliban*, Hurst & Company, 2009, p.133.

Pieces of Soviet artillery and equipment fill a junkyard in Panjshir Province. US Army



the traffickers have intertwined so that their relationship has become almost symbiotic - the most obvious demonstration of this being the relative quiet of the poppy harvest when insurgent manpower is devoted to labouring in the fields. To say that the Taliban have become a narco-insurgency is excessive, but the two streams of activity are almost inextricably linked.

## Lessons for Transition

*One major mistake that the Soviets made was to establish a public timetable for the withdrawal without any proviso for modifying or reversing the withdrawal if the political or military situation drastically changed.<sup>24</sup>*

One of the clearest differences between the Soviet withdrawal and the planned transition for UK troops is that the Soviets were fixed to a withdrawal deadline down to a specified day - 'a recipe for trouble'<sup>25</sup> which galvanised the Afghan-led policy of reconciliation and forced the Afghan government to anticipate a future without Soviet presence. However, the lack of flexibility increased pressure on supply lines and forced the withdrawing troops to cross perilous mountain passes in winter conditions.

By contrast, much is made of the conditions-based withdrawal adopted by ISAF. The difficulty is that progress is fragile, unevenly distributed and can be reversed. There are three rough 'types' of area in Helmand. First, areas such as Kajaki and the area west of the Nahr-e-Bughra canal have been largely governed by the insurgency with only intermittent disruption by ISAF, so transition may have little visible effect. Second, areas such as Gereshk have not had much in the way of permanent British security presence and yet have remained permissive to the government. In this sense Gereshk is something of a test-case for what Helmand will look like post-transition, with the interests of powerbrokers, militias, narcotics dealers and the government balanced out of economic necessity. Tellingly, the towns of Gereshk and Lashkar Gah where the situation is relatively stable are the same areas where the Soviets had most success.

Finally, there are the densely populated rural areas of central Helmand such as Nad-e-Ali and Marjeh, where the government and insurgency compete for control. Establishing government ascendancy in these areas would exceed Soviet success, as Soviet control never really extended beyond the urban areas. Here the very fact that there is a transition deadline at all means that the insurgent narrative gains compelling longevity against the government alternative. Though Nad-e-Ali has seen significant improvements in security over the past year, taking troops away to resource other areas can only create space for

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<sup>24</sup> *Grau, op.cit., p.22.*

<sup>25</sup> *Grau, op.cit., p.15.*

the insurgency to resurface. A hard-learned lesson of Helmand is that if you lose trust once through a lack of enduring presence, it is far harder to win it back a second time. The key question is not only whether the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are capable of providing security but crucially whether the contested population perceive them as in control now and likely to remain so after transition.

This leads into the question of what we now call 'over the horizon' support. Looking back to the Soviet era the question of whether the Kabul government would have survived but for the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is academic. Lester Grau states quite simply, 'the Soviets did not abandon the Afghan government - the Russian Federation did.'<sup>26</sup> It is important to recognise that the decisive reduction in aid to Kabul deprived Najibullah of the ability to pay his militias. These militias then turned on the government and Kabul became a battlefield for competing warlords as the civil war began. The monetary cost of supporting the ANSF is unsustainable without a continued flow of foreign cash.

Looking at the component parts of the ANSF, the Afghan National Army has a lack of logistical capacity that will make it difficult to maintain a significant footprint in remote areas. Crucially, the army is not the best counter-insurgent force as sustained control requires a force that lives and works amongst the people in the same way that the insurgent does, so the focus of effort before transition must lie with the police. The Soviets arguably failed to produce a viable conventional police force, with the Ministry of Interior police or Sarandoi neglected in favour of KhAD,<sup>27</sup> the equivalent of the National Directorate of Security. Though the Afghan National Police force is troubled and corrupt, it is improving and arguably holds the key to success in a post-transition environment.

The most imminent question is the extent to which Afghan Local Police programmes can be integrated with the National Police. Though the Soviets relied heavily on mobile militias and irregular forces, these groups were not based at the kishlak or community level in the same way that the Local Police are today. If these community forces can be linked successfully into the nervous system of the National Police, then they provide a good way of preventing the predatory behaviour that has so severely undermined previous policing efforts. If this integration fails, then community defence groups pose a serious risk of further fracturing an already fragile transition process.

Though the collapse of the Soviet Union was decisive, the fact that Pakistan managed to persuade the United States to continue supporting the Peshawar mujahideen parties against Najibullah once the Soviets left was a significant factor. The Peshawar parties were divorced from the reality of fighting on the ground and deceptively feeble in terms of genuine public support. The parallels to the *Quetta shura* are evident - the physical distance and operational separation of *Quetta* is a source of resentment for

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<sup>26</sup> Grau, *op.cit.*, p.21.

<sup>27</sup> *Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati (Government Intelligence Service).*

those commanders fighting and dying on Afghan soil. Yet one of the Taliban senior leadership's foremost achievements has been the artificial inflation of western perceptions of its control over the insurgency. Having existed as a power in waiting for so long, it is questionable whether *Quetta* will seek to negotiate or reconcile unless faced with the realistic prospect of defeat. The next question is whether *Quetta* even has the authority to compel the new breed of young, aggressive commanders to relinquish the power they have won through violence. Furthermore, as we search for mid-level insurgent commanders who are willing to reintegrate, *Quetta* will equally seek to hide those individuals from us by moving the most hard-line commanders into the most closely contested areas, looking to dislocate reintegration efforts.

### **Beyond Transition**

What will Helmand look like post-transition? The prevailing media and intelligence opinion in the moments before the Soviet withdrawal showed predictions can be utterly misguided. Once the Soviets left, the fight in Helmand shed the façade of resistance and became a war to secure drugs trafficking routes. Many militias switched from the government side or rival mujahideen groups to join Nasim Akhundzada and this identification of Nasim as the rising power gave him a self-reinforcing momentum.

What were the factors that contributed to Nasim's success? The first one is that he possessed de facto power centred on his militia, which had managed to suppress significant opposition. This first factor is linked to the second, which is that he had money, specifically narcotics revenue. This money enabled him to sustain his force of arms and also to patronise the clergy, giving him an important network of opinion-makers through the mullahs. The final factor is that he had a tribal basis and it was this that allowed the Akhundzada family to survive Nasim's death and continue their campaign to secure Helmand in the early 1990s. In summary, the conditions for success in Helmand are power, money and an enduring loyalty network.

The tribal element is tempered by the fact that the Taliban managed to transcend tribal divisions more effectively than any group has so far managed. This is a warning for those who argue that 'he may be a bad guy, but he's our bad guy' when selecting powerbrokers such as Sher Mohammed Akhundzada as front-runners for success after transition. Though Sher Mohammed has the factors that contribute to survival, the likelihood of marginalised groups turning against him cannot be ignored.

It is crucial to recognise that the divisions between those groups who benefit from government rule and those who are marginalised by it are sufficiently entrenched to prevent anything except a compromise solution before UK transition. Commanders will increasingly have to accommodate 'acceptable' levels of corruption and of insurgent association. Our threshold for acceptance may be less palatable than we might like, and one aspect of this is that those who have bought into the government system will

prioritise their own survival over that of the system. In doing so, the system may change out of recognition to its current form and only through ruthless prioritisation of what we are seeking post-transition can we guide this evolution to secure essential security goals. We must admit this openly, so that our planning does not develop a schizophrenic divergence between an idealised narrative and a much darker reality.

One final question remains: 'How important is Helmand post-transition?' Once the troops leave, the measurement of kinetic activity will drop. Limited by logistics, it is likely that the Afghan government will only seek to hold those urban areas close to the highways, particularly Gereshk and Lashkar Gah. Once this happens, Helmand won't look too different to how it did at the end of the Soviet campaign. However, the one aspect of Helmand that makes it of continued, undeniable relevance is the extent to which its poppy fields contribute to instability. From an insurgent perspective, Helmand has become the Taliban's bank account. It is the confluence of narcotics and insurgency that will make Helmand globally relevant beyond transition as it becomes a seam of insecurity that could yet be exploited by non-state actors and could once again destabilise a still-fragile region.

*Soldiers from 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment on a routine patrol in the Showal bazaar area with the Afghan National Army. Crown Copyright*





*Preserved Soviet T34 Main Battle Tank at 'Tank Taran' in the Valley of Death, Slovak Republic. Author's copyright printed by permission.*

# Studying Soviet Battle Strategy an Imperative

*This article by Major Rupert Burrige, Royal Engineers, was originally published in BAR 154, Spring/summer 2012 and looks at Soviet military strategy of the Carpatho-Dukla Operations in 1944 in the context of contemporary British doctrine.*

*The timely study, generalisation and application of war experience is an important task of all commanders and staffs.*

*Soviet High Command Directive, 9 November 1942*

*An understanding of the Soviet approach to the study of war can provide a vehicle for comparison and the analysis and critique of our own.*

*Colonel D Glantz US Army, Soviet Military Operational Art, 1991*

Battlefield studies, which also combine and supersede the terms 'staff rides', battlefield talks war walks and so on, constitute the study of historical operations in order to further develop the current conceptual component of Fighting Power.<sup>1</sup> As our training becomes more and more restrained by commitments, time and resources, such activities represent one of the few remaining ways to develop military thought outside periods of formal staff training. Battlefield studies have been described as 'the vital ground of the conceptual component'.<sup>2</sup> It is imperative these limited opportunities are created and developed to best align current training output with known and probable unit missions and the knowledge, perspectives and intellectual skills required of commanders and their staffs.

This article recommends greater attention be paid during the conceptualisation phase of a battlefield study meaning that the instruction for studies that normally lie in the NATO European area should be understood to include certain battlefields on the Eastern Front. Indeed, studying Soviet military thought has more relevance to contemporary Western military activities than many studies more commonly undertaken. This can be seen in the first British study of the Carpatho-Dukla operation that demonstrates both the practicability and desirability of studying a Soviet battle.

### **The Carpatho-Dukla Battlefields**

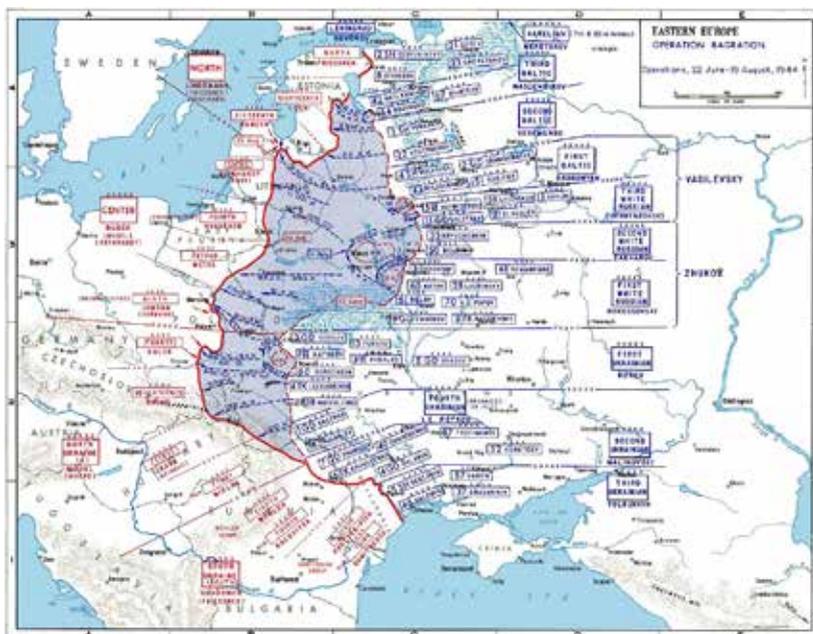
Soviet military historians identify January 1944 as the date from which concentrated mobile forces achieved the deep operations conceived in the 1930s. Of the subsequent 'Ten Stalinist Crushing Blows' the most important and largest of the Second World War was Op BAGRATION, launched from latter day Belarus towards Poland and, ultimately, Germany and Berlin.

On 29 August a popular revolt in the Axis dominated Slovak Republic created an opportunity for the Soviet 38th Army to swing South and open up a new operational corridor. This would require it to breach the 'Dukla Pass', a natural choke point constituting the only significant crossing through the Eastern High Tatras. The outcome, between September and October 1944, was a concentrated battle with the German

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1 23.004, AGAI 23.

2 GOC 3rd (United Kingdom) Division Directive: 2011/12, dated 6 Sep 11.



Map of Operation Bagration. Wikimedia.

1st Panzer Army on the Polish/Slovak border resulting in around 100,000 men killed, wounded and missing. The battle has a spiritual resonance for Slovaks because of participation of the 1st Czechoslovak Corps as the founding act of their post-War nation. The area is now well-maintained with many positions and equipments still in situ. The first British military survey of the Dukla Pass, and the associated 'Valley of Death', was undertaken as a unit battlefield study by 22 Engineer Regiment in September 2011.

### Terrain

Studying military activity above the tactical level can be physically difficult as most spaces involved are usually too vast to draw meaningful lessons from any single vantage point, except in urban operations. However, such studies have particular utility at the higher levels. One solution is to focus upon areas such as the Dukla Pass where conditions forced the concentration of normally dispersed forces. This further enables the study of air power as a land supporting component where the use of 'huge tactical air forces employed as flying artillery'<sup>3</sup> by both Soviets and the Axis contrasts with the discrete strategic air

3 Holmes R. (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, 2001, p 271.

forces more commonly employed in the West. Indeed, it is hard to envisage a better area realistically accessible in which to study the evolution of an air/land battle.

The Soviet practice of installing and maintaining politically-focused battlefield equipments, memorials and other reminders to the populations of Eastern Block and former SSR nations of the debt owed to their liberators enriches the experience.<sup>4</sup> Of course, careful research must be done to separate the real from the propaganda. The battlerun of the 12th Guards Tank Brigade through the Valley of Death is easy to follow as a Soviet T-34 is preserved at the exact location each original tank was knocked out.

### **The Study Soviet Military Thought**

If the aim of a study is for commanders to understand contemporary British doctrine<sup>5</sup> there is utility in examining combatants with doctrines similar to those we and our allies employ today. Once terminology has been negotiated the enduring utility of historical Soviet military thought is almost overwhelming: this is well illustrated through the concept of 'operational art'. Compare the following:

*At [the operational] level, abstract strategic objectives are translated into practical tactical actions and then resourced<sup>6</sup>*

*Stemming from strategic requirements, operational art determines methods of preparing for and conducting operations to achieve strategic goals<sup>7</sup>*

The first extract is from *Army Doctrine Publication: Operations (2010)*, the second from an article entitled 'Voina' [War] by the Soviet military thinker Mikhail Tukhachevsky published in 1926.

The Soviet understanding of military doctrine<sup>8</sup> combined both military-technical and social-political aspects: their 'operational art' included analysis of the broader factors influencing operations 'including politics, geography, technology, and the state of weaponry'.<sup>9</sup> In consciously situating the political below the strategic the Soviets thought about war in a manner that now manifests as modern and convincing. It is extraordinary

4 E.g. Stalin's armoured train in Gori, Georgia and the (reconstructed, and possibly fabricated) Frunze birthplace in Bishkek, latter day Kyrgyz Republic.

5 23.004, AGAI 23.

6 0314, Army Doctrine Publication: Operations, 2010.

7 Tukhachevsky M. N., Voina, 1926, Voprosy Strategii, pp 104-5.

8 In the Soviet context, the term 'doctrine' must be understood as emanating from the nation rather than the military. What we would recognise as military doctrine the Soviets term 'military science', a system of knowledge of war which cannot be independent of the objective political truths of socialism.

9 Colonel Glantz D. US Army, Soviet Military Operational Art, 1991, p 12.

to recall such sophisticated dogma, which is remarkably similar to the 'comprehensive approach' and predates the Second Gulf War by over seventy-five years.

Born from the First World War and the Russian Civil War the understanding that the quest for a single, climatic battle must be replaced with a series of military operations caused the Soviets to champion the new concept of 'deep operations' (*glubokaia operatsiia*). This articulation of the requirement to simultaneously affect the enemy through the depth of his defences was a precursor to many of the technologies and structures, deep surveillance, joint fires, special operations forces, now common within the Western military lexicon. The 1936 Field Regulation must be considered both the acme and conclusion of this productive stage of Soviet military thought. The following year the Stalinist purges subsequently liquidated or suppressed every important theorist in the Red Army.

Soviet military equipments represented a practical expression of Soviet military thought. Whilst the platforms - if not the lessons - of the Western Front are consigned to museums the British Army has encountered the direct evolutions of Soviet equipments and associated tactics in every land campaign (excepting Northern Ireland) since Suez. Even in hybrid training there is little purpose simulating combat against an enemy lacking this equipment and tactics of any we might reasonably expect to encounter. Indeed, significant efforts have been made to ensure the generic enemies we train against are associated with actual and potential adversaries. Why, then, should we choose to study historical battles devoid of such relevance? Whilst we persist with Arnhem and Normandy there is much greater utility in studying Second World War Soviet doctrine than British!



Engineer Regiment at 'Tank Taran' Valley of Death Slovak Republic. Author's copyright printed by permission.

The Carpatho-Dukla battlefields illustrate the ease by which higher military thought can be appreciated within the parameters of a unit study. The aggressing structures are armies, or 'fronts' and are the level the Soviets considered appropriate to conduct combined and independent operations. The employment of operational art may be dissected through the economic imperative which led the 38th Army to prioritise the fight for the oil producing regions of Krosno over the military logic of securing the Dukla Pass.

The Slovak National Uprising in context with partisan activity including deep target acquisition, special operations forces; the forcing of a pass that involved a weather aborted brigade level descant operation through three lines of German defences demands discussion of *glubokaia operatsiia*. This is amply aided through the military positions and equipment, including aircraft, memorials, heroic cemeteries and two dedicated museums all laid out in an area 30 km by 20 km that can be viewed from a 49m high observation tower at its highest point.

### **Reinvesting Academic Responsibility**

Clausewitz reminds us that, 'the conceptual component is meant to educate the mind of the future commander or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education'<sup>10</sup> For the professional soldier learning is an individual experience where more can be achieved through encouragement rather than prescription. On a battlefield study every attempt must be made to encourage the active engagement of all participants: the experience must be the converse of the passive receipt of historical information that has limited relevance to contemporary operations.

Our particular study was designed around syndicate questions which were researched on the ground and the resultant backbriefs promoted general group discussions. Those questions while matching historical methodologies to contemporary doctrine, tactics and equipment, with current doctrinal publications and field manuals on hand, proved most successful. It was heartening see junior officers and SNCOs confidently and effectively utilise texts on, for example, Soviet operational strategy to develop and present complex and relevant observations upon contemporary military activities.

The British military's propensity to divest itself of the role of interpreting, instructing and advising upon strategy must appear peculiar to other nations, not least the Americans whose war colleges routinely employ serving officers in academic roles. To the Soviets, who formalised the scientific exploitation of military historical experience within their operational analysis, the idea of outsourcing such core functions would be absurd. Our officers should be encouraged to research, prepare, lecture on and guide battlefield studies: this will ensure a clear and efficient focus on contemporary military objectives whilst developing the individuals' academic skills. Regarding the Carpatho-Dukla operation this was achieved without much pain by normally busy Regimental personnel

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<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, Karl von., *On War*, translated by Howard M. and Paret P., 1989, p 90.

for a campaign that is obscure in the West and lacked any English military guidebook.<sup>11</sup> *Mater artium* necessitas. To develop the conceptual component (and ensure maximum value for money) we must practice doing this for ourselves.

## Conclusion

Battlefield studies represent one of the few remaining opportunities for imaginative and challenging conceptual development at unit level. The study of Soviet battle is practicable<sup>12</sup> and inspiring, allowing us to better understand our adversaries and ourselves. In accessibility, concentration, interpretative experience and continued relevance the Carpatho-Dukla operation offers a rich unsurpassed opportunity for unit level military study.

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<sup>11</sup> Once the usual British sources had been exhausted, expert assistance was forthcoming (in perfect English) from Lieutenant Colonel Miloslav Caplovic PhD, Executive Director of the Slovak Institute of Military History. Can the British Army generate a comparably qualified individual?

<sup>12</sup> It is also affordable. <sup>22</sup> Engineer Regiment's effort cost £15.6K, which compares favourably with the £25-30K HQ 3(UK) Div specify for a unit battlefield study.



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*Slovak partisans alongside Soviet soldiers are depicted on the memorial at Svdnik in Slovakia. Author's copyright printed by permission.*



*Russian Internal troops special units take part in counter-terrorism tactics exercises. This image illustrates the types of tactics and weapons used in the extreme northern districts of Russia. Photo Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin, March 27 2013, Creative Commons Share Alike Attribute License Wikimedia*



# Russia and the Arctic

*This article by Dr Steven J. Main, originally published in BAR 159 Winter 2014, argues that it is time to change the way the Western militaries view the Russian military using Open Source Intelligence (OSINT).*

For too long now a degree of intellectual and policy complacency has crept into examining and analysing the Russian military over the past twenty years. Whilst this may have been understandable in the decades following the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, it is time in this author's opinion that this position was either significantly re-evaluated or dumped, once and for all.

As the Russian military becomes visibly more prominent, particularly inside Russia itself and Russia's politicians become more assertive in defending and advancing their country's position on a whole range of international security questions (Iran, Syria, the

Arctic), the previous intellectual and policy stance of the past has to be put to one side and Russian military policy, in particular, re-evaluated, if further damage to the West's capability to objectively analyse the current and future intent of Russian military policy is to be avoided. This does not mean a return to an ideological Cold War, but it does mean a mature realisation and acceptance of the fact that Russia, given its increasing resource-based revenue wealth and its expanding leverage on the global stage, has to be studied and analysed, as in the past, as one of the world's great powers, one which will have a significant say in the future development of the global political, military and economic environment.

Anyone with any knowledge of Russia's past, not just of the last century but long before the USSR existed, already knows and understands that Russia has a very specific way of interpreting the world, different from the way that the West perceives the world. This is a point which Russians themselves make time and again and one which the West largely seems either to have forgotten, or simply ignores. It behoves us to look at these issues with open eyes.

In the 19th century, a truism voiced in Russia was that the country had only two allies - the Army and the Navy. Given recent pronouncements, it would appear that contemporary Russia is, once again, heading back along that particular line of thinking. Russia is no longer constrained by the double-edged sword of an all-encompassing, global ideology (Communism), nor tied down by an expensive alliance system in the West (the Warsaw Pact). In short, Russia can - and will - pursue and defend its own interests. If this assessment is correct, then it has one very obvious danger, both for Russia and the wider, global community: the country could run the risk of isolation as it pursues its national interests. Given the projected trends in defence spending over the next decade, Russia could also have the military muscle to back up its position, either in relation to any of the current global hotspots, or future areas of contention.<sup>1</sup>

In this specific area, open source intelligence becomes ever more important. Good intelligence does not need to come with a hefty price tag, but bad intelligence can cost a lot more than staff salaries and departmental operating costs. Simply put, bad intelligence can cost lives. In essence, this article is an example of what publicly-funded OSINT can still do, if properly supported. Good intelligence can point out that, contrary to perceived wisdom, the situation in one important part of the globe is not as benign as it would appear or as others assume it to be.

This article examines Russian military and security policy in relation to one part of the globe which could become a potential source of conflict over the next few decades - the Arctic. Like many similar pieces of analysis - once regularly produced by the UK

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<sup>1</sup> *Even in the space of the next couple of years, Russian defence spending will show a healthy increase – from 3.1% of GNP in 2012 to 3.8% by 2015, Norwegian threat assessment focuses on Russian defence, borders, Arctic, BBC Monitoring Service, hereinafter simply referred to as BBCM, 4/3/2013*

MOD's in-house Soviet Studies /Conflict Studies/ Research Centre (1972-2007) - the references are entirely drawn from open sources - a mixture of published expert articles, policy statements and public pronouncements by Russia's leading political and military figures. Hopefully this will encourage a re-think on how better to assess the potential threat emanating in the northern hemisphere, not necessarily solely from Russia itself, but arising from a clash of interests in an increasingly important part of the world, involving a number of the world's great powers.

For several reasons, the Arctic has recently rarely been out of the news either as a result of Shell's ongoing problems in beginning drilling operations in the Chukchi Sea, north of Alaska,<sup>2</sup> the potential economic impact of the melting of Arctic sea ice,<sup>3</sup> or the growing influence of China on Arctic development.<sup>4</sup> This increasing concern for the world's last great wilderness is also heavily wrapped up in the potential economic wealth of the area and its impact on not just the member-states of the Arctic Five (Russia, USA, Canada, Norway and Greenland-Denmark), but also on the wider global community (particularly, but not solely, China). The region's hydrocarbon and mineral wealth - as well as the potential opening up of a new trade route between East and West, in the

*Special units of Russia's Internal Troops take part in winter exercises. This image illustrates the types of tactics and weapons used in the extreme northern districts of the country. Photo: Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin, March 27 2013, Creative Commons Attribute License, Wikimedia*



<sup>2</sup> *The Independent*, 28/2/2013

<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 5/3/2013

<sup>4</sup> *The Guardian*, 19/3/2013

shape of the Northern Sea Route, in the decades ahead - are a few of the many reasons why so many of the world's great powers are interested in developments far removed from their normal shores. If, as predicted, Arctic summer ice disappears within the space of the next 30-40 years, the security ramifications of the latter could mean a significant and fundamental re-drawing of the global security picture, affecting the interests and well-being of the inhabitants of a lot more of the states which have already declared their vital, strategic interests to lie in the Arctic.

Despite the collapse of the USSR in August 1991 and the subsequent reduction in Russia's immediate military threat, the country with the largest security footprint in the Arctic is Russia. Given its previous historical record, this should come as no surprise. Referencing Russia's long association with the Arctic, President Vladimir Putin alluded to this at the end of 2011 in an address to the Russian Geographical Society stating that Russian sailors had been active in the area since the 11th century and that Russia/USSR had been at the forefront of developing the region over the centuries:

*Russia has played a leading role in the construction of the Northern Sea Route, it has been at the birth of the ice-breaking fleet, Polar aviation, created a whole network of stationary and drift stations in the Arctic.<sup>5</sup>*

Further on in his address, he also reminded his distinguished audience that '70% of Russia's physical territory is in the North.'<sup>6</sup>

In other words, both in relation to the country's historical record - a not insignificant detail when the commission of the United Nations Convention of the Law On the Sea (UNCLOS) rules on which state gets what of the physical territory of the Arctic and the surrounding seas in the years ahead and its actual, physical territory, Russia is dominant in the region, in a way that no other member of the Arctic Five is. Russia's current Arctic zone is of great economic importance to Russia: in his very first opening address to the Russian Security Council as President in September 2008, the former President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev - Russia's current PM - outlined the contemporary importance of Russia's Arctic zone to the Federation, as a whole:

*According to figures which we have to hand, about 20% of Russia's GDP and 22% of Russian exports are produced in the region. We extract rare and precious metals in the Arctic region. Here are located oil-gas provinces such as Western Siberia, Tiumen-Pechora and Eastern Siberia. According to experts, the Arctic's continental shelf could contain 1/4 of*

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<sup>5</sup> *The Independent*, 28/2/2013

<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 5/3/2013

*all...the reserves of the hydrocarbons in the world. The use of the energy reserves...is a security guarantee, an energy security guarantee for Russia, as a whole.*<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the future potential hydrocarbon wealth of the hydrocarbon wealth of the region, experts reckon that there could be as much as 83-110 billion tonnes of oil and gas in the disputed part of Russia's continental shelf zone alone.<sup>8</sup> If this estimate proves to be correct, then its impact on Russia would be considerable, allowing the country to continue developing economically in a controlled and sustainable fashion. That being the case, it would also allow the country to project itself more prominently on the global stage.

In terms of the current importance of the region to Russia, one other factor which tends to be overlooked is the region's biological wealth. Russia's fishing fleet pulls in an annual bounty of 500,000-600,000 tonnes from the seas in the High North, representing some 50% of Russia's total annual catch.<sup>9</sup> Thus, given its current and future value to the country, it is no surprise that Russia's current senior political leadership views the Arctic as the country's main resource base for its future economic and political development.<sup>10</sup>

This was further borne out recently by the country's former permanent representative to NATO, currently Deputy Russian PM, Dmitry Rogozin, in an address to the country's Maritime Board in December 2012:

*It is extremely important that we place markers...that we mark the perimeter of our national interests in the region. If we do not do that, we will lose the battle for resources and thus lose the great battle for the right to have our own sovereignty and independence.*<sup>11</sup>

Rogozin warned of the danger that, by the middle of the 21st century, the battle for natural resources will acquire 'completely uncivilised forms.' He also made a point of informing his audience that the Arctic was a 'constant' feature in many NATO discussions.<sup>12</sup>

Rogozin, like many senior figures in the current Russian establishment, do not balk at the talk of possible conflict in the future over the world's diminishing resources,

7 *Vystupleniye na zasedanii Soveta Bezopasnosti 'o zashchite natsional'nykh interesov Rossii v Arktike'*, (<http://www.kremlin.ru/news/1434>).

8 *V Apanasenko, interesy desiatkov stran soshlis' u zemnoi osi*, (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23/11/2012).

9 *S Koz'menko, S Kovalev, Morskaya politika v Arktike I sistema natsional'noi bezopasnosti*, (*Morskoj sbornik*, 8, 2009, 57-63; 57).

10 *Vystupleniye...*, *ibid*.

11 *Russian 'independence' depends on the Arctic 'battle for resources'- deputy PM* (*BBCM*, 4/12/2013).

12 *Ibid*. Rogozin has also recently remarked that, in relation to the Arctic, diplomacy has to be tempered, when the occasion arises, like 'a steel fist in a kid glove,' (*Defence minister invites NATO for more drills in Norway*, *BBCM*, 28/2/2013).

believing that 'resource nationalism' will become an ever more prominent feature of conflict in the years to come. In his report to a conference, examining military security in 21st century, held in Moscow in February 2013, the current Chairman of the Russian State Duma's (parliament) influential defence committee, (former Commander of Black Sea Fleet and a former first deputy commander of the Northern Fleet), Vice-Admiral Vladimir Komoedov stated that:

*In the first half of the 21st century, the battle for the sources of raw materials will become the main cause of acute socio-economic and geopolitical contradictions in the world. After 2015, Russia could be at the very heart of the intensified grab [skhvatka] for natural resources.<sup>13</sup>*

Komoedov then spent a large part of the rest of his report to the conference identifying and outlining the main source of the threat to Russia - NATO headed by the USA. This may prove to have been uncomfortable reading, especially for those involved - on both sides - in the NATO-Russia Council - but the views of such a prominent figure in the country's military/political elite can neither be ignored, nor dismissed. An additional element of proof would appear to be that NATO has failed to convince an important section of Russia's current military-political elite that it is a benign alliance and has no quarrel with Russia that cannot be settled peaceably.

NATO may be right, but surely greater effort and analysis should be made to understand Russia's security position on a whole range of questions than would appear to have been the case in the past few years? It would be counter-productive to simply ignore this sentiment, even if it is held by a minority. It helps no-one for Russia to be in a security dilemma. It would certainly appear to be the case that an important section of Russia's military-political elite - never mind the wider section of the country's population - do not think that they have got it wrong. Indeed at the beginning of his address to the conference, Komoedov also made a point of quoting Putin's earlier remark that Russia is only treated with respect 'when it is strong, when it stands on its own feet.'<sup>14</sup>

The main documents dealing, either wholly or partly, in defining Russia's national security interests in the Arctic are the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation (RF) on the Arctic for the period to 2020 and beyond<sup>15</sup> a revised version of Russia's National Security Strategy, approved by the country's Security Council in May 2009 and a recently approved Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the RF and the maintenance of national security for the period to 2020.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> V Komoedov, *Chto ugrozhaet Rossii*, (Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er, no.8, (476), 27/2-5-3-2013, 9); *Military News Bulletin*, 8, 1998, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Komoedov. *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Approved by the President in September 2008, but not actually published until March 2009*

<sup>16</sup> *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 30/3/2009; <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>; *Krasnaya zvezda*, 20/2/2013.



*From left to right the 9A85, 9A84 and 9A83 of the S-300V Surface to Air Missile systems currently operated by the 202nd Air Defence Brigade in the Western Military District in Russia. This brigade received these systems in 1989. The image illustrates the types of tactics and weapons used in the extreme northern districts of Russia.*

*Photo: Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin, Feb 02 2012, Creative Commons Attribute License, Wikimedia*

Reading through all three documents provides the reader with a clear understanding of Russia's publicly stated position on how it sees the future development of the Arctic. The earliest of the three documents openly stated that it will be necessary to create groups of general purpose forces from the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations... capable of providing military security under various military-political conditions; optimise *the system of complex control over the situation in the Arctic, including border control at the main points of entry along the length of state border of the Russian Federation [some 20,000 kms], introduce a regime of border [guard] zones in the administrative-territorial units of the Russian Federation's Arctic zone...bringing border [guard] organs up to [full] capability in accord with the nature of the threat in RF's Arctic zone.*<sup>17</sup>

Russia has made considerable inroads into realising the above. The document also stated that Russia's eventual aim in the Arctic is to become the latter's leading power - no

<sup>17</sup> *VRossiyskaya gazeta, ibid. In September 2011, Putin announced that 134 billion roubles would be spent over the next 9 years upgrading the border zone in the Arctic, (O Elenskiy, Bor'ba za bogatstva eshche vpered, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 9/11/2012)*

mean ambition when one considers the membership of the Arctic Five, or the growing presence of China in the Arctic.

The country's revised National Security Strategy made little direct reference to the Arctic but, again, is important in outlining the attitude of the country's senior political and military elite in relation to Russia's current and future position on the world stage. In its opening statement, it noted that:

*Russia has overcome the consequences of the systematic political and socio-economic crisis of the late 20th century...maintained its sovereignty and territorial integrity, restored the possibility, by strengthening its market competitiveness and defending its national interests, of becoming a key element in the formation of multi-polar relations.<sup>18</sup>*

Similar to the country's earlier published - and current official Military Doctrine (February 2010) - the Strategy also warned against 'non-regional actors' becoming involved in solutions to 'existing regional problems and crisis situations.' So as to avoid any ambiguity, the Strategy made it clear what it meant by the phrase, 'non-regional actors': the unsustainability of the existing global and regional [security] architecture focussed particularly in the Euro-Atlantic region, solely on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation...more and more creates a threat to international security.<sup>19</sup>

In listing the threats facing the international community, in general, the Strategy also listed the danger posed by 'an increasingly noticeable deficit in fresh drinking water' - of which an important future source could be the water trapped in the ice of the Arctic.<sup>20</sup> However, the Strategy also pointed out the impact of the decline in energy resources:

*The focus of international politics in the long term...will be concentrated on securing sources of energy, including the Middle East, on the shelf of the Barents Sea and in other regions of the Arctic.<sup>21</sup>*

Further reference to the future importance of the Arctic to Russia is revealed in the section on economic growth:

*In the interests of maintaining national security in the medium term...the energy, information and military infrastructure, particularly in the Arctic zone...must be developed.<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> *Strategiya...*, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

In short, although there are only a few references to the Arctic in the Strategy, the latter helped place Russian security policy in the Arctic against the general background of current and future trends in global politics: occasionally, it is important to see both the wood and the trees. Combined with the earlier published Fundamentals - as well as the country's Military Doctrine - the economic and security importance of the Arctic to Russia will be a major concern for Russia both in the short to long-term. If one believes that more conflict will arise as a result of resource nationalism, then the publicly-made statements by senior members of the Russian political/military elite would appear to indicate that Russia will do all it can not only to maintain its dominant influence in the area, but defend it, as well. If the velvet glove does not work Russia is readying an Arctic fist. In a commentary on the recently published *Strategy For The Development Of The Arctic Zone* (February 2013), the author wrote:

*It is [generally] held that the probability of military conflicts [breaking out] over the division of the hydrocarbon reserves on the Arctic shelf is not great. Nonetheless, the Arctic today is a tasty morsel [lakomiy kusok] not only for the Arctic powers. Thus, a new strategy has been developed taking into account Russia's strategic priorities, maintaining Russia's national security and the steady socio-economic development of the country's Arctic zone. The strategy is designed to assist solving the most fundamental tasks of the state in the Arctic zone under current circumstances.*<sup>23</sup>

The author did not hesitate to point out that, as distinct from the recent past, the Arctic was now home to fairly large regular military units, the areas themselves include, according to various estimates, 30% of the world's unexploited reserves of oil and 15% of the world's unexploited reserves of gas, without exaggeration constituting one of the main oil-gas reserves of the planet.<sup>24</sup>

Bemoaning the military presence of the Norwegians and South Koreans in the region, in particular, the author also described the increasing use of the Northern Sea Route to freight traffic along the most northern part of the globe - last year, 46 ships made the journey; by 2020, the UN estimates this figure will increase by a factor of 40!<sup>25</sup> All told, the reasons for Russia maintaining and developing its presence in the region look incontrovertible.

Not long after the publication of the Fundamentals, the Russian news agency, *RIA-Novosti*, published the following expert commentary on the overall strategic and military importance of the Arctic to Russia:

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<sup>23</sup> E Orlova, *Ukrepit' arkticheskiy perimeter, Krasnaya zvezda, 20/2/2013.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

*Increased traffic along the Northern Sea Route will require the development of the coastal infrastructure along the length of the Route...This will require tighter military and border controls to check any attempt to violate the freedom of the seas. Busy maritime traffic is often accompanied by smuggling, poaching and piracy. Growing seaports will also need greater protection as they will become attractive military targets. The Russian Security Council's decision to maintain a military force...in the Arctic is aimed at enhancing such protection. To control the Arctic region, an effective coast guard system should be established, as well as a developed border [guard] infrastructure in Russia's Arctic zone and strong, well-equipped military contingents in the military districts. Russia's Northern and Pacific Fleets will shoulder the greatest burden in protecting the Arctic and the Arctic region.<sup>26</sup>*

Kramnik also made no bones of the fact that currently [Russia] has the strongest standing position in the impending race for the Arctic. Russia controls the Northern Sea Route and has some infrastructure along the Arctic, including cities and seaports, which could be used as bases for further development. Finally, Russia today has the greatest military potential in the Arctic, as its Northern Fleet is based there, along with several air force units. These forces are far superior to those [which] other countries in the region could deploy in the Arctic.<sup>27</sup>

According to official reports, in 2012 alone, the Northern Fleet carried out 1,300 combat training drills, 60% of which involved 'the practical use of weaponry'.<sup>28</sup> The same newspaper report also detailed a joint inter-branch Command Post Exercise (CPX), held in September 2012, involving naval, ground and air components, designed 'to defend the economic and scientific targets in the Arctic region.'<sup>29</sup>

In a later interview of the current C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, Vice-Admiral Vladimir Korolyov openly admitted that *in 2012, submarine crews of 30 of the Fleet's submarine force attested to their combat readiness. Crews of 40 of the Fleet's surface vessels also carried out a range of combat exercises. The subs were at sea for a total of 800 days; the ships - 900 days. Whilst out on patrol, ship-borne aircraft flew 150 missions in the Atlantic, Northern, Norwegian, Barents Seas and the Mediterranean. The large anti-submarine warfare ship, 'Vice-Admiral Kulakov' was at sea for 159 consecutive days - a record for the ship - and steamed 29,000 nautical miles.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> I Kramnik, *Russian Security Council turns to the Arctic*, RIA-Novosti, 30/3/2009.

<sup>27</sup> Kramnik, *ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> O Vorob'yeva, *Zapolyarnye orientiry Severnogo flota*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 12/12/2012.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> O Vorob'eva, *Severniiy shchit Rossii*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 19/12/2012.

In the interview, Korolyov also outlined the scope of the earlier-mentioned inter-branch CPX: it involved a total of 7,000 military personnel, 20 surface ships and submarines, 30 aircraft and more than 150 pieces of other military kit.<sup>31</sup>

A contemporary press release of the Western Military District added further operational detail about the inter-branch CPX, reporting that Marines of the Northern Fleet had made their first-ever sea-borne landing on the shores of Kotel'nyi Island, the deployment operation involved the study of new navigable areas and military landing opportunities in different locations along the Arctic shore. Reconnaissance of areas on the islands of the Novosibirsk archipelago was conducted, as was field testing of military equipment and ordnance under Arctic conditions.<sup>32</sup>

The press release also highlighted the fact that the operation was 'the first time that combat training of this kind has focussed on protecting civilian facilities, research stations, drilling facilities and energy-industry installations in the Arctic region.'<sup>33</sup> In short, Russia's intentions are increasingly more and more obvious in relation to the Arctic: it sees the latter as vital to its future development and seems to be readying for any and all

*The Russian Topol RT-2PM2 Topol-M-05 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile which can be launched from a mobile carrier or from a silo. This image illustrates the types of tactics and weapons used in the extreme northern districts of Russia. Photo: Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin, 19 March 2012, Creative Commons Attribute License, Wikimedia*



31 *Ibid.*

32 A Kislyakov, *Russia deploys Arctic troops*, [http://rbth/articles/2012/11/02/russia\\_deploys\\_arctic\\_troops\\_19711.html](http://rbth/articles/2012/11/02/russia_deploys_arctic_troops_19711.html)

33 *Ibid.*

types of eventuality in the region, including military operations. It would be foolhardy, on the part of the West, not to recognise and properly analyse Russia's publicly voiced policy and practical activity and its determination to maintain, develop and defend its presence in the region.

It should also not be forgotten that the Arctic is the main operational base for Russia's SLBM force, crucial in providing the country with a creditable nuclear deterrent. If Russia's SLBM force was compelled to be based and forced to operate in waters other than those of the Arctic seas, it would become increasingly vulnerable both to outside monitoring and possible attack, in the event of nuclear conflict. Again, this is an important consideration for the Russians, the Arctic, enhancing Russia's overall nuclear deterrent posture, a factor which should neither be underestimated, nor ignored, in analysing Russia's security posture in the region.

Indeed, in a recent interview of the Commander of the Northern Fleet's submarine forces, Rear Admiral Aleksandr Moiseyev not only confirmed that the Fleet's submarines had carried out a large number of combat-training exercises in 2012, but also that the infrastructure was in place for the arrival of the Russian Navy's new batch of nuclear-powered submarine missile cruisers, beginning with the arrival of *Yury Dolgorukiy* in January 2013.<sup>34</sup> The recently-appointed Russian Minister of Defence, General S Shoigu confirmed that, in accordance with the country's published state armaments programme, by 2020, it is planned that the Russian Navy will receive a further 14 strategic and multi-role nuclear submarines, of the Borey and Yasen class.<sup>35</sup> Shoigu also confirmed that since the programme has been adopted, the monies allocated, it is simply now a question of the shipyards building the boats. Once the Navy is satisfied with their performance they will enter service by the end of the decade. In other words, it is a question of when they enter service, not if. As noted above, *Yury Dolgorukiy* has already arrived at Gadzhieva; a further two of its class are scheduled to join it by the end of next year.<sup>36</sup>

In an earlier comment on the role of the Arctic in maintaining the effectiveness of Russia's nuclear arsenal, one expert noted:

*Great is the role of the Arctic in maintaining the defence capability of Russia...in controlling the sea, air and [land] expanse of our country. However, its main [importance] is containing the growing military-political pressure and deep penetration of NATO and the USA in Russia's northern geopolitical space, designed to neutralise Russia's nuclear containment potential.*<sup>37</sup>

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34 O Vorob'eva, *Po dolgu lidera*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15/3/2013.

35 *Russian Navy to get another 14 nuclear submarines by 2020 – defence minister*, *BBCM*, 10/11/2013.

36 *Russian Navy will receive...*, *ibid*.

37 S Koz'menko, *V Selin, Kontseptsiya soglasovaniya ekonomicheskoi i oboronnoi deyatel'nosti v Arktike*, (*Morskoi sbornik*, 4, 2009, 55-56; 55)

There is a lot at stake for Russia in the Arctic. If the relevant commission of the UN does decide in favour of Russia's territorial claim for an additional 1.2 m sq kms, then Russia will be able to proceed to explore, develop and exploit the additional hydrocarbon and mineral reserves for the benefit of the Russian economy. This could help increase the country's internal stability, as well as increase further its external influence.

However, at this point, it would be wise to introduce a number of caveats: firstly, the figures concerning the potential hydrocarbon and mineral wealth of the region are estimates - admittedly produced by the highly reputable US Geological Survey, but still estimates. There could be less there which is economically recoverable than people think; secondly, even taking into account the prediction of the impact of global warming on the Arctic, the latter will still be an inhospitable environment to work in and to defend. Despite the stature of the UN, UNCLOS's eventual decisions on all the territorial claims in relation to the Arctic will not be legally binding so, even if the UN commission accepts Russia's territorial claim, the other member-states of the UN do not have to. Similarly if Russia's claim is rejected - it has been before - by the UN commission, then Russia does not have to accept the decision, either.

If the decision, as regards the ownership of the Arctic continental shelf, does not go Russia's way, what would Russia do then? Abide by it, or ignore it? Will it calmly sit back and see what it perceives to be a national resource developed by other nations for the benefit of others? Two member states of the Arctic Five are West European states (Greenland-Denmark and Norway); a further two are North American (USA and Canada) and, Russia, well, Euro-Asiatic?



An Su 27SM3 in flight during the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Air Force in Zhukovskiy. This image illustrates the types of tactics and weapons used in the extreme northern districts of Russia. Photo: Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin, 12 August 2012, Creative Commons Attribute License, Wikimedia

In other words, 4 of the Arctic Five are prominent member-states of NATO and, as previously described, Russia has a big problem with what it perceives to be a non-regional actor becoming involved in regional issues. Hence, whilst it has considerably less problems dealing with USA, Canada, Norway, etc., on a bilateral basis in relation to the Arctic, it would have a serious problem dealing with NATO, as a bloc, on the Arctic. Russia is firm in its belief that the Arctic is ours, that it is a national resource, whose wealth should be used to help develop Russia, primarily. Any NATO involvement in trying to influence the course of events in the Arctic would be strongly viewed by Russia not only with suspicion, but almost as interference in its internal affairs. Thus, whilst, in the normal course of business, it has never ruled out mutually beneficial co-operation to unleash the natural wealth of the region, it does see the wealth of the Arctic as being primarily for the development of its economy. Needless to say, this is not a view shared by many outside of Russia, not least being China. In March 2010, the retired Chinese Rear Admiral, In Chzho, openly declared that *the Arctic belongs to all the peoples of the world, no one nation can claim sovereignty over it.*<sup>38</sup>

Given the historical, scientific, even emotional, legacy of the Arctic, as well as the practical economic and military benefits which the Arctic does and could still bring to Russia, one of the key questions in the first half of the 21st century which has to be addressed, in the West, Russia and in other states is the following: has Russia drawn a new red line in the ice of the Arctic?

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38 N Volkovskiy, A Pronin, *Voina na Arktike, Voенno-promyshlenniy kur'er*, 4, 9472) 30-1/5-2-2013.



President John F. Kennedy meets with the Soviet Ambassador and Ministers at the White House Oval Office 18 October 1962. Photo: Robert Knudson, National Archive and Records Administration.

# Nuclear Weapons in Soviet/US Relations

*In this article, originally published in BAR 163 Spring 2015, Major Oliver Ormiston looks at the role that nuclear weapons played in Soviet/US relations during the 1950s and the 1960s.*

*This is not a blockade. This is language. A new vocabulary, the likes of which the world has never seen.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert McNamara, portrayed in *13 Days* (2000).

By the early 1950s nuclear technology had advanced from the 20 kiloton atom bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to thermo-nuclear bombs with a yield of up to 1 megaton; the 1954 BRAVO test generated 17 megatons, and the Tsar Bomber in 1961 was 58 megatons.<sup>2</sup> Devastation on a scale that had never been seen before had moved the world from 'Mediocristan' to 'Extremistan'.<sup>3</sup> What role did nuclear weapons therefore have on the diplomatic and military levers of power?<sup>4</sup> The main argument here is that the key impact of nuclear weapons in the 1950s and 1960s was the establishment of new boundaries of escalation; the top rung of escalation ladders was now no longer a very large conventional war<sup>5</sup>, but potentially the end of the world.<sup>6</sup> There are also secondary impacts such as nuclear weapons reinforcing spheres of influence, which, in turn, enabled and forced the use of proxy wars.

### Boundaries Of Escalation And Policy By Other Means

The 1950s was a 'critical' decade.<sup>7</sup> The two superpowers were coming to terms with the implications of having nuclear weapons, and trying to establish the new rules of international interaction. Eisenhower articulated the impact early, speaking to the UN about the 'new language of atomic warfare', the 'probability of civilization destroyed', and his fear that the 'two atomic colossi [were] doomed to malevolently eye each other indefinitely across a trembling world'.<sup>8</sup> This was more than mere political grandstanding; there is significant supporting evidence from behind-the-scenes correspondence with Soviet diplomats that he was genuinely concerned.<sup>9</sup>

Khrushchev expressed similar views a number of times. He would only have started a war because 'he was under some great pressure'.<sup>10</sup> However, Khrushchev also saw advancement in nuclear capability (and technology in general) as one of the few metrics by which the Soviet Union could claim superiority over the US; witness, for example, his bragging to New York Times journalist James Reston after the launch of Sputnik in 1957.<sup>11</sup>

Nuclear weapons are an instrument of war, and their use is thus ultimately a policy tool.<sup>12</sup> John Dulles recognised this, and evidenced a number of events in which (he believed) the threat of nuclear attack influenced policy: Korea in 1953, the Indo-China partition of 1954, and the prevention of a Chinese invasion of Quemoy-Matsu in

2 ICAN (2013).

3 Taleb (2007).

4 See *Army Doctrine Publication: Operations* (2011), pp. 3-17.

5 Freedman (1986) provides a thorough study of nuclear escalation ladders (pp. 735-778).

6 For a sobering account of the impact of a nuclear war see Kahn (2007), pp. 40-95.

7 Gaddis (1997), p. 191. Trory (1992) ascribes particular importance to 1952 (pp. 9-29).

8 Eisenhower Archives (1953).

9 For example: Smirnov, Yuri and Zubok, Vladislav (1994), p. 16; FRUS 1952-1954, Vol II, Part 2, Document 231; and *ibid.*, Document 127.

10 Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

11 Gaddis, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

12 'War is policy by other means' (Clausewitz (2012), Book 1.24).



*Aerial Photograph of Medium Range Ballistic Missile Launch Site Two at San Cristobal. Photo Department of Defense, 1 November 1962, National Archives and Records Administration.*

1954-5.<sup>13</sup> Despite his belligerence even Khrushchev held a grudging respect for Dulles' comprehension of diplomacy; he 'knew how far he could push us, and he never pushed us too far... [H]e had never stepped over that brink which he was always talking about in his speeches.'<sup>14</sup> In this diplomatic framework, although the existence of nuclear weapons raised the stakes, the classic rules of diplomacy and bluffing still provided a basis for international relations. Both sides bought into the concept of 'Finite Deterrence; ... that no nation whose decision makers are sane would attack another nation which was armed with a sufficiently large number of thermonuclear bombs.'<sup>15</sup>

### **Containment and Coexistence**

Boundaries were therefore established. But there was still a requirement for geopolitical manoeuvring and political grandstanding, such as the discussions over the future of

<sup>13</sup> Rees (1967), p. 55. See Rosendorf (2005), p. 63, for Dulles' 'nuclear schizophrenia' and 'oscillating thinking'.

<sup>14</sup> Khrushchev (1971), p. 398.

<sup>15</sup> Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Germany and the disarmament posturing at the Geneva Summit Conference of July 1955. However, the fact that these were mere talks, with no hint of military action, were a marked shift in a European history that had so often seen escalation to violence in the form of land-centric warfare as the natural conclusion. By now there is the first evidence of Khrushchev's emerging 'coexistence' policy<sup>16</sup>, an implicit acceptance that despite Marxist theory advocating the demise of capitalism, in reality the US (and the West) were far stronger than envisioned.<sup>17</sup> It was the Soviet answer to Kennan's 'Containment' strategy.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this, the knowledge that Eisenhower genuinely sought to avoid nuclear war gave Khrushchev freedom of manoeuvre; the possibility of nuclear war had imposed 'drastic limitations on [US] policies'.<sup>19</sup> Soviet influence in the Middle-East and later Cuba was not deterred. Brutal repressions in Berlin, Hungary, and Poland went unanswered; Eisenhower was so afraid of potential nuclear conflict that he actively sought to reassure Khrushchev after the Hungary repression. Later in the same year he drove a clear wedge between US and UK/French policy over Suez, putting more value on avoiding confrontation with the USSR than on maintaining good relations with historical and ideologically aligned allies. Khrushchev had identified this earlier as an element of Eisenhower's personality; 'He was a good man, but he wasn't very tough. There was something soft about his character.'<sup>20</sup> Khrushchev sniffed weakness and, like all good (Machiavellian) statesmen, was not afraid to exploit it.

The establishment of these spheres of influence enabled, and even forced low-level - and relatively nuclear-safe - projections of power. The boundaries were predominantly geographical, and generally in keeping with Huntington's civilizational fault lines.<sup>21</sup> However, there were exceptions, and one that was glaringly obvious: Cuba.

## Looking Into The Abyss

The Cuban Missile Crisis was 'the epochal military confrontation of the cold war'<sup>22</sup>; a turning point, and 'the beginning of a tacit détente between Washington and Moscow ... based on a realisation in Moscow of superior American power'.<sup>23</sup> The world had never come closer to a nuclear war, and both sides saw how quickly (just thirteen days) situations could escalate. For the only time in its history the US raised its nuclear alert levels for elements of its military to DEFCON 2.<sup>24</sup> Through a combination of diplomatic

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<sup>16</sup> Khrushchev, *op. cit.*, pp. 393-4.

<sup>17</sup> Rees (1968), p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> See Kennan (1947), pp. 566-582, for the provenance of 'Containment'.

<sup>19</sup> FRUS, *op. cit.*, Document 368.

<sup>20</sup> Khrushchev, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

<sup>21</sup> Huntington (1992), pp. 22-49).

<sup>22</sup> Betts (1987), p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

friction, misjudgement of Kennedy's resolve by Khrushchev (understandable, considering the Bay of Pigs debacle, Kennedy's youth and political inexperience, and Khrushchev's experience with Eisenhower), internal pressure, and sheer brinkmanship on the part of Khrushchev, the Soviet Union brought nuclear weapons to the United States' back yard.

There was no obvious change in international relations following Cuba. The relevance of spheres of influence was challenged - Khrushchev would later remark that 'The USA has always liked to fight its wars in other people's lands, but now things have changed. Every part of the globe is exposed'<sup>25</sup> - but proxy wars continued (Vietnam), oppression of satellite states went unabated (Czechoslovakia), and smaller states played the two superpowers off against each other (Egypt). What was established was a recognition that relations between the US and the USSR could escalate rapidly. Indeed, the event probably served to reinforce spheres of influence. Both nations were now even more cautious about operating in the other's area, and the establishment of a hotline and arms controls were pivotal in preventing future escalations; witness, for example, Kosygin's message to Johnson in 1967 regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>26</sup>



*John F. Kennedy meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna. Photograph from the U. S. Department of State in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston*

<sup>24</sup> Only Strategic Air Command (SAC) went to DEF CON 2; the remainder went to DEF CON 3.

<sup>25</sup> Heikal (1978), p. 128.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the primary role of nuclear weapons in Soviet-US relations in the 1950s-1960s was to expand the boundaries within which international politics could be played to a level that had never been seen before: Extremistan. Like all weapons, nuclear weapons remained tools of policy. Secondary effects of these new weapons were examined: the rational recognition of Mutually Assured Destruction; the brinkmanship and bluff-calling that was played out both directly and indirectly through spheres of influence within quickly established strategies of Containment and Peaceful Coexistence; and finally the main repercussions of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Nuclear weapons did not become the driver for Soviet-US relations, but rather established guidelines within which normal geopolitics continued to be played out. The consequences of getting it wrong, however, were far greater than ever before.

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This 1962 Photo from the U.S. Department of Defense shows Soviet missile equipment being loaded at port in Cuba. Photo: U.S. Department of Defense.



*A minibus burnt by pro-Russian attackers during the Odessa clashes May 2014 at Gretska Plochcha. Photo Yuriy Kvach, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 3.0 Unported License, Wikimedia.*

# Russian Roulette

*Originally published in BAR 163 Spring 2015, this article by Chris Fisher looks at how Russian President Vladimir Putin has learned to beat us at our own game*

In his seminal article on the *Strategic Use of Liberal Internationalism* Ian Hurd depicts international institutional norms and symbols as a strategic resource that is open to manipulation by states.<sup>1</sup> President Vladimir Putin has played out Hurd's thesis to great effect: Russia has annexed strategically crucial territory, cowed a rebellious neighbour

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<sup>1</sup> Hurd, Ian, (2005) *The Strategic Use of Liberal Internationalism: Libya and the UN Sanctions, 1992–2003. International Organization*, 59, pp 495-526.

and shown the helplessness of Western powers. Russia has been able to do so partly as a result of the West overdrawing on what Hurd describes as the 'moral economy of symbolic politics'.<sup>2</sup> His actions challenge and may have unintended consequences on the very international norms and institutions in question.

I focus my analysis on one international regime, International Law, and two institutions: the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the UN Security Council. Case studies are based in Russian activity in its 'near abroad', particularly the 2008 war against Georgia resulting in the permanent occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and more recent events in the Crimea and the Ukraine. I draw on a number of well documented sources but the most recent events will be dependent on (in some cases unconfirmed) media reports owing to the very current and essentially presentational nature of the subject.

## Background

Russia has acquired something of a track record in terms of powerful displays of force in its near abroad: of the four 'frozen conflicts' that International Law recognises three<sup>3</sup>, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria, involve Russia as the main protagonist. At the time of writing it appears that she has just added a fourth to that account in the form of Crimea, recently annexed from Ukraine. In each example Russia has used force to take de facto control of the internationally recognised sovereign territory of a former constituent state of the Soviet Union where there is a preponderance of ethnic Russians. Each one appears to be a *prima facie* case of aggression and expansionism, but despite this, Russian rhetoric has been laced with the language of Western liberalism and of International Law. Despite the gravity of the purported violations of International Law both the ICJ and the Security Council, the two international bodies that could wield appropriate authority, have been conspicuously silent.<sup>4</sup>

Ian Hurd's article is based on the story of the alleged Lockerbie-bombers and Libya's legal battle with the US and UK to prevent their extradition and subsequent trial. In a somewhat surprising turn of events, despite the overwhelming material power enjoyed by the US and UK and the apparent 'moral high ground' of their argument, they were forced into a humiliating climb down and an unanticipated compromise. The themes that Hurd brings out are worth highlighting. Hurd posits that in a social constructivist interpretation of international relations, legitimacy, or perhaps more accurately the perception of legitimacy, is of great importance. Powerful states may elect to delegate actions to international institutions precisely in order to enhance those perceptions of legitimacy so that they appear to be carried out for a greater good and in keeping with international

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.528

<sup>3</sup> Weller, 2014

<sup>4</sup> The ICJ pronounced in 2011 that it did not have jurisdiction in the Russia-Georgia case.

norms of good behaviour rather than simply being viewed as unilateral expressions of self-interest. The Libya case demonstrates how the symbols associated with those institutions can be hijacked or misappropriated by states for their own ends using the 'natural incompleteness of authority to undermine existing power relations.'<sup>5</sup>

The three themes (or symbols) that were the foundation of the US/UK argument (the threat posed to international peace and security; Libya's non-compliance with procedural justice and her defiance of the collective will of the international community) were turned on their head by the Libyan regime to such an extent that it achieved a growing consensus (particularly amongst African and developing states) that it was in fact the US/UK that were out of kilter with international norms. Compliance and defection problems gave Libya the ammunition she needed to successfully portray her opponents as bullying, colonial powers, paying lip-service to an international legal system that was supposed to protect smaller, vulnerable states. Indeed, this narrative threatened to undermine the legitimacy of international institutions (particularly the UN Security Council) that the US/UK had used to press their case. An alternative view of the institutions as instruments of Western foreign policy rather than objective, non-partisan bodies started to take hold. The threat posed to those institutions, became so grave that the US/UK felt compelled to compromise in order to safeguard their considerable investment in those institutions themselves.

### **Norms and Symbols of International Law**

Russia has attempted to reframe the narrative of its recent adventures using two ostensibly inviolable principles of International Law: the prohibition of the use of force and sanctity of territorial integrity. The symbolic nature of each of these is deeply ingrained in international treaty and case law. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter is explicit: 'All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.' *The International Law Commission Articles*<sup>6</sup> make the use of force a *jus cogens* issue, that is to say an infringement of a peremptory norm of International Law that enjoys a higher status, a fact confirmed in Article 53 of the 1969 Vienna Convention Law on Treaties. In *Nicaragua vs US*<sup>7</sup> the ICJ confirmed the prohibition of the use of force had, through custom, become a Principle of International Law. In 1990 the violent annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, in breach of this law, led to immediate condemnation by the UN Security Council and a unanimous resolution (660) that required Iraq to withdraw to pre-invasion positions.

There are two widely acknowledged exceptions to the prohibition of the use of force. Under Article 51 of the UN Charter the right of a state to act in Self Defence if she comes

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<sup>5</sup> Hurd p. 502

<sup>6</sup> ILC Articles, 1966

<sup>7</sup> International Court of Justice, 1986



*The United Nations Building in New York. UN Photo/Andrea Brizzi*

under armed attack. The use of force narrowly constrained however through minute definition of what in fact constitutes 'armed attack'.<sup>8</sup> The second exception is when the UN Security Council mandates action under Chapter VII of the Charter. In this case definition is subjective but the use of force is constrained by the process (members of the

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<sup>8</sup> See treaty law such as the *Helsinki Final Act* or *UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 on the Definition of an Act of Aggression*; and ICJ case law such as the *Caroline and Nicaragua cases*

Council must be convinced enough to vote for it; P5 states must be convinced enough not veto it) and mandate (the wording of the resolution adopted may impose limitations on the nature of the force used). On the only four occasions when there has been a 'breach of the peace' the UN Security Council has taken positive Chapter VII action three times to restore the status quo.<sup>9</sup>

The principle of Territorial Integrity enjoys an equally lofty status. It can be traced back to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia and the birth of the modern state system, with which it is in some ways synonymous. It is also enshrined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States and in the UN Charter (see above). The doctrine of self-determination, which in principle allows for peoples to determine their own government is highly restricted to colonial and constitutional instances by UN General Assembly Resolutions 1514 and 1541. There has been only one successful example of unilateral opposed self-determination since the Second World War, this being the unique circumstances of Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>10</sup> Examples of illegal entities such as South Rhodesia and the Bantustans, which were created in violation of International Law were squashed by UN Security Council action.

### The Use of Symbols

Western states have been unambiguous in their condemnation of Russia's actions using the symbolic importance of the two norms above to justify their outrage. It is instructive to observe how central the theme of international unity is to President Obama's statement:

*[W]e have been guided by a fundamental principle - the future of Ukraine must be decided by the people of Ukraine. That means Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, and international law must be upheld... Russia's decision to send troops into Crimea has rightly drawn global condemnation. From the start, the United States has mobilized the international community in support of Ukraine to isolate Russia for its actions and to reassure our allies and partners. We saw this international unity again over the weekend, when Russia stood alone in the U.N. Security Council defending its actions in Crimea.<sup>11</sup>*

UK politicians have unsurprisingly used similar symbology, although it is worth noting that the emphasis on unity and the threat posed to the international community has a distinctly European flavour to it:

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<sup>9</sup> Korea 1951, Falkland Islands 1982, Iran-Iraq 1987, Iraq-Kuwait 1991

<sup>10</sup> Crawford, 1999

<sup>11</sup> [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 17-03-2014



*A wake ceremony in Kulikovo Pole square Odessa takes place on the 9th day of the death of the victims of the Odessa clashes, 2nd May 2014. Photo HOBOPCC, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License, Wikimedia.*

*The steps taken by President Putin today to attempt to annex Crimea to Russia are in flagrant breach of international law and send a chilling message across the continent of Europe. Britain depends on the stability and security of the international order. That relies on a rules based system where those who ignore it face consequences. And that's why the EU and the United States have already imposed sanctions.<sup>12</sup>*

Both of these statements (which were no doubt agreed between London and Washington prior to release) echo the narrative in the initial stage of Hurd's examination of the Libya-Locke case: an isolated state has acted in blatant contravention of international norms and taken unilateral action that will be punished by sanctions imposed by an indignant and united international community.

But how has Russia reframed this narrative using the very same symbols?

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<sup>12</sup> [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), 18-03-2014

### Protection of Russian Citizens

This theme is aimed at addressing the issue of intervention and was at the forefront of Russian statements in both the Georgia War and events in Ukraine. The essence of the argument is that Russia has a constitutional obligation to protect its citizens abroad. Russian Judge Zorkin states that wherever there is a clash of interests the Russian Constitution will take precedence over International Law.<sup>13</sup> Whilst this argument is unlikely to win much support amongst international lawyers it is not without precedent as we shall see. Perhaps more persuasive is the argument that Russia's use of force is really a form of humanitarian intervention. This doctrine, which finds favour among some international lawyers<sup>14</sup>, also has precedent in Kosovo and Iraq but was described warily by Lord Goldsmith in 2003 only as 'emerging as a further, exceptional, basis for the use of force'<sup>15</sup> [my emphasis]. In order to support this argument Russia has focused on the threat posed to ethnic Russians by the armed forces of the other state.



*Pro-Russian rally in Donetsk. Photo Andrew Butko, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License, Wikimedia.*

In the Georgian case this is relatively straightforward: the first armed action was carried out by Georgia herself against the two breakaway republics who had enjoyed *de facto* independence from Georgia for some time. Mikheil Saakashvili, a hot-headed

<sup>13</sup> Issaeva, Sergeeva & Suchkova, 2011, p.80

<sup>14</sup> Weller, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Goldsmith, 07-03-2003

and nationalistic leader had ordered the action on the night of 7th August 2008 under the cover of opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games. Russian troops responded quickly routing the Georgian armed forces and occupying parts of uncontested Georgian territory. Russia accused the Georgian forces of genocide and ethnic cleansing<sup>16</sup>; Putin, then Prime Minister, flew to the Russian side of the border and enjoyed lavish press coverage listening to horror stories of Georgians 'burning young girls alive ...stabbing babies and running tanks over old women and children' from refugees who had fled north to escape the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

### **Illegality of Other State's Actions**

In Crimea, reframing Ukraine's actions was also critical to the justification of the occupation, however Russia's armed seizure of Crimea was unopposed and Ukraine's armed forces remained confined to barracks without firing a shot. Instead, Russian rhetoric focussed on activity in Kiev. Moscow refused to recognise the interim government that formed after President Yanukovich fled the country. Yanukovich, they insisted, had been removed by a counter-constitutional coup and remained the legitimate leader of the Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> By doing so Russia compared the situation with coups that had taken place in Haiti and in Sierra Leone which, despite being the internal affairs of those states, the international community, led by the West had condemned and refused to accept. Reinforcing those symbols, the Russian Ambassador to the UN brandished a letter from the ousted Yanukovich to the Russian leader requesting military support and in effect inviting Russian forces to protect his government against this coup.<sup>19</sup>

Russia insisted that the new authority in Kiev was not only undemocratic, but that it was fascist. Dredging up images of the horrors of the Second World War would have a profound effect on Russia's domestic population as well as those ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Russian state media routinely used the swastika to symbolise the new government. In doing so they were making the most of the participation of far-right elements in the months of protests and were assisted by incidents such as that (widely rebroadcast by the state media) in which far-right Ukrainian MP Svobodovtsy beat up a television producer before forcing him to resign.<sup>20</sup> The effect was to create doubt and fear about the legitimacy, nature and intentions of the new Ukrainian regime. This was underpinned with frequent references to the West and especially the EU, as having played a destabilising role that had politically fractured the Ukraine allowing fascists elements to seize control.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Medvedev, 26-08-2008

<sup>17</sup> Economist, 16-08-2008

<sup>18</sup> Medvedev, 25-02-2014

<sup>19</sup> Churkin, 04-03-2014

<sup>20</sup> YouTube, 19-03-2014

<sup>21</sup> Putin, 19-03-14

### **They're Not Our Troops!**

Moscow insisted that the men dressed in Russian army uniforms, driving Russian registered army vehicles who appeared shortly after the arrival of a number of Russian air transport vehicles that landed at the Russian airbase, were not Russians but elements of a Crimean Self-Defence force. These well-drilled and well-equipped irregulars wore no insignia and did not fly the Russian tricolour. They did not speak to the Ukrainian soldiers that they kept besieged in their bases and they did not give interviews. Whilst this deception was quickly unveiled<sup>22</sup>, it nevertheless distorts perception. If they were locally recruited volunteers then the situation would conveniently resemble that of the Kosovo Liberation Army that had sought to protect ethnic Albanians from Serbian human rights abuses over a decade before, and which enjoyed the support of Western powers. Whoever they were, they also behaved with remarkable discipline and restraint: performing their duties with weapons unloaded, firing warning shots rather than killing shots when challenged and enjoying widespread, if sometimes somewhat staged, support from Crimean locals. The fact that the military occupation of the Crimea was achieved peacefully was a powerful symbol of legitimacy in itself.

### **Self-Determination**

The Georgian War took place only months after Kosovo had declared independence from Serbia and the Russian government went to great lengths to demonstrate that the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were echoes of the same event. Although both entities had long since declared independence, Russia became the first state to internationally recognise them on 26 Aug 2008:

*A decision needs to be taken based on the situation on the ground. Considering the freely expressed will of the Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples and being guided by the provisions of the UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on the Principles of International Law Governing Friendly Relations Between States, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and other fundamental international instruments, I signed Decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence.*<sup>23</sup>

Medvedev followed up his statement with a comparison to Kosovo:

*Western countries rushed to recognise Kosovo's illegal declaration of independence from Serbia. We argued consistently that it would be*

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<sup>22</sup> Stopfake, 06-03-14

<sup>23</sup> Medvedev



*A burned residential apartment building in Lysychansk, July 28 2014. Photo Pryshutova Viktoria, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike license, Wikimedia.*

*impossible, after that, to tell the Abkhazians and Ossetians (and dozens of other groups around the world) that what was good for the Kosovo Albanians was not good for them. In international relations, you cannot have one rule for some and another rule for others.<sup>24</sup>*

Whilst very few states joined Russia in recognising the two states, Russia had couched the issue in international legal terminology: she emphasised the free and democratic will of the people of both of breakaway republics and went through an ostensibly democratic process herself as the matter was dealt with by the Federation Council and State Duma (the elected representatives of the people) on whose authority Medvedev acted.

Events in Ukraine followed a similar pattern six years later. The Duma authorised the deployment of Russian troops to the Crimean peninsula, a referendum was quickly held effectively subordinating the choice of government to the will of the people and Russia's recognition was carried out with all the pomp and ceremony that could be mustered. The signing of Russia's formal acceptance of the newly independent Crimea by Putin and Sergey Aksyov, the erstwhile Prime Minister of Crimea, was framed as a triumph of the popular will of the people of both Crimea and Russia over the chaos and tyranny of an illegal far-right regime in Kiev.

### **Righting a Historical Wrong**

Unlike the other frozen conflicts, Russia chose to integrate Crimea into the Russian Federation itself, a significantly more profound act than simply recognising an independent (albeit vassal) state. Russia based the justification of its actions on the unique place that Crimea enjoys in the Russian psyche, drawing on the symbolic

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<sup>24</sup> FT, 26-08-2008

importance of the Crimean War and the unusual circumstances of its transfer to Ukrainian sovereignty in 1954. Putin offered up an apparently emotive narrative that suggested that Crimea had never really ceased to be part of Russia and that the half-century of Ukrainian primacy in the peninsular had really just been a technicality.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of legality Russia was able to successfully appropriate the symbols associated with the legal use of force and the legal manifestation of self-determination. The Russian narrative above avoids dwelling on counter-arguments such as the many treaties broken by the actions, Russia's status as a guarantor of Ukrainian territorial integrity, the legitimacy of referenda held at gunpoint, the status of the Ukrainian and Georgian Constitutions or the absence of any meaningful evidence of atrocities in South Ossetia. But it offers much more than simply a defence of Russian actions: appealing to both domestic and international audiences it turns the tables on Western powers, blaming them for interference and accusing them of stoking anti-Russian sentiment amongst traditional Russian allies; it accuses them of hypocrisy and double standards.

If Hurd is right and there exists a 'moral economy of symbolic politics'<sup>26</sup> then perhaps it is true that West has overdrawn on its account? Since the end of the Cold War the West and the US in particular have become embroiled in a series of contentious conflicts that have tested the rule of International Law. The prohibition of the use of force appears clear in classical International Law but recent developments including the evolution of the doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention introduce a grey area. NATO's actions in bombing Belgrade and moving ground forces into Kosovo in 1999 were achieved without a Security Council mandate and certainly did not meet the criteria for self-defence. Similarly the US-led coalition's invasion of Iraq was justified by tenuous links to a mandate over ten years old. The legality of both was challenged by the so-called 'status quo' powers China and Russia. Afghanistan (2001) and Libya (2011) have both been cited as examples of the West exceeding the terms of a Security Council mandate in order to achieve their own discrete objectives (regime change).

Similarly the widespread recognition of Kosovo by the West in 2008 was vehemently opposed by Russia. Putin claimed that it was a:

*Terrible precedent, which will de facto blow apart the whole system of international relations, developed not over decades, but over centuries ... they have not thought through the results of what they are doing. At the end of the day it is a two-ended stick and the second end will come back and hit them in the face.*

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<sup>25</sup> Putin, 18-03-2014

<sup>26</sup> Hurd, 2005

Although the West had made a case that this was *sui generis* (circumstances were unique and that it would set no precedent) there was no consensus; the issue split the international community with 107 of 192 states officially recognising Kosovo.<sup>27</sup>

The US has gained a degree of notoriety as the global hegemon leading some to believe that it can pick and chose when to play by the rules. The ICJ's<sup>28</sup> decision that US intervention in Nicaragua had been contrary to International Law received great criticism in Congress and resulted in the US withdrawing jurisdiction from the ICJ. The judgement called for the US to pay reparations to the Nicaraguan regime but US subsequently blocked draft Security Council resolutions calling for compliance with the ruling. A later General Assembly vote demanding compliance was passed by 94 votes to 3 and was ignored by the US. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the US ambassador to the UN dismissed the ICJ as 'semi-legal, semi-judicial, semi-political body, which nations sometimes accept and sometimes don't.'<sup>29</sup>

In 2003 the US defended its use of force against Iran in the Oil Platforms case as self defence. This argument was dismissed by the ICJ who ruled against the US and demanded once again that they pay reparations. Once again, the judgement was roundly ignored.<sup>30</sup>



Seen here are the effects of the attacks during the ongoing Ukraine Crisis on the Donetsk Regional Museum.  
Photo by Andrew Butko, GNU FDL Creative Commons Attribution License, Wikimedia.

<sup>27</sup> [kosovothankyou.com](http://kosovothankyou.com)

<sup>28</sup> Liptak, 10-03-2010

<sup>29</sup> Kirkpatrick, 1986

<sup>30</sup> Harris, 2010

None of this makes Russia's recent activity any more legal; two wrongs do not make a right. Nor does it necessarily foretell the demise of the international legal order; as in domestic law, actors may break laws but that does not mean that that law no longer exists. Panke and Petersohn, for example, provide evidence that 'norm degeneration processes are more likely to take place if other actions do not or cannot invest resources to punish obvious or hidden instances of non-compliance in order to stabilise the norm in question'.<sup>31</sup> The point of the examples above is not to condemn Western action<sup>32</sup> but to show that by continual unchecked infringement, the norm itself can be weakened.

That Russian action may be a thin liberal institutional veil to disguise a materialistic intent is irrelevant to Hurd: 'sincerity is beside the point ... [w]hat matters is how the audience reacts to the claims'. In fact, international opinion has not achieved anywhere near the same consensus as the Lockerbie case and instead of being faced with defection problems, Western states are struggling to achieve unity in the first place. Whilst there are no examples of outright support for Russian intervention the developing world has been circumspect in its response and cautious to avoid condemnation. When the US sponsored a Security Council draft resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea the Chinese ambassador abstained stating noncommittally that, '[t]he vote... at this juncture will only result in confrontation and further complicate the situation, which is not in conformity with the common interest of both the people of Ukraine and those of the international community',<sup>33</sup> a position consistent with China's stance on the Georgian breakaway republics. *The Economist* reported a source close to Xi Jinping claiming that the Chinese President has telephoned President Putin to advise him against holding a referendum in Crimea, but that 'in no case will China criticise Russia publicly'.<sup>34</sup> India, has also been reluctant to criticise Russia recognising 'legitimate Russian and other interests involved'.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed there has hardly been unity amongst Western powers on the strength of the response and whilst there was finally a statement from the G7 countries condemning Russian action, European states, particularly Germany have been noticeably more 'dovish' in their negotiating position than the harder line taken by Washington.<sup>36</sup> Putin appears to have opened up cracks in the coalition of states that oppose him. There is evidence too of a two-level game being played out.<sup>37</sup> Reports suggest that European powers are more reluctant to adopt sanctions against Russia because they fear damage to their

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31 P Panke & Petersohn, 2011

32 *There are many crucial differences from the Russian cases: concerted attempts to obtain Security Council resolutions, the legitimising effect of coalition support or the fruitless decade of international negotiation that exhausted settlement options prior to Kosovo's declaration of independence to name a few.*

33 Xinhua, 16-03-14

34 *Economist*, 15-03-2014

35 *ibid*

36 Waterfield, 20-03-2014

37 Putnam, 1988

own economies that are highly dependent on Russian energy supplies.<sup>38</sup> Russia's claims that its actions are legitimate and legal may offer Western states a way to avoid a costly confrontation whilst simultaneously appealing to domestic audiences that they stand by their principles.

The international bodies that were instrumental in the isolation of Libya in the Lockerbie case have been rendered redundant. The ICJ does not have jurisdiction unless both state-parties give their consent, something that Russia is extremely unlikely to do; the Security Council has also been frozen out by Russia's veto although the vote of 13 out of 15 states to adopt the resolution condemning the Russian annexation suggests a majority of states fall into line with the US when they are compelled to give an opinion.<sup>39</sup> Whilst commentators and politicians can make all the claims they like, with institutional paralysis there will be (as with Georgia) no definitive judgement of legality. All that is left is international opinion, and when that becomes divided then legitimacy becomes ambiguous. Much will depend on 'floating voters' like China and India who, for selfish or ideological reasons, seem likely to continue to refuse to express an opinion.

The long-term effect on the use of force and territorial integrity norms is unclear although Panke and Petersohn offer cause for hope. Two factors that they determine may give a norm longevity are the presence of competing norms and the inherent imprecision of the norm itself.<sup>40</sup> The West has already indicated that it will not surrender its interpretation of these norms and is making efforts to achieve global consensus. Ironically, the norms themselves may also be less brittle and fragile thanks to years of inconclusive debate over grey area issues such as pre-emptive, self-defence or remedial self-determination.

## Conclusions

Russia's actions in her 'near abroad' broadly confirm Hurd's three principles. That legitimacy is central in international relations is evidenced in the lengths to which Russia and the West have tried to frame the narrative using the symbology of international law to convince domestic and international audiences that their interpretation is correct. What is perhaps surprising is the shallowness of legitimacy given that when one cuts away the rhetoric, international law in this case seems to be fairly clear.<sup>41</sup> But without the voice of international institutions to iterate it, that same rhetoric clouds the issue and offers states that may not wish to take sides a way of doing so without doing themselves harm.

There also appears to be a 'moral economy of symbolic politics' and Russia has made full use of what it sees as Western hypocrisy. In the Russian narrative it is the Western

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<sup>38</sup> *ITARTASS*, 27-03-2014, *WSJ*, 03-03-2014

<sup>39</sup> *UN News Centre*, 15-03-2014

<sup>40</sup> 2011, p.735

<sup>41</sup> *Weller*, 2014

powers that have weakened the norms in question whilst she has simply had to adjust to this changing dynamic. A brief counterfactual thought analysis illustrates how valuable this has been: if Russia had not been able to allude to changing norms or the weakening effect of Western actions then her legal argument would carry much less power and be presentationally less compelling. Moreover, she may have decided to fall back on a unilateral right to exert force in these circumstances or her argument that she was righting a historic wrong. Such a brazen abuse of norms would surely have left developing states less room for ambiguity and would have pushed wavering European states towards a harder line and more punitive countermeasures.

Russia's argument becomes absurd however when examined in any detail: far from internalising a norm as it cascades<sup>42</sup> Russia has herself adopted a schizophrenic position that sees her using the symbols of self-determination and humanitarian intervention: on the one hand Putin made extraordinary use of the Kosovo example in his speech accepting Crimea into the Russian Federation<sup>43</sup> but at the same time continues to block Kosovo's entry into the United Nations and views her declaration of independence illegal. Similarly Russia shows no signs of adopting a more liberal view of her own territorial integrity vis-a-vis a referendum on the independence of Chechnya. Contradictory signals like this allow us to remove any doubt we may have about Russian altruism and see how cynically she has deployed the symbology of international law to her advantage.

Finally, it has reinforced Hurd's assertion that material power is not necessarily a good indicator of the distribution of power in a moral economy. Russia has been able to take action without any serious threat to her own security and at time of writing an unknown severity of economic sanctions. She has been able to do so despite having given the world a dress-rehearsal in Georgia in 2008. In fact the attitudes in the West seem to be shaped by how much worse it could be if Russia were to invade Eastern Ukraine.

The scale of Russia's actions is of course far greater than those of Libya refusing to hand over a couple of suspected terrorists, no matter what their crime. Russia has not only challenged US and Western power by using force to annex Crimea, she has shaken the international system and the laws that purport to govern it. In the fullness of time this may backfire as certain 'floating voters', in particular China, would potentially stand to lose a great deal if the international legal system and UN Security Council were to be weakened. The powerlessness of crucial international institutions, or as Hurd would put it the 'natural incompleteness of authority' has been laid bare. Whether these norms and institutions that the West has come to rely on are strong enough to survive this challenge remains to be seen.

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<sup>42</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998

<sup>43</sup> 17-03-2014





*The wake ceremony in Odessa's Kulikovo Pole Square remembering the victims of the Odessa clashes.  
Photo HOBOPCC, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License, Wikimedia.*



*Russian T-80 Main Battle Tank: Photo Vitaly V Kusmin <http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/188>*

# Is Russia Preparing For War?

*In this article, published in BAR 164 Autumn 2015, Dr. Steven J Main of the Russian Military Studies Office (RMSO) looks at the creation of the Russian National Defence Management Centre in March 2015 and asks if Russia is preparing for conflict.*

The current consensus in the West is that recent events in eastern Ukraine could simply be a foretaste of even worse things to come. Given the recently announced weapons procurement figures for 2015<sup>1</sup>, (never mind the regular probing, for instance, of Britain's air defence system), Russia's re-militarisation looks set to continue and primarily designed

to aid Russia claw back some of the strategic ground lost in the 1990s. However, this article is not greatly interested in examining the equipment side of Russia's re-militarisation plans, but is much more focussed on the organisational nature of changes which have taken place inside the Russian military-civil complex, recently, and which have largely gone by without comment, or analysis, in the West.<sup>2</sup>

Just as important, if not more so, than having the equipment to wage war is ensuring that all the relevant component parts of the state, which are designed to wage war, are in place and fully operational from the top down. Largely ignored in the West, Russia took a giant step forward in this particular area with the full operational activation of the National Defence Management Centre (NDMC) at the end of 2014. Built at an estimated cost of 40 pre-sanction/oil plummet-price/ billion roubles, in terms of its physical size, this significant building - it has a number of helipads and its own berth on the Moscow riverbank and is reputed to be as big below ground as above<sup>3</sup> - is located within the complex of the Main Command of Ground Forces in Moscow - and looks destined to be the head designed to control the body in the run up to and, more significantly, in the event of war.<sup>4</sup>



*Frunzenskaya embankment, Moscow, headquarter of the Russian Ground Forces and the National Defence Management Centre. Photo Ikar.us, Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License, Wikipedia.*

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- 1 According to official figures, published in the Russian media, in 2015 alone, the Russian Armed Forces are scheduled to receive 701 new tanks, BMPs, armoured transport carriers; 126 new planes; 88 new helicopters; 5 new surface warships; 50 ICBMs, etc (ITAR-TASS, 'Oboronniy zakaz na 2015 god', <http://tass.ru/infographics/8249>)
  - 2 Only available comment that this author could find in English on the subject was an English translation of an original piece in Russian namely, 'Russia launches 'wartime government' HQ in major military upgrade', (11/2/2014: <http://lrt.com/news/210307-russia-natioonal-defence-center/>)
  - 3 V Miasnikov, 'Natsional'niy tsentr upravleniia oboronoi RF', *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No.40 (829), 7-13/11/2014; Yu Gavrilov, 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Strogo sekretno...V Moskve nachalos' stroitekl'stvo Natsional'nogo tsentra upravleniia oboronoi Rossii', <http://www.rg.ru/printable/2014/0121/20/oborona-site.html>

Whilst its exact role, for instance, in relation to Russia's action in eastern Ukraine, can only be surmised at present, there can be little doubt that, given its published responsibilities and, more to the point, capabilities, it can be safely assumed that it played its part and helped Putin ascertain Russia's best way forward in relation to the (eventual) settlement arrived at in Minsk. Headed by Lieutenant-General Mikhail Mizintsev<sup>5</sup> the Centre became fully operational on 1st December 2014, having successfully completed an initial trial period (which included the large-scale 'Vostok-2014' CPX held in the Russian Far East).<sup>6</sup> As will be detailed below, the Centre has its own trained staff, uniform, standard, even an anthem and, as implied by the opening paragraph, a number of official statements have been made (including by the Russian Minister of Defence, Sergey Shoigu and the Head of the Centre, M Mizintsev) which have compared the Centre's duties to that of a modern version of a number of important Soviet organs of WW2.<sup>7</sup> Psychologically, this in itself is interesting, as it would imply that Russia is, not to put too fine a point on things, preparing for war or, at least, military conflict. This should not be taken to mean that Russia will declare war this time tomorrow afternoon, but it does imply that, having examined and analysed military conflict over the past 20 years, in particular, Russia is stealing a march on its Western counterparts and, given the Russian historical memory - especially prevalent this year - has no intention of being strategically blind-sided by events either inside, or outside, its territorial boundaries.

The immediate background to the creation of the Centre would appear to confirm not only the importance of the work of the earlier-created Crisis Situation Centre, (part of the Ministry of Emergency Situations, (MES)); the ruling regime's analysis surrounding the 'coloured' revolutions of the past decade in various republics of the former Soviet Union but, most importantly of all, the importance of the appointment of the previous head of MES, Sergey Shoigu, to the post of Minister of Defence in November 2012.<sup>8</sup> Along with the appointment of Shoigu, the restructuring of the Russian Ministry of Defence continued, with the swift appointment of former Commander of Western Military District (MD), Colonel-General Bakin as Shoigu's First Deputy Minister of Defence, just three days after Shoigu's appointment.<sup>9</sup> By the middle of January 2013, Shoigu had appointed a further two new deputy Ministers of Defence (Yu E Sadovenko and R Kh Tsalikov), men

4 Miasnikov, *ibid.*; 'Na boevoe dezhurstvo zastupila operativnaia dezhurnaia smena Natsional'nogo tsentra upravleniia oborony Rossii, ([http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12002205@News&\\_print=t](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12002205@News&_print=t)); D Semenov, 'K upravleniu oborony strany – pristupit!' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 1/12/2014; D Tel'manov, 'Shoigu peredet na Frunzenskii naberezhnuii', *Izvestiia*, 2/8/13, (<http://izvestia.ru/news/554789>)

5 Lieutenant-General M E Mizintsev (DoB 10/9/1962) is, by all accounts, an extremely experienced and able Staff officer. Latest information is that he's currently being considered for one of the prestigious State Russian Federation MSU G K Zhukov awards, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 27/2/2015.

6 Miasnikov, 'Natsional'bnii tsestr...'. *ibid.*

7 At various times, both Shoigu and Mizintsev have compared the Centre to Stavka (GHQ) of the Red Army in WW2, whilst other commentators have compared it to the USSR's WW2 State Defence Committee

8 Ministerstvo oborony Rossiyskoi Federatsii: Ministr oborony Shoigu Sergei Kuzhugetovich, [http://structure.mil.ru/management/minister.htm?fid=null&\\_print=true](http://structure.mil.ru/management/minister.htm?fid=null&_print=true)

9 Ministerstvo oborony Rossiyskoi Federatsii: informatsiia o rukovoditele Bakhin Arkady Viktorovich, [http://structure.mil.ru/management/deputy/more.htm?id=10330380@SD\\_Employee&](http://structure.mil.ru/management/deputy/more.htm?id=10330380@SD_Employee&)

who had worked with him in the MES. The appointment of Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov to the post of CGS on 9th November 2012<sup>10</sup> - the same day as Bakin's appointment - meant that, not long after becoming Russia's MoD, Shoigu had a number of men at the top of Russia's military tree who had either worked with him in the MES, or when he was Governor of Moscow oblast'. This would ensure a smooth path for any reform he wished to push through, (always assuming, of course, presidential approval). As borne out by subsequent events, this bode well for the creation of the NDMC. Given the weight of the MES element in the top military hierarchy, it would appear that the decision and drive to create the Centre came from the former, an assertion further supported by a statement in one of Russia's main newspapers following the appointment of yet another long-standing colleague of Shoigu's - Pavel Popov - to the post of Deputy Defence Minister on 7th November 2013. According to the newspaper article: 'as deputy head in the defence ministry, he [Popov] will continue to work on creating the State's National Defence Management Centre, [my emphasis] as well as innovative research, designs and the 'informatisation' ['informatizatsiia'] of the activity of the military department.' As the article also pointed out, Popov had previous experience in this area, when he helped to create the MES's own Crisis Management Centre.

It is also interesting to note the relative speed in which Putin took the decision to proceed with the creation of NDMC - according to a number of accounts, Putin took the decision in May 2013 at a session of the country's Security Council<sup>11</sup> - thereby inferring that Russia not only has a very active Minister of Defence, but also one who has a very good, working relationship with the country's President. As stated earlier, the Centre would appear to be a new 21st century version of organs from the country's military-historical past, whose main objective was to assess the military-security threat, coordinate the actions of the relevant civilian and military organs of the state and then proceed to counter-act the military threat to the country as best they could. Of course, times have changed and now the Centre boasts the very latest communications technology, including the capability 'through open sources' to monitor 'the military-political situation' over significant parts of the globe.<sup>12</sup> It trains its own personnel: all the sources talk about the Centre being staffed by '500 well-trained personnel' and, in one interview given by Mizintsev, the quality and training of the Centre's personnel are particularly emphasised:

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10 *Ministerstvo oborony Rossiyskoi Federatsii: informatsiia o rukovoditele Gerasimov Valeriy Vasil'evich*, [http://structure.mil.ru/management/deputy/more.htm?id=11113936@SD\\_Employee&](http://structure.mil.ru/management/deputy/more.htm?id=11113936@SD_Employee&)

11 *'Natsional'nyi tsentr upravleniia oboronoi Rossii zastupil na boevoe dezhurstvo'*, (<http://lenta.ru/news/2014/12/01/defence/>); *'Na boevoe dezhurstvo zastupila operativnaia smena Natsional'nogo tsentra upravleniia oboronoi Rossii'*, ([http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12002205@egNews&print=t](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12002205@egNews&print=t)); *D Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut Natsional'nyi tsentr upravleniia oboronoi'*, ([http://izvestiya.ru/news/551033\\_28/5/2013](http://izvestiya.ru/news/551033_28/5/2013)).

12 *'Tsentr upravleniia oboronoi Rossii nauchitsia analizirovat' politicheskuiu situatsiiu'*, (<http://itar-tass.com/armiya - i opk/1727256>

*This is an absolutely new management organ, in the history of the Armed Forces there has never been...such an organ. In order to staff it, only the most advanced and experienced officers are selected, having either rich practical experience in commanding and/or managing complex weapon systems in the field, as well as experience of staff work. But to work in NDMC, even this level of training is not enough. Thus, in the interests of the National centre, a scrupulous selection and re-training of officers in the eight military academies [is undertaken] and additional professional instruction [given] with the emphasis on acquiring skills in the most up to date information-telecommunications technologies.<sup>13</sup>*

The article also pointed out that the General Staff Academy had its own training centre for personnel aspiring to work in the NDMC, simply entitled 'institute for the management of national defence.'<sup>14</sup>

The Centre coordinates, or controls, not only the country's Armed Forces (both conventional and nuclear), but also those ministries and government departments (49 in total) actively involved in the country's national Defence Plan.<sup>15</sup> In short, this is an organ deserving of our utmost attention and analysis, especially if, as is likely, it is destined to play a key role - if not THE key role - in Russia's future military threat assessment and decision-making process in counter-acting any perceived threat to Russia's national security (both internal and external).

One of the earliest, if not the earliest, mentions of the Centre, appeared in the newspaper, *Izvestiya*, towards the end of May 2013. The article was simply entitled, *National Defence Management Centre is being created in Russia*. It will link the Crisis Centre of MChS [MES], the Central Command Post of the General Staff, 'Rosatom', 'Rosgidromet' and other departments in a single system.<sup>16</sup>

The beginning of the article would imply that Gerasimov's role in drafting the original proposal was primary although, given what has been described earlier, it is hard to imagine that Shoigu was nothing but crucial in drawing up the plan for the creation of NDMC and was the elemental drive behind its creation:

*The Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia Valeriy Gerasimov has approved the draft [for the creation] of the State National Defence Management Centre (SNDMC), which will unite all current*

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<sup>13</sup> O Vladykin, 'Tsentr krugovoi oborony strany', (*Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No.44 (833), 5-11/12/14).

<sup>14</sup> Vladykin, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> D Tel'manov, 'Shoigu peredet na Frunzenskuii naberezhnuiu', *Izvestiya*, 2/8/2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/554789>

<sup>16</sup> Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut...', *ibid*.

*departmental management and monitoring systems. According to 'Izvestiya's sources, the draft will be presented to the Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu on Friday [the newspaper article was published on Tuesday].<sup>17</sup>*

Further, according to the newspaper source, 'SNDMC will carry out the tasks of controlling and managing all the forces and means involved in the interests of defending the country both in wartime and in peace time.'<sup>18</sup> The source also revealed that the Centre would be 'informationally' ('informatsionno') linked with the General Staff's Central Command Post (CCP) and all other government control and management centres, e.g. EmerCom Russia's National Crisis Situation Management Centre, 'Rosatom', 'Rosgidromet', 'Rosvodoresursy', etc.<sup>19</sup> Emphasising the integrated nature of the



*33rd Special Purpose Unit Peresvet of Internal troops. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin  
<http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/188>*

<sup>17</sup> Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut...' Interesting to note that the word, 'state' has been dropped off the official title of the Centre. Although this is purely speculative, could it be that the title bore too much resemblance to the WW2 State Defence Committee's title? State National Defence Management Centre too close to State Defence Committee?

<sup>18</sup> Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut...'

work of the Centre, particularly in relation to the country's Armed Forces, the article outlined that the Centre itself would be made of 3 main components, also, somewhat confusingly, dubbed 'centres', these being the 'higher command centre' (designed to unite the country's leadership and military infrastructure, acting like an 'electronic version of the country's Security Council'; the 'centre of combat control' (commanding military operations) and, finally, the 'centre of everyday activity', designed to coordinate the work of the power ministries and departments in peace time.<sup>20</sup>

In an interview published not long after the Centre became fully operational in December 2014, Mizintsev explored part of the thinking not only behind the creation of the Centre, but also its future role.

*The necessity and, more importantly, the advisability in creating the NDMC, on the basis of the CCP of the General Staff, has much deeper reasons than simply increasing [the former's] status...The fact is that the CCP, created in Soviet times, did maintain the reliable control of the Armed Forces, including the use of the strategic nuclear forces and other means and forces on combat duty. However, the organisation of the country's defence has become much more complicated.<sup>21</sup>*

The article went on:

*Mizintsev explained that the process is not only limited to managing the Armed Forces. In the event of the appearance of a real threat to the security of our country [occurring] in the period of threat, all federal departments, regional and local organs of power will be included in the process of organising defence. On top of that, the resources of non-state structures of all forms of ownership ['vsekh form sobstvennosti'] will [also] be used to assist defence: [private] enterprises, fuel-energy complex, transport...And here, taking into account the colossal scale of the various resources [to be used], as well as the geographical length of our country, special significance will be attached to the necessity of optimising their distribution and concentration in any given region, synchronising their deployment with the operational plans of the Armed Forces [my emphasis].<sup>22</sup>*

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19 Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut...'

20 Tel'manov, 'V Rossii sozdaiut...'

21 Vladykin, 'Tsentr krugovoi...';ibid.

These sentences are crucial in evaluating the role of the Centre, it is almost a throwback to WW2, when the USSR, in the first week of the war, took the decision to organise the State Defence Committee, whose main function was to ensure that, economically, the Armed Forces of the USSR would have everything required to beat back the Nazi invaders. 'Optimising' resource distribution would seem to imply the possibility that Russia may embark on 21st century version of pre-WW2 and WW2 programme of 'carriages to the East', the transfer of economic production to less vulnerable areas to attack. 'Synchronising the deployment' of economic resources with the operational plans of the Armed forces would also seem to imply a much greater role for the state in ensuring, again, the defence needs of the state were higher placed in the country's economic development than has been the case over the past 20 years, or so. There is a strong implication that every region in Russia, not just those with heavy concentrations of obvious defence production facilities, but every region, will have a carefully thought-through, pre-allocated role to fulfil in terms of the country's defence needs - worked out, no doubt, partly by the Centre itself and that will monitor, on a daily basis, what is being done in order to ensure that the defence plan is being complied with and that the state has everything it needs - including intelligence - to protect itself against all threats, internal and external, (hence the decision to give power to the Centre to monitor social websites and calls for more powers to be given to the Centre to monitor other electronic means of communication).<sup>23</sup>

Mizintsev also outlined the role of recent past conflict in determining the future role of the Centre:

*A profound analysis of current existing threats to [our] security and the possibilities of the country's military organs to neutralise them showed that, under contemporary conditions, for the Army and other power structures to guarantee the [successful] fulfilment of the tasks placed before them would require a single organ of control, operating on completely new principles and equipped with the most up to date telecommunication systems. Such an organ...would have to operate in conditions of 'real' time, uninterruptedly able to track changes in the world military-political situation, receive full and reliable information on the state of all the troops and military units [operating] in the country. Being faced with a concrete task, it would be necessary, on the basis of a full analysis, model the development of the situation and propose*

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22 VVladykin, *ibid*

23 Yu Gorbachev, 'Bor'ba v eletronnom prostranstve usilivaetsia'. (*Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No.3 (839), 30-11/5/2/2015.

*to the country's leadership one, or several, variants, guaranteeing the [successful] completion of the task.<sup>24</sup>*

Mizintsev pointed out that, in order to be able to fulfil its overall function, the Centre had 'one of the most powerful super-computers in the world.'<sup>25</sup> According to a number of other open source materials, the Centre will operate a number of computer programmes that will allow it to look at a whole range of material over a wide range of media – radio, social media websites, TV, etc. - and, at least initially, in 5-6 different languages. The Centre will also have the capability to 'automatically collect information, classify it and, using expert analysis, model possible variants in development [of crisis situation].'<sup>26</sup> One Russian news agency has also reported that the Centre can store 19.6 x more information than its American equivalent-the Pentagon-and the speed of its processing capability is equivalent to processing the equivalent content of 50 Lenin Libraries...per second!<sup>27</sup> One other thing that is worth noting: all the computer technology was designed and built in Russia.<sup>28</sup> As is typical of other such organisations all over the world, access to information is on a 'need to know' basis, with only the country's most senior military-political leadership having unfettered access. However, when/if/ the situation arises,



*Project 775 landing ship Korolev that took part in the Victory Day Parade in St Petersburg. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin <http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/188>*

<sup>24</sup> Vladykin, 'Tsentr krugovoi...'. *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Vladykin, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Avdeyev, 'Kompiutery...', *ibid.*; 'Minoborony Rossii zaymetsia...', *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Shoigu rasskazal o preimushchestve Tsentra oborony Rossii pered Pentagonom', 25-12-14: <http://lenta.ru/news/2014/12/25/Shoigu/>

individual military units would receive the necessary information enabling them to fulfil their mission properly.<sup>29</sup> In other words, from top to bottom, those needing the information to make the decisions will have all the necessary information supplied.

According to Russian open source material, regional Centres have been created in Ekaterinburg and Severomorsk and territorial Centres in Samara and Novosibirsk. Some information is available regarding the regional Centres but, to date (March 2015), no information has been found examining the work of the territorial Centres.

The work of the regional Centre operating in Ekaterinburg, the latter is based in the Staff HQ of the Central Military District (MD) and, as such, is responsible for 29 'subjects' of the Russian Federation ('subject' here being a territorial entity within the Russian Federation), as well as the Russian military garrisons based in Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan and Kirghizstan. According to the official Central MD press release, 'on a 24-hour rolling basis, daily, duty officers will conduct an analysis of the situation along various trends, monitor the daily activity of the military units of Central MD, manage the fulfilment of the decisions of the state's military-political leadership. One of the most important functions of the Centre is the effective coordination of the activity of all the regional ministries and departments of the 'subjects' of the RF [Russian Federation] in the interests of ensuring the defence and security of the state, cooperation with the municipal organs of power.'<sup>30</sup>

In similar vein, but more detailed, was a report of the regional management centre ('regional'niy tsentr upravleniia', RTsU) operating in Severomorsk, home not only to the Northern Fleet, but also Russia's '5th MD' – the 'North' Unified Strategic Command. The report was a summary of a meeting held in Severomorsk in December 2014, under the auspices of the Commander of the Northern Fleet, Admiral V Korolyov:

*In Severomorsk in December 2014, under the leadership of the Commander of Northern Fleet, Admiral V Korolyov, a meeting ['sbor'] was held of the command staff of the unified strategic command ['OSK' in Russian, USC in English] in which took part the commanders of formations, units, heads of organs of military administration [control] of the Northern Fleet. Invited to attend the meeting were representatives of the Presidential apparatus of North-Western Federal District, heads of executive regional organs of Murmansk oblast', the [other] power structures and a number of civilian departments...Particular attention was paid to working out a single [unified] approach to solving issues [in relation to] ensuring the security of the economic activity of the Russian*

28 'Putin, Lukashenko, Sargsian, Nazarbaev I Atambaev poseteli tsentr upravleniia oboronoi', <http://itar-tass.com/armiya-i-opk/1668052>

29 Tel'manov, 'V Rossii zsozdaiut...'

30 Lieutenant-Colonel Yu Pogrebnoi, 'Upravlenie oboronoi', *Ural'skie voennye novosti*, No.13, 5/4/14



The latest Russian Main Battle Tank T-14, based on the Armata platform drives by during a rehearsal for the Victory Day parade, May 2015. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin <http://vitalykusmin.net/?q=node/188>

*Federation in the Arctic, taking into account the growth in the duties and zone of responsibility of the operation of the OSK Northern Fleet, the Centre for managing the means and forces of the fleet was accorded the status of a regional [defence] management centre ('RTsU') RMC of the Russian Federation. In the words of the chief of staff of the NF, Vice-Admiral N Evmenov, the necessity in creating a regional management centre, allowing the Fleet command to monitor the situation 'on-line' was dictated by life itself, as with the increase of the Fleet's zone of responsibility, so [too] grew the significance of the speed of reaction of the command to all the processes ['protsessy'] taking place in it ['the zone']. The RTsU of NF, in 24-hour rolling cycle, will collect and conduct an operational analysis of information coming into the Centre about the daily and combat activity of the units both onshore and at sea, monitor and control the creation of the military infrastructure, from creating the berths for the strategic missile cruisers, like the 'Borey'... to the construction of military garrisons on the islands of the Arctic Ocean. Equipped with the most modern means of automation, communication and information display systems, the duty officers will be able to manage all the processes in 'real' time.<sup>31</sup>*

Commemorating the first month's full operational activity of the NDMC, the official Russian MoD website carried the following 'report' of the NDMC's role:

*The NTs UO [English transliteration of the Centre's Russian abbreviation] is a permanent, working single (both in peace and wartime) organ for the operational control ['upravlenie'] of the state's military organisation. It is a multi-layered system and operates in a system of regulated regional and territorial control points of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian*

<sup>31</sup> 'Ofitsial'niy otdel', Morskoi sbornik, No.2, 2015, 11.

*Federation, guaranteeing the concentration of all the information-analytical resources of the Armed Forces and the federal organs of executive power.*

*The technical capability of the Centre allows [both] operationally and uninterruptedly, the coordination of the activity of [all] the executive organs [operating] in the defence sphere, as well as [allowing the Centre] to receive the necessary data from all parts of Russia in [near] real time, model various scenarios, concerning the development of [crisis] situation [both] in the country and in the world, timeously determining global tendencies and phenomena, guaranteeing the conduct of strategic and operational planning and the adoption of decisions by the leaders of the state, both in peace and war-time.*

*The National Centre consists of three control centres: the combat control centre, the daily functioning Armed forces' control centre, the strategic nuclear forces control centre.<sup>32</sup>*

Given its immediate organisational background, the previous historical precedent of both the Red Army's/Soviet state's WW2 organs, Stavka and GKO, its wide-ranging powers over the country's conventional and nuclear forces, (both in peace-and war-time), its enhanced monitoring capabilities, its control over a number of government ministries and departments, Russia looks already to have created its wartime command and control organ. We may also have witnessed - possibly are still witnessing - part of its future operational activity in Russia's handling of the situation in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine. It is pertinent, at this point, to remember the words of a former Soviet CGS, Marshal of the Soviet Union, V Kulikov:

*One of the lessons of the war [referencing the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945] is that the system of strategic leadership must be thought through, worked on and knitted together in all details beforehand, long before the beginning of war, [my emphasis].<sup>33</sup>*

Has Russia stolen a march on the Western powers and is already actively engaged in working out the 'strategic leadership' of the country/Armed Forces for the conflict to come?

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<sup>32</sup> Vladykin, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> General V Kulikov, 'Strategicheskoe rukovodstvo Vooruzhennymi Silami', *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, No.6, 1975, 12-24; 14



*The T-14 Armata Main Battle Tank prototype based on the heavy unified tracked platform – Armata, at the Victory Day parade in Moscow 2015. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

# Armata: Should The West Be Worried?

*This article, originally published in BAR 164 Autumn 2015, represents the author's own views and should not be interpreted as an official MOD statement. The author, Major Sergio Miller, provides an analysis of the latest Russian Tank known as the T-14 Armata.*

Russian tank designers have done it again. With a coup de théâtre, Moscow displayed its latest tank at the May Day parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of VE Day. It is called *Armata*, plural of the Latin 'arma' meaning weapon. The NATO nomenclature is T-14. Without hyperbole, *Armata* represents the most revolutionary step change in tank design in the last half century. For the first time, a fully automatic, digitized, unmanned turret has been incorporated into a main battle tank. And for the first time, a tank crew is embedded within an armoured capsule in the hull front. Unsurprisingly, the tank has caused a sensation.

None of this should surprise us. The Russian love affair with the tank is deep and enduring. From the battlements of the Kremlin, this has always been the great symbol of the armed proletariat - a tractor with a gun. Today, the wartime T-34 is as venerated as the Spitfire in Britain (it featured in the May Day parade). Almost 60,000 were built and over twenty countries still fielded this remarkable vehicle at the end of the last century.<sup>1</sup> No wonder von Kleist - no mean exponent of armoured warfare - judged it 'the finest tank of the war'.

Post-war, Soviet designers set about revolutionizing the workers' war chariot. Russian tanks were the first to feature an inverted 'saucepan' turret (the T-54/55). They were the first mass production tanks with a 100mm gun (which prompted the British response of the Royal Ordnance L7 rifled gun). Russian tanks were the first to switch to a three man crew and to incorporate an automatic loader (the T-64). They could ford and snorkel. In the 1970s, Russian tanks began to feature explosive reactive armours. The latest - Relikt - is said to be able to defeat NATO High Velocity Armour-Piercing Fin-Stabilized Discarding Sabot (HVAPFSDS). Russian tanks were also the first to feature gun-launched missiles and electro-optical defensive aids (Shtora-1, or 'curtain' in English), capable of spoofing wire-guided missiles such as TOW, as well as laser-guided missiles like Hellfire. They also first fielded Doppler radar-based defensive aids - Arena - a system that launches a charge against incoming projectiles.

In other respects, Soviet tank design has been poor. Russian engineers persisted with infra-red technology when it was clear that the future lay in thermal imaging. Fire control and stabilization remained comparatively rudimentary. The automatic loader proved troublesome (T-64 was never exported), and dangerous to the crew. In the first Gulf War, Iraq's T-72s gained the nickname 'pop-tops' because of their propensity to detonate catastrophically. In the post-Soviet period, Western technology has provided useful upgrades, notably to sensor and fire control systems (the French Thales Optronique Catherine thermal imager, for example, which incidentally was also procured for the British Army's BGTI upgrade). Today, the export version T-72M1 is as fine a tank as any found in Western inventories.

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1 Zaloga & Kinnear 1996:pp.42-43.



*The T-15 Heavy Infantry Fighting Vehicle (Object 149) built on the heavy unified tracked Armata platform shown at the Moscow Victory Day Parade. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

The *Armata*, examined in this article, is not just a tank but a proposed future family of armoured vehicles. Are we on the cusp of a new technological arms race? Has an understandable focus on defeating the single threat of IEDs distracted Western military vehicle designers? A more or less unmodified Challenger 2 is currently due to remain in service until 2030 and beyond. Is it time to re-think?

### **Origins of 'Object 148'**

*Armata*, codenamed 'Object 148', has origins in the fall-out from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tank production was split between the Ukraine (Kharkov) and Russia (at Omsk, Leningrad, and at Nizhny Tagil in the Urals). This eventually led to two separate tank lines: the Ukrainian T80UD and today's T-84, and the Russian T-72 series culminating in the current T-90. Along the way, Russian designers flirted with a revolutionary T-95 'Black Eagle' and T-99, both prototypes to *Armata*. Over the same period resurgent Russian nationalism; a growing obsolescence in the Russian army's tank fleet (some ten tank types in forty variants); and a realization that Western defence technology had raced ahead, all acted as incentives for implementing a major modernization program.

The output of this program has been the 'Universal Combat Platform'. *Armata* has stolen the show but six additional armoured vehicles have also been added to the stable. These include a heavy infantry fighting vehicle (Kurganets-25); a heavy armoured personnel carrier (T-15); a wheeled armoured personnel carrier (Bumerang); a tank support combat vehicle (BM-2 (TOS-2) launching thermobaric rockets); a self-propelled artillery system (2S35 Koalitsiya-SV); and an armoured recovery vehicle (BREM-T T-16).

Other vehicles reportedly on the drawing board include an MT-A armoured bridgelayer, MYM-A engineering vehicle, and USM-1 minelayer.<sup>2</sup>

Of note, it appears that Russian designers have responded to enhanced Western AFV cannon (the 40mm CTAI weapon being fitted on the British Army's Scout and upgraded Warrior, for example), with more armour (protection) and a new 57mm AU-220M turret. In a familiar story of measure and counter-measure, the intelligence assumptions that informed the procurement of Scout as a superior battle-winning platform may now be open to question. There is competition on the block.

### What's New?

*Armata* has grabbed the headlines as the world's first main battle tank with a fully automated, digitized and unmanned turret. The design corollary to this novel configuration is the armoured crew capsule located in the hull front. What is perhaps not emphasized is that designers had to address the long-standing problem of crew vulnerability caused by the automatic loader and unprotected, semi-combustible propellant charges that have featured in Russian tanks since the mid-1960s.

In itself, the automatic loader does not make a tank dangerous to the crew. But coupled with a consistent design philosophy that has produced medium-weight tanks, it has proved so. Over the last four decades, Russian tanks have given away between 15-20 tons to Western counterparts. The justification for this comparative difference has been enhanced mobility and a low profile. But the experience from Middle Eastern wars has shown that 15-20 tons less armour represents a significant loss of protection. Unlike Western tanks that employ a safer system of compartmentalized ammunition and manual loading, unlucky T-72s crews have discovered that sitting on a carousel of live ammunition can be a lethal experience.

Russian designers faced two choices: either add weight (protection) and change the ammunition loading mechanism (perhaps even adding a fourth crew member); or come up with a completely novel solution. They chose the latter, unwilling it seems to sacrifice the basic principle that Russian tanks must be fast, low and light.

Other novel features include a reported radar system derived from the AESAKA band radar fitted on the Sukhoi T-50 fifth-generation fighter, and new composite armour designated 44S-sv-SH, designed by the JSC Research Institute of Steel. The radar will presumably underpin a reported new Afganit defensive aids suite. A traditional configuration of six road wheels has been increased to seven, reflecting the increased length of the new family of vehicles. The main caliber gun is an upgraded smoothbore 125mm 2A82-1M with a reported higher muzzle velocity. This can fire a mix of APFSDS, HEAT, and HE-FRAG rounds, as well as launch the 9M119M Refleks anti-tank

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2 <http://www.janes.com/article/50896/new-russian-heavy-armour-breaks-cover>

guided missiles (NATO designation Sniper-B). In a radio interview with Moscow radio Stolitsa FM, the Vice-President of the Russian Commission for Defense industry has claimed that *Armata* will launch a 'new missile', but this is often double-speak for an ungraded existing missile.<sup>3</sup> The tank also features a remote weapon station fitted with a 7.62mm 6P7K machinegun, identical to the system fitted on T-90MS. Some reporting has suggested that *Armata* may be fitted with the more powerful NSVK 12.7mm machinegun, or even the Epoch 2A42 remote station 30mm cannon.<sup>4</sup> As a complete package, *Armata* certainly deserves its billing as the most revolutionary tank in a generation.



*T-14 Main Battle Tanks on parade during the Victory Day Parade at the Alabino Training Ground on the 22nd April. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

### Words Of Caution

Some caution, however, is requisite. To date, it is believed that only twelve *Armata* have actually been built.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Western procurement practice, Russian industry produces the prototype in expectation of orders and before trials. In this respect, *Armata* is an unproven tank with trials due to start in 2016.

From visual inspection, some practical problems can be seen straight away by the tank's novel design. Manoeuvring a tank is a cooperative endeavour between the commander who enjoys the elevated, panoramic view, and the driver who has

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.armyrecognition.com/component/content/?id=9938&lang=en&task=view>

<sup>4</sup> <http://irt.com/news/234363-armata-tracked-armored-platform/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2015/01/10/tank-arms-race-introducing-russias-21st-century-ar.aspx>.

a restricted, frontal view. An unmanned turret raises the obvious question: how will the crew reverse *Armata*? How will they negotiate tight, urban spaces? How will they maintain vigilance over their vulnerable rear and sides? Setting aside these questions of practicalities, nobody knows how a crew may be psychologically affected fighting such a tank. The equivalent would be taping up all the vision blocks on Challenger 2 and only allowing the crew to view the outside world through the commander or gunner sights. It may be guessed such a loss of situational awareness would multiply a crew's nervousness manifold.

The examples paraded in Red Square revealed their prototypical state in other ways. One tank embarrassingly broke down (the parade announcer explained this away as a deliberate act to demonstrate recovery procedures, but only succeeded in producing a ripple of laughter in the crowds).<sup>6</sup> A prominent commander's sight was evident (which resembles the commander's sight on T-90MS), but where was the gunner's sight? And is there a reversionary mode? *Armata* will reportedly be fitted with 360 degree cameras but none of these were evident (the vehicles paraded in Red Square did not even feature rear view mirrors). The meteorological mast was present, but not an obvious radar mount. Three prominent recesses were evident on the turret front, but what systems are these designed to fit? - Shtora 1, Arena, Afganit, or another system altogether? Where were the electro-optical dazzlers that have become standard features on Russian tanks? Or the IR search light? Which ERA will be fitted? These and many other unanswered technical questions surround *Armata*.

Important questions also hang over production numbers. It has been widely reported that the Russian government intends to procure 2,300 *Armata*, eventually replacing 70 per cent of its operational tank fleet. However, the Russian-speaking Gazeta.Ru reports tense negotiations between the Russian Ministry of Defence (MinOboron), and the manufacturer UralVagonZavod (UVZ).<sup>7</sup> In a tale familiar to Western procurement programs, the Ministry is reportedly concerned over costs and completion, even threatening to procure the perfectly good and proven T-90 instead.

To date, a modest 15 billion roubles (approximately £200 million) has been sunk in the project. A further 39 billion roubles is in the Ministry budget to proceed with development. Plainly, these sums are grossly insufficient to proceed with mass production. According to inside sources, MinOboron has dug in its heels and is refusing to authorise serial production unless costs are driven down. This presents a problem for UVZ as the current schedule forecasts 40 tanks in 2016 (for trial purposes), 70 in 2017, and 120 in each succeeding year. At this rate of production, it would take 20 years to complete the order. *Lenta.Ru*, another Russian-speaking news outlet, suggests a cost of

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 8 May 2015.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/12/10\\_a\\_6336601.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/12/10_a_6336601.shtml),



*The highly successful and proven T-90 Main Battle Tank seen here at the Alabino Training Ground during a rehearsal for the Victory Day Parade in 2013. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

\$4-5 million per tank, or roughly half the cost of Western tanks.<sup>8</sup> However, *Lenta.Ru* has simultaneously quoted a Russian officer who has reported 'the tank currently doesn't have a price'. This vagueness does not bode well. The total cost of the program is reportedly in the order of £6 billion. Even in the context of a ten year £260 billion Russian defence spending spree (which is unlikely to be met due to falling oil prices), this is a significant sum for a single vehicle that is not yet proven, still less, operational.

### **A Top Tank?**

The unveiling of *Armata* has inevitably provoked a torrent of comparisons with current Western tanks, not least from blogging armour enthusiasts. Much of this debate is idle speculation. The true test of the battle-worthiness of a tank is war. Until *Armata* joins battle, we will not know how it stands in the rankings of modern battle tanks. Comparisons also amount to conjecture because a tank is not an autonomous platform. The secret to its success has always been rooted in its combination with the other arms and mass. The tank was invented to save the infantry, but needs the infantry to save it from anti-tank weapons. In an age of air-launched precision weapons, it also needs an effective air defence screen. *Esprit de corps*, bold leadership, smart tactics, good drills,

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<sup>8</sup> <http://lenta.ru/news/2015/01/20/armata/>

and realistic training - all these factors also contribute significantly to the successful employment of armour.

Perhaps the single factor which the Ground Forces of the Russian Federation can count on is mass. The Russian Army maintains an active fleet of some 2,500 tanks with a reserve of 12,500 (or thirty-five times the size of the fleet in the British Army). With such numbers, decisive effect is credibly achievable and losses are less important. In Russian military academies, 'manoeuvrism' has always meant mass. Next year, as *Armata* enters its trial phases, the steppes around the Nizhny Tagil training area will no doubt witness many such mass manoeuvres. With so much political momentum behind the 'Universal Combat Platform' it seems likely *Armata* will pass muster. But it is not inconceivable that a decision may be taken to suspend development on the unmanned turret and invest instead in the T-90, which is already proving an export success. This scenario is not as implausible as it sounds. As late as last year, the Russian defence media outlet *Army News.Ru* was referring to 'Object 195' or the T-90AM tank as *Armata*, and indeed it was this tank that was featuring in released imagery (hence all the mistaken artists' visual impressions of the future tank).<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the future of the unmanned turret variant of *Armata*, the designers at UralVagonZavod deserve some applause. They have re-enlivened the tank debate and demonstrated with a typically Russian impulsive flourish that there is still plenty of track mileage left in this century-old war horse.



*The crew of a T-80U Main Battle Tank demonstrate the tank's capabilities during the Third International Forum 'Engineering Technologies 2014' from 13 to 17 August in Zhukovskiy. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

9 <http://army-news.ru/2011/06/kakim-mozhet-byt-tank-armata/>



*Hague and Kerry discussing on Ukraine Crisis, US State Department, Public Domain*

# Politeness As A Weapon Of War: V Gerasimov (CGS), Russia And The Crimea - Part One

*In this first part of a two-part article by Dr. Steven J Main, RMSO, originally published in BAR 165 Winter 2016, he looks at the Russian annex of the Crimea in the context of open source Russian material in order to discover how Russia might act in the future.*

Much has been written - and, no doubt, will be written - about Russia's annexation of the Crimea. However, despite the wealth of material available, comparatively little has been written in the West using the large body of Russian-language material on the subject. This is largely due to politics: in the West, the perception of events in Ukraine is largely viewed through a Ukrainian filter and Russian-language based material has either tended to be overlooked, or simply ignored. This is a pity if, for no other reason in that if one applies the necessary intellectual and cultural 'filters' there is much hard information out there, both officially and non-officially approved which, if put alongside what we already know adds considerably to our knowledge of Moscow's actions in February/March 2014, as well as point out the way Moscow could act in the future. As in the past, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) has an important role to play here, one which will be clearly shown in the following articles.

In March 2013, an article appeared in the influential weekly newspaper of the Russian military defence complex, the *Military-Industrial Courier* (*Voenno-promyshlenniy ku'rer, VPK*), which was a summary version of an address to the Russian Academy of Military Science delivered by the current Russian Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Valery Gerasimov, entitled '*Fundamental Tendencies in Developing the Forms and Ways of Using the A[rmed] F[orces], real tasks of military science to improve them.*'<sup>1</sup> In general, his address was a public statement of his thoughts on the future conduct of military operations, as well as an analysis of the importance of military thought on the development and role of Russia's Armed Forces, in particular. As such, it was an important address, but was largely overlooked by the Western media, with the exception of one commentator who, more than a year later, praised it as being 'the most lucid exposition' of the concept of 'hybrid' war.<sup>2</sup> As alluded to by Jones, examined carefully, the address may well provide a number of 'pointers' as regards the conduct and future development of Russian military policy. However, if used as basis for examining a number of other developments - some high-lightened by Russian military action in Crimea, for example - then there can be little doubt that OSINT can help to forecast what Russia may do in terms of its global role in the months and years ahead.

In his address, Gerasimov emphasised that the distinction between war and peace had become increasingly blurred over the past couple of decades and traditional ideas and concepts associated with war and peace have largely become outmoded, no longer reflecting conflict, both within and outwith society/country:

*...in the XXI century, the tendency of an erosion of the differences between the state of war and peace has become ever more apparent.*

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1 V Gerasimov, 'Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii', *VPK*, No.8 (476), 27/2-5/3/2013, 1, 3.

2 S Jones, 'Russia's new art of war', *The Financial Times*, 29/8/2014.



*Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, First Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov. Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, Mil.ru*

*Wars are no longer [formally] announced, but having begun - do not follow their normal course. The [recent] experience of military conflict, including those associated with the so-called coloured revolutions in North Africa and the Near East demonstrate that [even] a very well-off state, within the space of a few months, even days, can become an arena for fierce military struggle, can become a victim of foreign intervention, can descend into an abyss of chaos, a humanitarian catastrophe and civil war.<sup>3</sup>*

In other words, any society/country could potentially find itself in conflict, either with its own population, or directly/indirectly with an outside power, which could, in turn, lead to the fall of the ruling regime. In reference, for instance, to the 'Arab spring', Gerasimov urged caution on those who doubt the relevance and importance of such events to the professional military:

*...of course, it would be easier to assert that, in the events of the 'Arab spring', it was not a war, so there is nothing for us, the military, to learn. But perhaps the opposite is the case – namely that these events are the typical war of the 21st century?<sup>4</sup>*

In his opinion, these conflicts can have consequences similar to those of a conventional war:

*...such conflicts of the new type are comparable, in terms of their*

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<sup>3</sup> Gerasimov, *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

*consequences, to a real war.*<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Gerasimov also pointed out that the role of non-military factors in the pursuit of strategic and political goals could be just as telling as any of the more traditional military methods:

*...the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has increased and in a number of instances, in terms of their effectiveness, significantly exceeded the power of arms.*<sup>6</sup>

Further on in the address, Gerasimov also made reference to 'the protest potential of the population' as being one of the non-military means which could play a vital role in future conflict. Finally, Gerasimov also hinted at the darker side of forces sent in to try and ameliorate the brewing crisis:

*...the open use of force is often disguised as peace-keeping activity and crisis management, only eventually becoming, at a certain stage, an essential [element] in achieving ultimate success.*<sup>7</sup>

Having outlined his views on the nature of conflict in the modern era, Gerasimov proceeded to detail his views on how best such threats could be countered. At this point, it's worth pointing out that Gerasimov's military career has been an impressive one, rising through the ranks of tank troops before being appointed commander of a motor-rifle division in 1993 and then a number of increasingly ever more senior appointments until his latest appointment as CGS in November 2012. Throughout his military career, he has graduated from a number of military academies, either with the gold medal or 'with distinction'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in the person of the current Russian CGS, to put it somewhat crudely, you have a 'thinker' as well as a 'doer'.

In the next part of his address, Gerasimov outlined a few of the major changes in future military conflicts:

*....the role of mobile inter-service groups of forces is increasing, operating in a unified intelligence-information environment...Military operations are more dynamic, active and effective. Tactical and operational pauses have disappeared...New information technology has allowed a significant reduction in the space, time and information gap between troops and organs of command and control. Frontal clashes involving large groups*

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Voennaya elita Rossiyskoi Federatsii. Kratkiy entsiklopedicheskiy spravochnik, M.2014, 46-47.*



*Anti War Protests In Odessa by Yuriy Kvach, Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia.*

*of troops (forces) at the strategic and operational-level are gradually receding into the past. Distant, non-contact coercion against the enemy has become the main way to achieve [both] battle and operational objectives.<sup>9</sup>*

Hence, it should come as no surprise that the development of pilotless aircraft has now become one of the main areas of future development for the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>10</sup>

Referring back to Soviet operational art, Gerasimov was also keen to point out that, thanks to modern technology, there was now little distinction between strategic, operational and tactical targets: 'destruction of his [the enemy] targets is to be carried out over the entire length of his territory. The differences between strategic, operational and tactical, offensive and defensive operations, are evaporating.'<sup>11</sup>

Classic Soviet military-operational theory always made a distinction between phases of an operation and the targets to be destroyed, relevant to specific phases of the operation. Interestingly enough, in his address, Gerasimov quoted from the work of one of the early fathers of Soviet operational art, namely G S Isserson, a divisional commander who not only managed to survive the Stalinist purges of the USSR's Armed Forces in the late 1930s, but

<sup>9</sup> Gerasimov, 'Tsennost' nauki...*ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> A Tikhonov, 'Priority voennogo stroitel'stva', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 14/2/14.

<sup>11</sup> Gerasimov, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Isserson published a two-part article in the Soviet military history journal in the early 1960s, entitled 'Razvitiie teorii sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva v 30-e gody', (*Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no.1, 36-46 and no.3, 48-61, both published in 1965; for biographical information – in Russian – see Yu Gorelik, untitled article in *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no.6, 1978, p.125; 'Voennaya entsiklopediya', vol.3, (M.1995), p.400; N S Chermushev, 'Rasstrelianaia elita RKKA... (M.2012), pp.219-220.

also continued to write on Soviet operational art in the 1960s, dying in 1976.<sup>12</sup>

Gerasimov's reference to past Soviet military thinking, in general, and the works of Isserson, in particular, was important for a number of reasons: first of all, it allowed him a platform to criticise the current state of Russian military thinking and, secondly, it allowed him the necessary historical background to further reinforce one of the main points of his address – the nature of military conflict is changing irrevocably and Russian military thinking must reflect, if not drive, the way ahead. New technology is driving through change at an incredible rate and, in the opinion of the CGS, this has to be reflected in current Russian military thinking. Modern conflict has changed considerably over the past two decades and, Gerasimov seems to be arguing that, unless Russia changes its perceptions of the different types of conflict which it may face, it may be caught out by a conflict which it simply does not understand, due to lack of advanced military thinking, never mind being able to know how best to react to the unfolding turn of events. Again, he was keen to use the analogy of pre-WW2 history of the Red Army in order to further underline this particular point:

*...one cannot compare current native military science with the bloom of military-theoretical thought [which occurred] in our country on the eve of the Second World War. Of course, there are a number of objective, as well as, subjective reasons [for this] and it is impossible to blame, concretely, one [single] person for this. Not by me was it said that it is impossible to generate ideas by command. I agree with this but [even so] cannot but recognise something else: then there were no Doctors, no Candidates of Science, no scientific schools or tendencies. There were extraordinary individuals with brilliant ideas. I would call them fanatics of [military] science, but in the good sense of the word. Perhaps today we do not have enough such people.<sup>13</sup>*

As noted earlier, Gerasimov then went on to praise the work of Isserson:

*...such people, for example, like divisional commander, Georgiy Isserson who, despite the prevailing views which existed in the pre-war period, published a book [entitled] New Forms of Combat. In it, the Soviet military theoretician predicted: 'in general, war will not be announced [formally]. It will simply begin earlier [than traditionally] by deploying the armed forces. Mobilisation and concentration [of forces] will take place not in the period after the announcement of a state of war as was the case in 1914 [Isserson's work was published in 1940] but, unnoticed,*

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<sup>13</sup> Gerasimov, 'Tsennost nauki...' *ibid.*, 3.

*gradually, long before this [formal announcement of a state of war].’  
Tragic was the fate ‘of the prophet in his own land’. Our country paid a  
high price because it did not heed the conclusions of the Professor from  
the General Staff Academy.<sup>14</sup>*

Gerasimov drew one main conclusion from Isserson’s work and fate:

*...a negative attitude towards new ideas, non-standard approaches, to  
a different point of view in military science is unacceptable. And even  
more unacceptable is a negative attitude towards science [scientific  
approach] on the part of the practitioners. In conclusion, I would like to  
say that, regardless of the strength of the enemy, regardless of his forces  
and means of warfare, their forms and capabilities...he will always have  
vulnerable spots which means that the possibility exists of adequate  
counter-measures. This being the case, we must not copy alien experience  
and attempt to catch up with the leading countries, but work to surpass  
them and place ourselves in the leading position.<sup>15</sup>*

Aware of the cost of past shortcomings in examining new ideas and approaches to modern conflict, Gerasimov is intent that Russia not be out-thought, both in assessing the new threats, as well as being able to adequately counter-act them. Interesting also that he chose to focus on Isserson, rather than, M N Tukhachevsky, or V K Triandafilov, the most commonly cited authors on Soviet operational art, Isserson himself being the least well-known of the three, even to a Russian audience. Gerasimov’s deliberate use of Isserson may well have been the CGS underlining one of his main points: the importance of the non-traditional, non-conventional, approach to analysing conflict.

Moving on from the relevance of understanding the changing nature of modern conflict, Gerasimov switched his attention to outlining the lessons to be learned from asymmetric warfare over the past twenty years:

*...asymmetric operations are more widespread [now] allowing for [the  
possibility] of nullifying the [military] superiority of the opponent in  
the armed [military] struggle. These [operations] include using special  
operational forces and the internal opposition [combined] in order to  
create a constantly active [operational] front over the entire territory of*

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Whilst ‘tragic’ may be the normal term used to describe the fate of one of the Red Army’s senior commanders caught up in the Stalinist repressions of the late 1930s/early 1940s, according to one source, Isserson was punished not without reason: his record in the 1939/1940 Soviet-Finnish War earned him formal censure and demotion in rank, (Cherushchev, N.S. ‘Rasstreliania elita RKKA: komandarmy 1-go I 2-go rangov, komkory, komdivy I im ravnye 1937-1941: biograficheskii slovar’’, (M.2012), 219-220.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



*Military base at Perevalne during the 2014 Crimean crisis. Photo Anton Holoborodko, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia*

*the opponent's state, as well as information coercion ['informatsionnoe vozdeystvie'], the forms and capabilities of which are forever improving.<sup>16</sup>*

Despite their widespread application, however, according to Gerasimov, such operations were not very well-understood in contemporary Russian military thinking:

*one has to admit that we understand the essence of traditional military operations, which are carried out by regular armed forces, but our knowledge about asymmetric forms and means is superficial.<sup>17</sup>*

One should be careful not to take the above statement, in particular, at face value: Russia's knowledge of conventional military operations shows that they understand the latter a lot more deeply than simply their 'essence' and, more importantly, given the success of the operation to seize the Crimea, there is ample evidence - as will be shown in the next part in more detail - that, at least on a practical level, the Russians are already in possession of the 'weapons' and skills required to ensure pro-Russia regimes both within and immediately out-with Russia itself.

The USSR's activities in Afghanistan also had a role to play in formulating current Russian military thinking on the ways to combat a particular form of conflict:

<sup>16</sup> Gerasimov, 'Tsennost' nauki...' *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

*I would like to underline [the fact] that throughout the length of the Afghan war [the Russian version!] specific forms and methods of conducting military actions were born. At the heart of these were surprise, high tempos of movement forward, bold use of tactical para troops and evasive units which, in total, allowed [us] to forestall the plans of the enemy and inflict telling damage on him.<sup>18</sup>*

Slightly more worrying was a section of his address concerning 'the operational use of the Armed Forces...beyond the borders of the state'. Gerasimov contended that the state should look at a number of steps 'including the introduction of simplified procedures for crossing the state border, use of air space and territorial waters of foreign states, the order of co-operation with the authorities of the countries of arrival [for peace-keeping operations].'<sup>19</sup>

In general terms, Gerasimov's 2013 address contained a number of important 'pointers', both as regards current top-level Russian military thinking about what the future may hold in store for Russia, as well as a clear indication that the country's top military leadership is not only aware of the potential dangers ahead for the country, but that past modes of thinking are no longer useful in examining, never mind planning for, new conflict situations. In short, Russia has a CGS for the 21st century.

In his address to the 2014 AGM of the Academy of Military Science, Gerasimov spoke about the role of his organ - the General Staff - in preparing the country's defence system and revealed a number of features concerning the earlier approved 'Plan for the defence of the Russian Federation', (January 2012). In his words, the Plan:

*...is a complex [i.e. multi-agency] execution of general state strategic containment measures, planned to prevent military conflict. It [the Plan] consists of political-diplomatic and foreign economic measures, which are closely linked in with military, information and others. In general, they are designed to form [in the minds] of potential aggressors the conviction of the futility of any forms of pressure being applied to the Russian Federation and its allies.<sup>20</sup>*

In addition to the Plan, it was also decided to create an entirely new organ in the state's defence structure, namely the National Centre for Managing the Defence of the Russian Federation, (Natsional'nyi tsentr upravleniia oboronoj Rossijskoj Federatsii)

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Gerasimov, 'Tsennost' nauki.', Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Gerasimov, V.V., 'Rol' General'nogo shtaba v organizatsii oborony strany v stroitel'stve s novym polozheniem o General'nom shtabe, utverzhdennym prezidentom Rossijskoj Federatsii', (Vestnik AVN, no.1 (46) 2014, 14-22; 16).

subordinate to the General Staff.<sup>21</sup> According to one source, the new body is designed to prepare proposals in relation to specific events, rather than long-term planning:

*...the General Staff is [still] charged with issues relating to current, future and long-term planning. The National Centre creates proposals directly in relation to [specific] events. Once a decision has been made, [then] the General Staff takes control...the National Centre has the function to inform all the necessary interested structures and controls the fulfilment of allotted tasks.*<sup>22</sup>

Although the National Centre is still in its operational infancy, it would appear that the organ is designed to introduce a greater degree of operational flexibility in the senior military and political command structure, allowing the country's political and military leadership to react to 'events' as and when they occur and ensure that the appropriate counter-measures are not only adopted, but put into immediate effect. To all intents and purposes, the new organ would appear to be a considerably enhanced version of the previous Central Command Post of the General Staff, designed to increase the operational 'real-time' reaction of the Armed Forces to a wide range of 'crisis' situations.<sup>23</sup>

All these changes in the Russian approach to conflict in the future have also been mirrored by a number of changes at less senior-level, most noticeably in the area of combat training of the men and soldiers themselves. Gerasimov seems to be determined to make sure that not only will the Russian Armed Forces be intellectually ready to meet any challenge - regardless of the nature and colour of the threat – but will also have the relevant skill set and kit to carry out their allotted tasks. To this end, the central military authorities are in the process of kitting out 4 state of the art combat-training facilities, one for each of the operational-strategic commands/MDs of the Russian Federation. The first one to be ready is based in Gorokhovetsky training range, Mulino, in Nizhny Novgorod oblast' (Western MD). The re-vamped site at Mulino involved the German firm, Rheinmetall Defence Electronics, as well as a number of Russian high-tech firms, most notably RusBITeKh.<sup>24</sup> In an interview, the C-in-C of Russian Ground Forces, Colonel-General V V Chirkin, stated that 'for the first time, the means of training the command and control organs, simulator complexes, weapons and [various] military technology, computer classes, laser-firing simulators, [all] will operate in a unified information space.'<sup>25</sup> Chirkin also confirmed that the new equipment will allow for both individual and

21 Gerasimov, 'Ro' Generalnogo...', *ibid.*, 16.

22 'Minstr oborony menyaet adres, a shtab VMF – net', (VPK, No.40 (558), 29 October-4 November, 2014, 1.

23 Miasnikov, V., 'Natsional'niy tsentr upravleniia oboronoj gotov k deystviyu' (Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie, No.40 (829), 7-13/11/2014, 1, 3.

24 Tikhonov, A., 'Poligon blizhayshchego budushchego', (Krasnaya Zvezda, 23/11/2013)

25 Khudoleyev, V., 'V Mulino za navykami' (Krasnaia Zvezda, 21/3/2013)

unit training, the intent being that, once having completed the course, the soldier/unit will be able 'to fight in any TVD' (TVD - 'teatr voennykh deistviy' literally 'theatre of military operations').<sup>26</sup> According to another interview, given by First Deputy Minister of Defence, General A V Bakhin, the process of training at the Centre will entail a measure of tailored assessment of each individual soldier:

*....on arrival at the Centre, first of all, the individual qualities of every soldier will be assessed...During the training, professional instructors will fight against those who are being trained, using laser-simulator firing systems and, only after that, will the units be allowed access to live-firing [part] of the exercises.<sup>27</sup>*

More detail on the projected work of the Centre was revealed earlier last year: each Centre will be able to train, annually, 5-6 motor-rifle, tank units of the Ground Forces, as well as other units and types of troops (including naval infantry and parachute troops). Each course will last 7 weeks: 'during the 7-week cycle of the training course, the officers and men of the units will improve their training level by using computer technology and modern simulators. The end of the unit's training [period] will be [marked by] the holding of a multi-tactical exercise, using laser simulators.'<sup>28</sup>

An article which appeared on the internet spoke about the possibility of each of the new training Centres being able to train up to 9 brigades per year. The article also stated that units will arrive with full kit. It confirmed that each individual would be assessed as



*U.S. Army Europe Stryker soldiers aim at targets at the Grafenwoehr Training Area, while Observer-Controllers monitor during Saber Junction 2012, Oct. 13. The U.S. Army Europe's exercise Saber Junction 2012 trains U.S. personnel and more than 1800 multinational partners from 18 different nations, including Ukraine, ensuring multinational interoperability and an agile, ready coalition force. U.S. Army Photo Markus Rachenberger Released*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> 'Boevoi podgotovke – novye podkhody', (*Krasnaia Zvezda*, 4/2/2014).

<sup>28</sup> Groznyi, O., 'Novye tsentry boevoi podgotovki', (*Krasnaia Zvezda*, 4/4/2014).

to their own military shortcomings. Interestingly enough, in terms of the 'enemy' to be faced in the tactical exercises, the latter were described as highly-trained professional soldiers, skilled in foreign (enemy) tactics in order to help increase the 'authenticity' of the final tactical exercises. The article also confirmed that live ammo would be used and, somewhat laconically, stated that 'you could be wounded, you could be killed.'<sup>29</sup>

Thus, before the Russian take-over of the Crimea and military action in Ukraine, the country's CGS had strongly hinted that the Russian military were on a new course of intellectual development and that, given military events over the past two decades, a number of lessons had been learnt to ensure that Russia would not become the victim of a 'coloured' revolution, nor fall victim to the ambitions of other powers. It would also take a more proactive stance to ensure its own national security: subsequent steps taken on a more practical level would appear to confirm that Russia does take the training and equipping of its men in a much more serious fashion that it has done since the collapse of the USSR. Gerasimov is part of a powerful domestic triumvirate - Shoigu and Putin being the other two members - which seems to be intent on creating a new, powerful military machine, able to cope with whatever military challenge may face Russia in the years ahead. As will be detailed in the next part, a more detailed analysis of what exactly happened in the Russian seizure of the Crimea would appear to confirm that Russia's future actions on the world stage are not that difficult to fathom, if one analyses their perceptions, writings and history and take into account that, whilst the case may still be out as regards Russia's long-term ambitions, what can no longer be in any doubt is that Russia is back as one of the world's key international players, whose interests, fears and concerns can no longer be ignored or dismissed and, if and when, will use force and/or the threat of force to promote and defend its national interests.

*Formerly a Senior Lecturer, attached to the UK MoD's old Conflict Studies Research Centre, (initially based at RMA Sandhurst before being moved to Defence Academy of UK, Shrivenham, in 2005), Dr S J Main created the Russian Military Studies Office towards the end of 2013, providing accurate and in-depth research, using primarily Russian-language military and historical source material, on various aspects of the Russian Armed Forces, current and past.*

*Another image from the military base at Perevalne during the Crimean Crisis in 2014. Photo Anton Holoborodko, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia*



<sup>29</sup> 'O Tsentre boevoy podgotovki', (<http://twower.livejournal.com/1080594.html>). Accessed 29/10/2014.



*A T-72B3M/B4 of the Russian Team takes part in the Final of International Tank biathlon 2014 competition at the Alabino training ground of 2nd Guards Tamanskaya Motor Rifle Division. Crews from Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and China took part in the competition and the Russians came first. The tank shown is a special biathlon version of T-72B3 called T-72B3M/B4. Photo Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin <http://vitalykuzmin.net>*

# 'Politeness' As A Weapon Of War: Part Two - Russia And The Crimea

*Part Two of the article, Politeness As A Weapon of War by Dr Steven J Main, RMSO, published in BAR 166 Spring 2016 examines the annexation of the Crimea and its impact on the West.*

As detailed in part one, under Gerasimov, Shoigu, and Putin, the Russian military has assumed a much more assertive stance in the face of changes in the nature of conflict over the past two decades. The current senior military-political leadership would seem to be intent on restoring Russia, if not to the former super-power status of the USSR, at least to Great Power status, one that can decide, not to put too fine a point on things, the fate of other nations. We in the West may find this repugnant, especially given our values and traditions, but how better to understand current Russian political and military policy unless we acknowledge, first and foremost, that the Russians see the world very differently than us. Secondly, that Russia, through dint of size, history and previous military conflict, is a nation obsessed with security, both internal and external. In other words, Russia will pursue any policy that significantly enhances its security, regardless, almost, of the consequences. It had, and still has, an imperial mentality and thinks that the future position and status of Russia in the new world order has been weak, that its concerns and fears have largely been ignored too many times and that raw, military power, is one of the few avenues open to it to try and re-dress the decline in its power and influence that has been taking place since the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

However, on saying that, it would be wise to exercise a degree of caution at this point. This should not be taken to mean that Russia is Hell-bent on re-creating the former USSR. Why should it? The physical cost would be too great and, at the end of the day, would probably not enhance that much, the actual physical security of the Russian Federation. It has no all-encompassing ideology that demands that it seeks to create a Communist, Marxist-Leninist, global order. It will seek, when and where it can, to improve its security, but there would be little gain in attempting to try and re-establish, in any meaningful sense, the Warsaw Pact or Comecon. Rightly, or wrongly, it equates military power with political influence; it sees great value in beefing up its Armed Forces and ensuring that they are well-trained, well-equipped and ready for any sort of military conflict in the future. Hence, Gerasimov's attempts to persuade the senior military-intellectual leadership of Russia to start generating ideas and new ways of thinking about future conflict and how it should be best tackled and, on a more practical-level, the re-vamping of the country's military-training centre network, again, designed to make the men better able to deal with any type of future conflict. Combining various elements of both drives was the operation to seize and then hold the Crimea earlier this year. A largely unfussy military operation, the latter could easily be a foretaste of things to come representing a new, more committed approach to securing Russia's national interests on the global stage.

The Russian take-over of the Crimea - despite the Ukrainian military presence in the area<sup>1</sup> - was largely a military operation carried out with no mean skill and speed

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<sup>1</sup> According to one Russian source, the Ukrainian Navy alone numbered approximately 11,000 officers and men in the Black Sea region (Grinevetskiy, S.R., Zonn, I.S., Zhil'tsov, S.S., 'Chernomorskaia entsiklopediia', (M.2006), 119.

in its execution. It underlines the fact that a great amount of thought must have gone into the whole operation involving, no doubt, Russia's General Staff. Although initially denying direct Russian military involvement in the operation, there is now no doubt that the operation was carried out by units of the Russian Armed Forces, probably special operation forces.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the choice of targets for the men in unmarked uniforms were conventional, part of their operational methods were not. Despite their seizure of key elements of the peninsula's infrastructure, they carried out their tasks with quiet efficiency and with no formal/informal announcement of who they were, or from whence they came; in other words, operational silence was an essential component of the tactics employed. Needless to say, speculation was rife at this time about the exact origins of these forces. Thus, as part of the public reaction to their demeanour - as well as a half-hearted comment that became blown out of all proportion by social media - they became known as 'the polite people' ('vezhliwie liudi' is the normal phrase you would use in reference to 'polite'



*Unmarked soldiers at the Perevalne Military Base during the Crimean crisis. Photo Anton Holoborodko, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 license, Wikimedia*

2 'Vezhliwie liudi', (<http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%B5%D0%B6%BB...>); 'Putin zayavil, chto v Krymu deystviut ne rossiyskiye voiska, a mestnye sily samooborony' (<http://zn.ua/POLITICS/putin-zayavil-chto-v-krymu-destvuyut-ne-rossiyskie-voyska...>); 'Vezhliwie liudi' rozhdalis' v mukakh: istoria poyavleniya sil spetsoperatsiy Minoborony. U istokov SSO stoyal polkovnik Kvachkov', (<http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2014/14/1013909-verzhliwie-lyudi-rozhdalis-v-m...>

people). Indeed, the term itself has become part and parcel of the geopolitical vocabulary in that part of the world. It is now being used in an attempt to improve and bolster the image of the Russian armed forces, as a whole. It has been formally registered as a brand, with a variety of merchandise being produced and on sale for the general public to buy, either incorporating the phrase, or simply very positive images of Russian military personnel in a helping gesture/pose. There is even one T-shirt bearing a suitable muscular portrait of Putin with the phrase, 'the most polite person in Russia'. To help further enhance the message, there is an official anthem and there was even talk about creating an official commemorative day, Day of the Polite People, marked down for 7th October - Putin's birthday!<sup>3</sup>

The contemporary origins of the phrase lay in the events of late February 2014 when a group of unidentifiable, but well-armed and trained men initially seized the airport at Simferopol, a key strategic target in any attempt to seize control of the Crimea. According to the Russian Wikipedia entry, 'the polite people' phrase now specifically refers to the Russian military action and south-eastern Ukraine:

*...in a number of instances, the terms 'polite people' and 'little green men' refer to units of Russian military service personnel, as well as those who, at the beginning of April 2014, took part in protests in south-eastern Ukraine, during the phase of open armed resistance to the Kiev authorities, forming units of 'people's militia' and seizing a number of targets in Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts.<sup>4</sup>*

Further on, there is a more Crimea-orientated explanation concerning the newer use of the phrase, 'the polite people':

*The expression, 'the polite people', came into use when, at the end of February-beginning of March 2014, unknown men in camouflage occupied a number of strategic sites in the Crimea. These men, in military uniform but without badges of rank or insignia, did not enter into dialogue with representatives of the mass media and said nothing about where they came from, but conducted themselves 'very politely'. Ukraine,*

3 Demidiuk N, 'Vezhlivost' goroda берет.' Internet-tem-'vezhliivye liudi stanet brendom', (<http://www.mk.ru/economics/article/2014/04/17/1015873-vezhlivost-goroda-beret-int...> Accessed 21/8/2014); Rossiyskie voennye k 9 maya nachnut prodazhu odezhdy 'vezhliivye liudi', ([http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20140516/1007988002.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140516/1007988002.html)); 'Putin: vezhlivym liudiam, v ispolnenii Ansambliya Aleksandrova sniskal populiarnost' na YouTube' (<http://www.vz.ru/news/2014/4/25/684011.print.html>); 'Minoborony Rossii zapustilo liniyu odezhdy 'vezhliivye liudi' ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2014/05/140508\\_polite\\_people\\_brand.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2014/05/140508_polite_people_brand.shtml)); 'Vezhliivye liudi' kak noviy obraz Rossiyskoi armii' ([http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20140516/1007988002.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140516/1007988002.html)); 'Peskov: v Kremle znaiut ob initsiative uchredit' v RF Den' vezhliivyx liudey' (<http://itar-tass.com/politika/1484464>).

4 'Vezhliivye liudi' entry (<http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%A5%D0%b6%D0%b8%D0...>).

*many [other] countries, NATO, as well as a number of Russian sources, surmised that 'the polite people' were military personnel from the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>*

Officially, both Putin and Shoigu, at the beginning of March 2014, denied wholeheartedly that these 'polite people' were Russian military personnel, claiming that the uniforms, for instance, could be bought in any number of shops in the post-Soviet space. Interestingly enough, though, and a point worth bearing in mind for the future, notwithstanding the actual origins of the men involved in Crimea, Putin did assert that Russian troops would get involved 'to defend [our] citizens.'<sup>6</sup> One should always bear in mind that, following the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, there are still a lot of Russian citizens scattered all over the former republics of the USSR, out with the Russian Federation: is Putin hinting at the possibility of future Russian military action within the confines of the ex-USSR? Events in Ukraine would seem to point, at least, to a partial answer to that particular question.

The Russian Wikipedia article attributed the actual 'authorship' of the phrase itself to 'a number of activists' from the pro-Kremlin, youth movement, 'Set' (Russian word meaning 'network') and the pro-Kremlin blogger, 'Politrush', otherwise known as Stanislav Apet'yan.<sup>7</sup> According to one local Ukrainian source, between 28th February - 4th May (inclusive), the phrase was used more than 3,000 times by various Ukrainian news agencies. According to another Ukrainian journal editor, the term itself denotes a new way of thinking in terms of waging the military struggle:

*...principally, this is a new piece of kit, it's a new weapon, new means of communication, [it's not just] about speed and decisiveness of operations.<sup>8</sup>*

### **'Politeness'- A Weapon Of War**

The current close identification of the phrase with the new image being built around the Russian Armed Forces was further confirmed by a Russian news agency poll carried out in the middle of May 2014 of a group of experts that showed that the expression itself 'was/is gradually becoming a symbol of the Armed forces of the Russian Federation.'<sup>9</sup>

Internet-chatter aside, according to another contemporary account, the phrase's origins were very simple:

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5 *Ibid*, a recent article has appeared in the Russian military press confirming the identity of the troops used: a battalion of Marines from the nearby Caspian Flotilla, (Sh Khayrullin, 'Krymskiy ekzamen', Krasnaia Zvezda, 26/11/2014).

6 *Putin zayavil chto v Krymu deistviut ne rossiyskie voiska, a mestny sily samooborony* (<http://zn.ua/POLITICS/putin-zayavil-cto-v-krymu-deystvuyut-ne-rossiyskie-voiska...>)

7 'Vezhlivie liudi.' *ibid*.

8 'Vezhlivie liudi...,' *ibid*.

9 *Ibid*.

*...it originated formally from many posts, 'polite people have seized 2 airports in the Crimea', which was written on the night of 28th February...Part of the story rung thus. The airport at Simferopol' was seized by unknown armed men who, probably, were [also] involved in the seizure of a number of government and parliament buildings in the Crimea. This was passed on to 'navigator' by a source from the Crimean militia HQ, 'Approximately at 1 o'clock in the morning, the airport at Simferopol' was seized – by the very same people. Carrying weapons, strong, in the same uniform. Head of security reported that the men politely asked them [local security personnel] to leave...' It is worth noting that the Crimea militia still do not know [the report is dated 23/3/2014] who these people are, who occupy the main administrative buildings in the Crimea. 'All that is known [for sure] is that they speak pure Russian without a Caucasus or Moscow accent.'*<sup>10</sup>

And the rest, as they say, is history.

From the Russian point of view, it is obvious why the phrase has proved to be so compelling: it is much more attractive than phrases like 'occupation force', or 'invasion force'. Before the appearance of 'the polite people' Crimea was a formal part of Ukraine and, as such, had contingents of Ukrainian Armed Forces - ground, air force and naval personnel. Thus, in order to reduce the possibility of a Ukrainian military reaction, it was imperative that Ukraine was left second-guessing on what was actually taking place. Speed, decisiveness, and sewing as much confusion as possible in the mind of 'the enemy', were all key components of the operation to seize and then hold on to the Crimea, whilst the local authorities organised the 'referendum' that eventually led to the annexation of the peninsula to Russia. On the eve of the operation, as recorded by a number of Russian commentators, as well as American and European, even 'silence' had a role to play:

*US and European commentators have noted that, on the eve of the appearance of 'the polite people' at the administrative buildings in Simferopol', no [extra] activity had been detected in signals traffic... The operation, begun on 27th February, caught the intelligence services of various countries by complete surprise.*<sup>11</sup>

According to the same source, the Russian General Staff even planned for active military resistance on the part of Ukrainian para-military units operating in the Crimea

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iarex.ru/articles/46396.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/63246.html>

(‘Right Sector’); the possibility of attacks on installations of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF); hostage-taking of BSF personnel; even the possibility of local Crimean Tatars taking up arms against the Russians.<sup>12</sup> That none of these things actually happened again is further proof of the speed and thoroughness of the operation carried out - an indication of good operational planning and the success achieved by total surprise. That no blood was spilt was, judging by Russian version of events, due to the fact that neither local Russian nor Ukrainian military units wanted to be the first to resort to large-scale use of the weaponry at their disposal, fearful of the consequences:

*....the operations of the Russian military were so unexpected that they simply did not allow their Ukrainian colleagues to respond in kind, allowing control of the targets to be achieved by negotiation. [However] The most important factor in this dramatic stand-off [protivosostoyanie] was the understanding, on both sides of the conflict, that the use of weapons could have catastrophic consequences. Thus, in the first stage [of the operation] the main task...was seizing and the safe blocking of the weapon stores and arsenals.<sup>13</sup>*

The troops deployed were also instructed to specifically protect local kindergartens, in order to prevent hostage-taking of local kids: one sad lesson learnt, no doubt, from the horrific experience at Beslan.<sup>14</sup>



*Signing of the Treaty on the adoption of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia. Left to right: S. Aksyonov, V. Konstantinov, V. Putin and A. Chalyi, www.kremlin.ru/news, Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license, Wikimedia*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

In an interview published in the Russian MoD's main newspaper, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, one of the local Ukrainian military commanders, caught up in the events of February/ March 2014, (and who eventually defected to the Russians), described the situation for Ukrainian military personnel, based in Crimea, as being caught up in a situation that they could not have imagined let alone prepared for. Commander of 501st Independent Naval Infantry [Marine] Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel A Saenko, a professional, career soldier, described the almost impossible situation facing him and his men:

*...at the end of February [2014], the unit was blocked in by a detachment of Crimean self-defence [personnel]. At any moment, it [the self-defence unit] could have begun storming [our] unit. In reply to our reports concerning the [increasing] worsening of the situation, our higher HQs said [only] one thing: 'Hold on!' But supplies from the Ministry of Defence had practically ceased...There was a feeling [afoot] that we had been thrown to our fate. At the beginning of March, military personnel wearing Russian military field uniform arrived at the units' command post. Judging by their kit, they were paras. Their senior [officer] correctly explained his duties - not to allow any provocation from either side, guard the unit and not to allow the passage of weapons beyond the confines of the base.<sup>15</sup>*

Saenko, for his part, had no doubt at the time that these men were all professional Russian military personnel:

*...a military professional could easily assess the discipline and training of these calm and confident warriors. The brief orders were carried out exactly and without fuss. The conversations were minimal-laconic and precise. Even in holding their weapons, one felt that these paras were at one [with their weapons]. One sensed that they were professionals. Our contract soldiers tried to get close to them, but they correctly kept their distance. And that is how they kept themselves in relation to the local population, who turned up at our command post. In their behaviour, there was not a gram of haughtiness or bravado, although everyone understood well exactly what serious force was behind them.<sup>16</sup>*

In a later published interview, Saenko detailed the increasingly tense political situation surrounding the base in March, as well as the mood of his own men to events outside:

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<sup>15</sup> 'Vezhlivie liudi' silnoi Rossii', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 19/8/2014, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

*....during these days in March, the Crimea was like a storm...During the time when the referendum was being prepared for and held, we raised the Ukrainian flag. But in front of the [unit's] command post parents of our men, as well as activists from various public organisations, met under the Russian tricolour. Imagine what it was like how, through the wire fence, a Marine asking his brother: 'How's mum? Dad? What's situation like in town?' And he answers: 'We will soon be in Russia. When are you going to give up?' Can you imagine what the feelings were like? Of course, making a decision as a commander was complicated. It's one thing when you're only responsible for yourself, it's another thing when you're responsible for a whole military unit. I immediately determined [what I was going to do]. And this choice was determined, partly, by family-officer traditions from the Soviet period. Other than that, the Crimea - where I had served after the Academy - had become my own little Motherland, here lives my mum, my family, here was my home.<sup>17</sup>*

Largely abandoned, as he saw it, by the central political and military command, and responsible for the safety of his men, what was he to do? In part, he was assisted by one of the local senior military commanders who was prepared to make a decision and sort out the situation. On the day of the referendum, the battalion was visited by the Head of Shore Troops of the BSF, Major-General A Ostrikov. According to the published account, Ostrikov 'with complete objectivity, correctly and in detail, sketched out the situation and invited the personnel to make a decision where they would continue to serve.'<sup>18</sup>

Saenko detailed what happened next:

*The day after the proposal made by General Aleksandr Ostrikov was spent in deep thought. I then called the battalion to order and announced my decision. Those who wanted to leave and serve in Ukraine, I ordered to take two steps forward, those who could not decide or wanted to quit the service [altogether] - one step forward, those who wanted to transfer and serve Russia - stay as you were. Thus, the battalion was divided into three parts: 50 took two steps, one step - [further] 20, which left 220 naval infantrymen [Marines] as they were. The result was totally predictable. You see, our battalion was a contract battalion, 78% of the personnel were local men. I know that from 'Ukrainian', 50, a good half would also have wanted to stay [in Crimea], but neither their parents nor their relatives would have understood their choice. All who decided to*

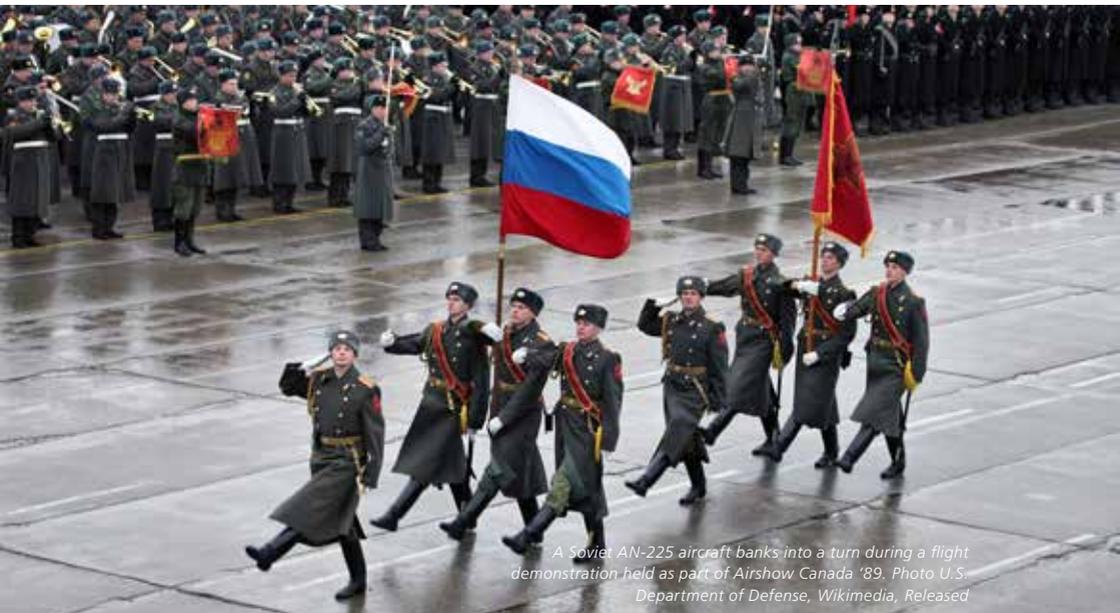
<sup>17</sup> Sosnitskiy V, 'Pod Andreyevskim flagom', Krasnaia Zvezda, 26/9/2014.

<sup>18</sup> 'Vezhlivie liuidi...' ibid.

*serve in the Armed Forces of Russia, without delay, received the passports of citizens of the RF. Literally within a few days, they gave us our new uniforms. Dining rooms were transferred to offering 3 courses per day. Earlier, it was only dinner.<sup>19</sup>*

Saenko also noted that all ranks and previous qualifications were to be formally recognised and honoured and pay for all ranks significantly improved. He also noted an unprecedented increase in the number of senior officers visiting the unit since its transfer of allegiance:

*...in the past month [the article was published in September 2014], I have never saw so many senior officers visiting the unit than in all my previous years of service. And it's not a question of controlling this unit of recruits. Many operational questions on [future] organisation of service, maintenance of the unit, working with the personnel, have been decided. The main thing now is that we all serve under the flag of St. Andrew and are proud to serve it!<sup>20</sup>*



*A Soviet AN-225 aircraft banks into a turn during a flight demonstration held as part of Airshow Canada '89. Photo U.S. Department of Defense, Wikimedia, Released*

<sup>19</sup> Sosnitskiy, *ibid.*

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

Propaganda aside, the extracts from the interview do give a flavour of what it was like as a serving Ukrainian officer based in the Crimea at this time. His earlier comments concerning 'the polite people' are further proof, in their own way that, under Gerasimov and Putin, Russia would appear now to have a senior military-political leadership who have a focussed and determined approach to defending and advancing Russia's national security interests. Just as important, Russia appears to have a strategy - to be further revealed in the upcoming new Military Doctrine - and an improving and reactive military capability to ensure that Russia can no longer be ignored as a former spent super power. The West does not like what Russia has achieved in the Crimea and, more recently, in Ukraine, but it cannot deny the relative success of the strategy, so far.

Russia has seized the Crimea in an almost bloodless fashion, thereby securing its position in the strategically important South; events now in Ukraine owe as much to Moscow's influence, as Kiev's and, unless the central political authority in Kiev adopts a decisive strategy in relation to Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts, it is hard to see how Kiev will maintain any sort of influence in that part of its own country. Economic sanctions will tell on Russia, but the Kremlin looks intent on riding them out and, as long as the other non-Western countries are prepared to trade with Russia, the latter will be in business, so-to-speak, in the years ahead.

As was warned by this author last year in this very journal, Russia will not play the international game according to OUR rules, it has its own historical and military experience to draw upon. Gerasimov's quotes from Isserson are proof not only of the country's rich military-theoretical thought, but also the fact that, for the Russian CGS, history still has relevant lessons to be drawn and that, as the nature of war changes so too must the methods. Isserson himself wrote on the eve of the Soviet-German War of 1941-1945, 'if you fight with the old methods, you will repeat the old stories'.<sup>21</sup>

Events in the Crimea and Ukraine would appear to demonstrate that Russia has learnt and is learning that modern conflict can and does come in all shapes, colours and sizes, that in this highly communicative age, even silence, 'politeness', can be part of a nation's armoury. The Western countries must fundamentally re-evaluate where Russia is going and how best to counter-act Russian moves in what is going to be an increasingly complex game. On untangling and comprehending the game ahead, OSINT has a very definite and important role to play. We really do need to know what they're saying in Russia.<sup>22</sup> As the recently departed former Secretary-General of NATO, A Rasmussen, remarked:

*...from Moldova to Georgia, and now in Ukraine, Russia uses a mix of economic, political, propaganda and military pressure, to produce instability and manufacture hot conflicts which it can freeze at will.*

21 'Voprosy strategii i operativnogo iskusstva v sovetskikh voennykh trudakh., (1917-1940 gg),' (M.1965), 425.

22 Preston P, *We need to know what they're saying in Russia*, *The Observer*, 16/11/14.

*Moscow's master plan is to prevent its neighbours from choosing their own path so that it can rebuild a sphere of influence. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace. Despite our efforts since the collapse of communism, Russia clearly views Nato not as a partner, but as an adversary.<sup>23</sup>*

Whilst seeking to avoid blaming NATO for its own attempts to create 'stability' in Europe by increasing both the size of the Alliance, as well as its proximity to the Russian border, and blindly ignoring, for instance, the wars in the former Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Rasmussen would appear to have grasped the head of the nettle by implying that Russia will not play 'the game' according to our interpretation and understanding of the international arena. Russia's view, for instance, of recent events on the global stage is very different from ours but, like Rasmussen's, does point to a potentially very adversarial relationship with the West in the years to come:

*...after the disappearance of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, the USA decided not only to keep NATO, but advanced the initiative of expanding the alliance to include the republics of the former Soviet Union. Thus, what unfolded was the military and geopolitical occupation of the space which Russia left [behind] because of its weakness - beginning in the Balkans, then the Baltics and the Black Sea, including the Caucasus and Central Asia. The Alliance proceeded a planned operation to carry out its new global role - securing the interests of the West, above all the USA, over the Earth, confirming the priority of the Euro-Atlantic civilisation in the world community.<sup>24</sup>*

Bartosh, a prominent member of the Russian Academy of Military Science, also argued that there are two main tendencies at work in global international affairs:

*The first is connected to the strengthening of the economic and political position of Russia, China, India and a number of other states, their amalgamated unions, improving the mechanism for a multi-layered management of international processes.<sup>25</sup>*

The 'second tendency', in his opinion, refers back to an earlier, less complicated period in global relations, a time when international affairs could and often were decided by a small group of powerful states, or even just by one state:

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<sup>23</sup> Rasmussen A., *Putin's Russia has been my biggest regret*, *The Guardian*, 28/9/14.

<sup>24</sup> Bartosh A., *Geopoliticheskie proektsii vtorogo fronta*, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No.22, 4-10/7/2014.

<sup>25</sup> Bartosh, *ibid*.

*The second tendency manifests itself through the policy of the USA and NATO, creating a structure [model] of international relations, based on the dominance on the world stage of the developed Western nations, led by America, and based on a one-sided, primarily military-force [adjective, not the noun], solution of the key problems on the planet, avoiding UN and the fundamental norms of international law.<sup>26</sup>*

In Bartosh's opinion, these tendencies will eventually clash, especially taking into account the world's diminishing natural resources and Russia's own national interests:

*...the strategy of Atlantism is aimed at the global dominance of Washington in a radically reformed world. Today, the process of reforming within the confines of the Euroatlantic security space is determined by several powerful vectors: the war in Ukraine, the current withdrawal of the USA and NATO from Afghanistan, American plans to transfer the strategic centre of force from the Euroatlantic region to the Asian-Pacific region. The resultant force of these factors determines the actions of the USA and its allies, at the basis of which is the understanding that without mastery over Europe, it will be*

*Internal Troops from the 604th Special Purpose Centre sit on top of a BTR-80 during the International Operators Exhibition "Interpolitex-2014" in Moscow from 21st to 24th October 2014. Demonstrations also took place at the testing and shooting range of the Federal State Enterprise 'Geodesia' in the town of Krasnoarmeysk. Here, special units from Ministry of Internal Affairs, Federal Drug Control Service and Federal Service for Execution of Punishments took part in the demonstration, as well as military vehicles. Photo Copyright Vitaly V Kusmin <http://vitalykuzmin.net>*



<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

*impossible to realise the global redistribution of resources to their advantage. The national strategy of the Russian Federation, based on the projected and strategic planning for the steady development of the country, must oppose attempts to establish such supremacy.<sup>27</sup>*

Thus, as outlined throughout these two articles, events in 2014, particularly in relation to the Crimea and Ukraine have shown that, for good or bad, Russia has re-announced its presence at the top table of global affairs. The prediction made by this author in this journal over two years ago has proven to be accurate: NATO must fundamentally re-examine its attitude to, and relationship with, Russia. Russia's effortless take over of the Crimea; its activities in eastern Ukraine; its promotion of a much more appealing image of its Armed Forces; the increasing regularity of holding larger military exercises of all types and at different levels; the improvement of combat-training facilities at Mulino and elsewhere, etc., show that Russia is now a power to be reckoned with. OSINT has a vital role in helping both the West to better understand, and react, to Russia's future interventions on the world stage. Russia has learnt lessons from the way modern conflict can occur and develop. It remains to be seen, how and in what ways, the West and the world's other major powers, meet the new Russian security challenge.



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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



A Russian T72 Main Battle Tank of the Russian Team during the opening of the Tank Biathlon 2014. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

# The Strategic Context Of Russian Policy

*This article by Professor Brendan Simms, originally published in BAR 167 Summer 2016, examines some of the recurring patterns and themes in Russian policy.*

Russia perceives the West as a threat in two ways. The first is as a territorial and military challenge. She has repeatedly been invaded from that side over the past three hundred years: by Sweden, France, Poland and Germany. This has led her to think of her security in terms of buffers and a territorial glacis so extensively as to make her an aggressively

annexationist power herself. Throughout the past four hundred years, Russia advanced relentlessly westwards, absorbing swathes of the Baltic, Poland, Germany, Romania and other states. This trend was only reversed after 1991, and has revived again in recent times. Moreover, unlike the West, which sees the stability and prosperity of her neighbourhood as the key to her security, Russia feels safer the more it can make the areas bordering her unsafe and unstable. This means that the security of Russia can only be achieved, in the Kremlin's mind, through the insecurity of others, either by taking territory from them or preventing them from settling down. It is a zero-sum game.

Secondly, Russia fears the West as an ideological challenge to her form of politics: universal and open, as opposed to national and closed. The Tsarist regime worried after the Napoleonic Wars that returning Russian soldiers would bring the contamination of western ideas with them. Stalin feared the same after the Second World War. Today, Putin is concerned about the infiltration of ideas not so much through western NGOs, which he now has largely under control, but across borders from the eastern members of the European Union, and the lands between, especially Ukraine. The one thing he cannot risk is a repeat of the Polish experience, after which that country went from having a standard of living roughly comparable to that of the Ukraine to a multiple of that today. If Ukraine were to progress in a similar fashion after joining the EU, then the population of Russia proper would start asking him awkward questions.

It is against this background that Putin's grand strategy should be understood today. He is not, as his biographer Masha Gessen suggests, simply an opportunist though he will exploit western weakness quickly once identified. Nor is Mr Putin just nostalgic for the Soviet Union. Putin's aim, instead, is to give Russia the critical mass it needs to survive in the global great power contest. In October 2011 he announced the launch of a new 'many-tiered, multi-speed integration project in the post-Soviet space', primarily designed to bring Ukraine more closely into his orbit. Mr Putin's objective is nothing less than the creation of what he calls 'a higher level of integration- a Eurasian Union', a 'powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world' alongside the EU, China and the United States. What he is driving at, in short, is not the reconstitution of the Soviet Union, still less world hegemony, but a Russian-dominated Eurasian commonwealth that would give him some kind of global parity with the other world 'poles'.

The execution of this policy has involved the destabilisation of neighbouring states, to keep them weak, remind them of their weakness, and if possible to draw them back into the Russian orbit. Its modus operandi reminds one of the old Bolsheviks. 'When a man sticks in a bayonet and strikes mush, he keeps pushing', Lenin once remarked approvingly, 'but if he hits cold steel, he pulls back'. His successor Nikita Khrushchev was fond of repeating this remark, as he tested the West in Berlin, Cuba and elsewhere during the Cold War. For some years now the Russian leader, and former communist

secret service agent, Vladimir Putin has also been sticking in the bayonet and, so far, he has only encountered mush. In 2007 he was behind a 'cyber attack' on the Baltic Republic of Estonia. A year later he invaded the sovereign state of Georgia, handed out Russian passports and effectively annexed the territory of South Ossetia. Most recently, he has invaded the sovereign state of Ukraine, annexing Crimea and supporting separatists in the eastern part of the country. At every stage, Mr Putin has proceeded carefully, using hooded 'deniable' units in the Crimea, only throwing off the mask, and proceeding to full annexation, when he thought it was safe to do so.

Russia's gamble succeeded largely because the West was slow and weak, but also because it was confused. The public, and even well-informed observers, were temporarily disorientated by Russian propaganda that the Ukrainian revolution was dominated by 'fascists' and that intervention was necessary to rescue the Russian population from them. Mr Putin spoke of 'reactionary, nationalist and anti-semitic forces going on the rampage in certain parts of the Ukraine, including Kiev'. There was, in fact, never any serious threat against Ukrainian Jews, the Russian population, or any other minority group. But by the time the truth was clear, it was too late to do anything about it.

At the same time, and without any sense of contradiction, Russia has opened a new political front within Europe by supporting the far right against the liberal European Union. She champions their hostility to globalisation, universalism, humanitarian intervention, immigration and much else as part of a global resistance against a western hegemonic project. Moscow specifically invited representatives of European far-right parties, including the French National Front and the Austrian Freedom Party, to observe the referendum in the Crimea, hardly the actions of a government concerned about



*A Russian SU34 demonstrates its capabilities at the International Aviation and Space Salon, MAKS 2015.  
Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

'extremism'. There are now governments, for example in Hungary and Greece, which openly sympathise with Putin and his challenge to the European Union. The result is that there is a substantial 'fifth column' in western and central Europe that weakens our response to Russian aggression.

Since then, the west has woken up to the threat of 'hybrid warfare'. 'Its not just the old Fulda gap, for those who remember the Cold War issue of tanks crossing over', US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter said a month ago, 'Its the little green men phenomenon as well. This is a new playbook'. Across the continent, the phenomenon is being analysed in conferences and staff colleges. New structures are being devised to cope with it.

Herein, however, lies the danger. We may neglect conventional defence and deterrence. The decisive factor over the past few years has not been the strength of 'hybrid warfare', or any Russian overall military advantage, but the absence of western forces on the spot and in particular the lack of a credible threat to use them. Moscow could have been stopped by early action. If Mr Putin had been deterred from attacking Georgia, or put under such intense political, economic and military pressure as to force him to withdraw, then he would never have dared occupy Crimea. If the Americans, who must have seen the build-up on their satellites, had deployed naval forces to the Black Sea just before or immediately after the Russian incursion, while it was still being conducted at arm's length by Moscow, Putin's men could have been overpowered, probably without the use of firearms, and he would probably have disavowed them. He would then never have attacked eastern Ukraine. A similar confrontation at Pristina airport in 1999 at the end of the Kosovo crisis, saw NATO intervention to prevent reinforcements from reaching the Russian advance guard and a compromise solution. Failure to respond robustly in the early stages of this crisis, by contrast, has emboldened Mr Putin and led to a crisis, which has far from run its course.

The current danger is not that Russia will use hybrid warfare to take over the Baltic states - we are wise to that. It is that she will use the advantages of surprise with massive conventional force to present us with a fait accompli to which we cannot respond without embarking on an unacceptable escalation. We will have failed, not because Moscow has bamboozled us with 'measures short of war' but because we have failed a Cold War-style test of deterrence. In that sense, we must hold on to the old playbook, and quite a lot of the old equipment too.

The UK contribution here should be twofold. First, to recognise that Europe is the most important area of national security and that Russia constitutes the most serious challenge there. Secondly, to act on this realisation with the dispatch of substantial ground forces, including armour, to Poland and the Baltic states.

*Professor Simms is the author of Europe. The Struggle For Supremacy, 1453 To The Present (Allen Lane, 2013)*



*Infantry Fighting Vehicle Object 695, on a medium unified tracked platform Kurganets-25 on display for the first time at the Victory Parade 2015 rehearsal in Alabino training area. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*





*The back end of the formidable Topol Ballistic Missile System as seen at the Victory Day Parade rehearsal near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

# Russia's Nuclear Sword: The Strategic Missile Forces

*This article by Dr Steven J Main, originally published in BAR 167 Summer 2016, looks at Russia's intent behind their Strategic Missile Forces from open sources across the web.*

On 30th October 2015, the Russian TASS news agency reported that, as part of a planned test of the country's nuclear command and control system, a series of missile launches had taken place, involving a number of elements of the country's sea, land and airborne nuclear weapon systems. SLBMs were launched from the 'Briansk' (Northern Fleet) and 'Podol'sk (Pacific Fleet) submarine cruisers; ICBM (Topol) launched from the Cosmodrome at Plesetsk and 'Cruise' missiles were launched from strategic bombers - Tu-160 - operating from bases in the Komi Republic and Kamchatka.

Not only did the launches test both the men and the missiles but, as the reports also noted, so too was the country's entire nuclear command and control system, from the National Centre for Managing the Defence of the Russian Federation to the command posts of the various military units taking part in the planned exercise.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, on the exact same day as the planned launches were taking place, TASS also reported that Putin had chaired a meeting of the country's Security Council, at which he instructed the Council 'to prepare a system of contemporary views on security threats' facing the country, hinting that the security threats facing Russia had increased - probably as a consequence of Russia's actions both in relation to eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's air campaign in Syria - and that the country, despite the publication of a new Military Doctrine at the end of 2014, was already in need of a revised list of threats and how best to combat them.<sup>2</sup>

Given Russia's decision to mount an independent air campaign in the skies over Syria - regardless of Western criticism - to date, the campaign clearly demonstrates that not only does Russia possess the necessary conventional military capability to launch such an operation but, arguably even more important than that, the will to use military force in yet another attempt to advance, or protect, the country's national interests. The planned series of launches and Putin's instruction concerning the new series of threats facing the country, taken together, show that it is more important than ever that a fundamental examination of Russian material is conducted to ascertain, particularly in relation to Russia's nuclear 'sword' - the Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) - (Raketnye voiska strategicheskogo naznachenii) - the intent behind the weapons.

What follows, based on Russian open source material, is an examination of the country's current publicly stated nuclear posture (capability and doctrine). This should allow the reader a reasonable basis for him/her to answer the question: will Russia use its nuclear capability if the need arises? Given that the issue of 'Trident' renewal in Britain is fast becoming a very 'hot' political issue, in answering the earlier posed question, the

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1 'Korabli i podlodki VMF RF proveli boevye puskii v khode planovoi proverki sistemy upravleniia', (<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2392989>). 30-10-2015, accessed – 30/10/2015. For more on Russia's National Defence Management Centre, see 'Is Russia preparing for war?', *British Army Review*, 164, autumn 2015, 27-35

2 'Putin provedet zasedanie Sovbeza RF po yadernoi i khimicheskoi bezopasnosti strany' 30-10-2015, (<http://tass.ru/politika/2390769>). Accessed – 30/10/2015; 'Patrushev: Putin poruchil sformirovat' sistemu sovremennykh vzgliadov na ugrozy bezopasnosti', 30-10-2015 (<http://tass.ru/politika/2393215>). Accessed – 30/10/2015)



*The Iskander Ballistic Missile Launcher as seen at the Victory Day Parade 2013 rehearsal near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

reader may reassess the value of renewing Britain's nuclear deterrent in an increasingly fractious world.

According to the Russian MoD's official website, the Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) were created on 17th December 1959,<sup>3</sup> and are 'the main component of... the Strategic Nuclear Forces', (SNF), whose main purpose is 'nuclear containment [yadernoe sderzhivanie] of possible aggression and to strike [back] either as an element of SNF, or independently, or en masse, or single nuclear missile strikes at strategic targets...forming the basis of the enemy's military and military-economic potential.'<sup>4</sup>

Conditions concerning their potential use are to be found in the country's updated Military Doctrine (MD), formally approved by Putin on Christmas Day, 2014. In the section outlining the Russian state's formal position on the use of the country's nuclear arsenal, the MD stated that:

*The Russian Federation reserves itself the right to use nuclear weapons in response to their use against it and (or) its allies nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation using conventional weapons, placing under threat the very existence of the state. The decision to use nuclear weapons will be taken by the President of the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> *Khronika osnovnykh sobyitii istorii Raketnykh voisk strategicheskogo naznacheniia, (M.1994), 238-239*

<sup>4</sup> *Ministerstvo oborony Rossiyskoi Federatsii: raketnye voiska strategicheskogo naznacheniia, ([http://structure.mil.ru/structure/forces.strategic\\_rocket.htm?fid=null&print=true](http://structure.mil.ru/structure/forces.strategic_rocket.htm?fid=null&print=true). Accessed – 16/9/2015)*

<sup>5</sup> *'Voennaia doktrina Rossii', Krasnaia Zvezda, 13/11/2015*

Compared, however, to late Soviet nuclear strategy, Russian nuclear strategy would appear to have become more assertive in its stance on using nuclear weapons to defend the country. In a recent Russian analysis of the country's nuclear strategy, the Soviet emphasis on non-first use of nuclear weapons was outlined - as well as the reaction of the nuclear and non-nuclear actors of the time:

*....in the late Soviet period, official nuclear strategy was based on the principle of non-first use of this type of weapon against nuclear states and complete non-use of it against non-nuclear states (unless their territory was being used to launch a nuclear strike against the USSR). This principle, adopted by L I Brezhnev [the contemporary General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]...was met (especially amongst nuclear states ) abroad with disbelief. They considered it to be one of many tricks of Soviet foreign policy propaganda, one of the directions of the so-called 'Soviet peace offensive.'*<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the element of doubt would seem to have been removed from official pronouncements on the country's potential use of nuclear weapons: only when the very existence of the state is under real threat will the Russian President sanction their use. (Unless conventional weapons are used that could also threaten the existence of the state). This statement would appear to be clear and unambiguous. Of course, no nuclear deterrent can be effective unless the potential enemy believes that not only do you have the capability to inflict unacceptable damage to the opponent's military and civilian infrastructure, but also the will to unleash such calamitous destruction should the need arise.

As will be shown later, Russia certainly does have the capability but, public pronouncements aside, assessing the will is much harder to ascertain. The recent history of the SMF, as described by the SMF's own Commander, Colonel-General Sergei Viktorovich Karakayev,<sup>7</sup> may help us understand if the will and the intent are there for their potential use.

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<sup>6</sup> Konyshov, N., Sergunin, A.A., 'Sovremennaiia voennaia strategiiia', M.2014, 81

<sup>7</sup> Karakayev, Sergei Viktorovich; In 1983, he completed the Chief Marshal of Artillery M I Nedelin Rostov Higher Military Command-Engineering Academy. In 1994, he finished the F E Dzerzhinskiy Military Academy, in 2009, the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, (with distinction). April 2006, he was Commander of 27th Missile Army. October 2009 he became 1st Deputy Commander of SMF; June 2010- Commander of SMF. In August 2012 he was promoted to the rank of Colonel-General. Awarded Orders 'For Service to the Fatherland' (4th class); 'For Military Service', other medals. (sources: Voennaia elita Rossiyskoi Federatsii. Kratkiy entsiklopedicheskiy spravochnik, M.2014, 72; [http://astructure.mil.ru/management/types\\_of\\_troops/more.htm?id=10330373@sd\\_e...](http://astructure.mil.ru/management/types_of_troops/more.htm?id=10330373@sd_e...) <http://ria.org/spravka/20100622/2490112368.html>

*The business end of the Topol Intercontinental Ballistic Missile System as seen at the Victory Day Parade 2012 rehearsal near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*



During a detailed and lengthy interview Karakayev lost no time in outlining what he saw as the main role of the SMF in the more troubled periods in its recent history:

*....there were certain periods when, namely the might of the SMF preserved the Russian state on the political map, as well as the unique Russian world - on the earth. There is no need to kid ourselves [teshit' sebia] with hopes of the peace-loving [nature] and goodwill of those 'gentlemen', whose predecessors were the first to unleash nuclear weapons. They do not take into consideration the interests of unarmed states, they respect only strength. And from the second half of the 20th century - [only] nuclear strength.<sup>8</sup>*

This theme, that the SMF guarantees both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, is a fairly 'standard' line used by many previous Commanders of the SMF over decades. However, for the current generation of the SMF's senior military leadership, who have had to endure both the collapse of Soviet military might and the parlous state

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<sup>8</sup> Karakayev, S., 'Raketno-yaderniy obereg Rossii', Krasnaia Zvezda, 16/12/2014

of Russia's conventional military power throughout the 1990s-2000s, it must seem as a self-evident truth that had it not been for Russia's strategic, nuclear arsenal, Russia would have not survived intact over the past two decades. In a similar vein, Putin also remarked concerning the guarantee of Russian sovereignty provided by the country's nuclear arsenal:

*For 50 years [the remarks were made in 2013] they [SMF] have formed the basis of our defence capability...guaranteeing our sovereignty.<sup>9</sup>*

Russia has not, nor will it ever, rely on maintaining its security on the 'goodwill' of others. Thus, in understanding Russia's contemporary attitude towards maintaining and developing its nuclear arsenal, one has to remember that the weapons are viewed not simply as a deterrent to being attacked, but also as a vital element - if not the vital element - in guaranteeing Russia's very existence on the planet. As conventional military force eventually ensured Soviet military victory in The Second World War, for those commanders who were young officers at the time of the collapse of the USSR and who witnessed the deterioration in Russia's conventional military power, the SMF have no less a role, or importance, in guaranteeing Russia's geopolitical existence today, underlined by recent events in Russia's recent past. On top of this, it would also appear that Russia is not planning to give them up any time soon. According to one of the country's leading specialists on Russia's nuclear arsenal, Vasiliy Lata, the weapons are going to form an important part of Russia's military stance for many years to come:

*Nuclear weapons will hardly diminish in importance over the next 10-15 years and probably not for a long period of time.<sup>10</sup>*

In a more recently published statement on the importance of nuclear weapons to Russia, the emphasis was still firmly placed on Russia's nuclear weapons capability representing the country's final 'argument' in maintaining its sovereignty and power:

*....saving SMF-saved Russia. This assertion immediately becomes apparent when one reflects back on the historical miracle which saved our country on the threshold of the second and third millennia...namely our nuclear missiles, in the silos and on mobile platforms, capable of reaching any target on the globe, were at that time the final argument which had to be taken seriously.<sup>11</sup>*

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9 *Soveshchaniye po voprosam razvitiya RVSN'*, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 27-11-2013

10 *Khvastov, A.*, *'RVSN segodnia i zavtra'*, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 27-2-2014

11 *Tikhonov, A.*, *'Rakety dlia suvereniteta'*, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 15/12/2015

In short, the whole attitude towards the country's nuclear arsenal, both in the past and now, could almost be reduced to a simple formula: no nuclear weapons - no Russia. Moving on from outlining the overall importance of the SMF in Russia's most recent history, Karakayev outlined the importance of the SMF element in the SNF, as a whole:

*Today, the Strategic Missile Forces, as before, are the key component of the triad making up the Strategic Nuclear Forces of Russia, tasked, along with the other parts [of the triad] to containing aggression against Russia and its allies and, in the event of war, to destroying the objects of military and economic potential of the enemy by nuclear-missile strikes. The particular role of the SMF in the structure of the SNF is determined by a number of objective factors. The land-based strategic weapon systems are quicker and easier to create and made militarily effective. They have high indicators of combat use, operational-technical characteristics, safety in maintenance and use. The quantity, the ability to vary the type and power of the warheads, the high level of operational and technical readiness of the mobile complexes for combat use, the reliability of the command and control systems of the strategic weapons, the great robustness and durability of the weapons...enables SMF to solve the majority of tasks placed before Russia's SNF.<sup>12</sup>*

Further on in the interview, Karakayev expanded on both the men and the missile complexes that make up the SMF. He stated that approximately '6,000 people are at their duty combat stations on a daily basis' and that no less than '95% of the missile complexes are ready for a quick launch', should the need arise. Currently, SMF has 6 different types of missile complex - 3 silo-based and 3 based on mobile platforms. In terms of the strike power of the country's total nuclear force, SMF accounts for '2/3 of the total number of nuclear warheads.' On constant combat alert, currently, there are 400 ICBMs; in terms of the SMF's total number of warheads, the majority are silo-based, approximately 70% of the SMF's overall nuclear potential.<sup>13</sup>

Outlining the achievements of 2014, Karakayev described the ongoing modernisation programme:

*In 2014, we continued the rearming of the group [SMF] with the newest missile complexes, which have greatly enhanced methods of overcoming existing and future anti-missile defence measures. The troops received 16 'Yars' ICBMs: 12 of which are mobile-based and 4 silo-based.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Karakayev, 'Raketno-yaderniy obereg Rossii', Krasnaia Zvezda, 16/12/2014



*The Pantsir Erector Launcher Missile System as seen at the Victory Day Parade 2012 rehearsal near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*

Discussing future improvements, Karakayev underlined the state's commitment to further modernise and develop the forces under his command:

*The State Defence Order envisages the further development of the strike capability of the SMF... First of all...the [further] test-design work on the modern, strategic missile complex, 'Yars' will be completed. Secondly, there are plans to finish the experimental work on the testing of the silo-based 'Sarmat' missile complex. Thirdly, work will continue on creating*

*the rail-based missile complex, 'Barguzin.' Plans for 2015 included the delivery of a further 24 'Yars' ICBMs to SMF, as well as carrying out a further 14 test launches of the new missile.<sup>15</sup>*

Karakayev also reported that, by the end of 2014, half of the missile complexes making up the strike potential of the SMF were of 'the newest type.' However, this figure is set to rise to '100%' by the end of 2020.

Officially, SMF will undergo another intensive year of training in 2016: more than 100 exercises - of all types - are due to be held, all aimed at improving the 'habits' of the missile men and women, under conditions as close as possible to those of modern warfare. The year is also going to witness an increase in the number of 'snap' checks of the units, again designed to increase their overall combat readiness.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, at least judging by Russia's own figures, the SMF under Karakayev would appear to be not only well-equipped but set to become even stronger in the not too distant future. Whilst outlining Russia's plans to develop a rail-based ICBM system, ('Barguzin'), Karakayev also made a couple of passing references to the situation as regards Ukraine and Crimea. Even before the situation in eastern Ukraine soured relations between Ukraine and Russia, Russia had stopped using Ukraine to assist Russia in developing components for its planned rail-based ICBM system. In relation to Ukraine, as he simply put it, there is 'no plan' to base SMF forces in the peninsula, there being 'no necessity' for such a deployment. He underlined this point further by pointing out that the range of modern ICBMs did not make this necessary:

*The range of modern ballistic missiles allows targets to be attacked anywhere in the world...Thus [our] missile complexes are located deep within our territory, where they enjoy the maximum [possible] protection from the enemy's means of attack.<sup>17</sup>*

In a more recent statement, Karakayev has also ruled out the possibility of the weapons being used against ISIS.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the human element of SMF, Karakayev stated that, as reflected in the technical demands of the force, 'more than 98%' of its personnel have higher educational qualifications; the personnel are also comparatively young, average age being 31. The

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<sup>15</sup> Karakayev, *ibid.* An interesting report appeared in October last year, concerning Russia's possible deployment of 'false' SMF divisions, consisting of holographic 'Yars', 'V RVSN razrabatyvaiutsia lozhnye golograficheskie puskovye ustanovki PGRK, 'Yars', 5/10/2015, ([http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country\\_more.htm?id=12059623@News&\\_print=t...5/10/2015](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country_more.htm?id=12059623@News&_print=t...5/10/2015))

<sup>16</sup> 'V 2016 gody v RVSN znachitel'no uvelichitsia kolichestvo vnezapnykh proverok sostoiianiia bovoi gotovnosti', 1/12/2015, ([http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=1207628@egNews&-print=t...](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=1207628@egNews&-print=t...))

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> 'General-polkovnik Karakayev: amerikanskaia PRO ne mozhet protivostoiat' rossiyskim RVSN', 16/12/2015, (<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2533141>)

last autumn call-up into the ranks of the SMF would again clearly demonstrate that the SMF, as a whole, is staffed by extremely well-educated men and women. According to official figures, 25% of those called up had degrees - the highest figure ever recorded in the history of the SMF.<sup>19</sup> The number of contract personnel in the SMF is also increasing - doubling in the past three years alone.<sup>20</sup> The SMF also boasts fairly impressive training/educational facilities. The Peter the Great Strategic Missile Academy, for instance, is regularly assessed as being one of the best academies in the entire MoD network.<sup>21</sup> According to one official account, of 900 students who enrolled into the Academy in 2013, 95% gave a positive assessment of their time there. On top of that, again according to the same source, 98% of all officer vacancies in the SMF were filled.<sup>22</sup>

Towards the end of the interview, Karakayev once again emphasised the pivotal role of the SMF in guaranteeing Russia's national sovereignty in an ever-changing global military-political environment:

*Undoubtedly, the firmness and success of the political steps in strengthening Russia's position on the international stage is secured by its corresponding force potential. Taking into account the dynamically developing military-political situation in 2014, great attention was paid to the Missile Forces. It should be emphasised that the Missile Forces are supported by the required number of nuclear containment, combat ready in silos. More than 95% of the strike capability of SMF is maintained in readiness for immediate launch...Peace is maintained largely due to the fact that our country possesses nuclear weapons. Today, as in the past, the Strategic Rocket Forces are the real military force of our state and one of the fundamental instruments in maintaining its security.<sup>23</sup>*

As if to further underline this, reports appeared in late January 2016 that 10 SMF regiments were now at full combat readiness and that seven of the ten had been on field manoeuvres in various parts of Russia, as well as in the Altai and the Republic of Mari El.<sup>24</sup> We have been warned.

19 [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12073752@News&\\_print=t...](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12073752@News&_print=t...) 14/11/2016.

20 [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12073513@News&\\_print=t...](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12073513@News&_print=t...), 9/11/2016.

21 *Ibid.* The reputation of the Academy may, however, be under threat: the Academy has been forced to move from its previous site in central Moscow to a complex near the town of Balashikha, hours travelling distance from Moscow itself. The move has been widely condemned by a number of specialists, who now fear the impact the move could have on the country's overall defence capability in the short-to medium-term, (N Kotlovitsev, R Markitan, V Sredin, A Raskolov, 'Okhopta na Akademiiu', VPK, no.14, (580), 15-21 April 2015, 4; R Markitan, A Rassolov, 'Vezhliyiv raketniy Pinok', VPK, no.16, (582), 29 April-12 May 2015, 4; 'V Balashiku pereekhala akademiya RVSN imeni Petra Velikogo', 17/9/2015, [http://www.vbalashihe.ru/news/news/?php?news\\_id=24791](http://www.vbalashihe.ru/news/news/?php?news_id=24791)

22 Khvastov, A., "Sarmat" na smenu "Voevode", Krasnaia Zvezda, 19/12/2013

23 Karakayev, 'Raketno-yaderniy obereg Rossii', Krasnaia Zvezda, 16/12/2014

24 'Desiat' polkov RVSN priveli v vysshie stepeni boegotovnosti,' 26/1/2016 (<http://tass.ru/armia-i-opk/2614459>)





*The Russian S-400 Missile Erector Launcher System known as Triumph as seen at the Victory Day Parade 2012 rehearsal near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kusmin, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*



*4th Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division, part of the Western Military District, on exercises. This T-80 prepares firing 12.7 mm machine gun NSVT. Photo Vitaly V. Kuzmin, [www.vitalykuzmin.net](http://www.vitalykuzmin.net), Creative Commons Attribution – Share Alike 4.0 International License, Wikimedia*

# Operational Strategic Command - the Western Military District (MD)

*This article by Dr Steven J. Main was originally published in BAR 168 Winter 2017 and it analyses the creation and command structure of the Russian Western Military District.*

Russia's recent military actions over the past couple of years have forced the West to ask a number of uncomfortable questions: will Russia resort ever more increasingly to military force to solve external/internal security issues? Will the West still undervalue, or overestimate, the influence and scope of Russian military power? What follows below, exclusively based on open Russian source material, is an examination and assessment of the command and forces currently (April 2016) making up one of five of Russia's operational/strategic commands: the Western Military District (MD). For those in the know, it should provide extra valuable information to make a correct assessment of the exact composition of the Russian military challenge facing the West in Europe; for those not in that position, it should hopefully open their eyes to the reality of the Russian military machine physically based in those areas bordering a number of NATO member states.

## Creation

The Western MD came into being following the publication of presidential decree, No. 1144, 'on the military-administrative division of the Russian Federation', dated 20th September 2010.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the Western MD consisted of troops and forces of the former Moscow and Leningrad MDs, the Northern and Baltic Fleets, 1st Command of the Air Force and Air Defence, as well as all the military units subordinate to the control of the MoD Russian Federation (RF) (including units of the Railway Troops). In its 'zone of responsibility' are 30 constitutional areas ('sub'ekty') of the RF (making 13.72% of Russia's landmass, with a total population in excess of 50.5 million, in other words, more than 1/3 of the country's total population. This is the most significant MD of Russia.<sup>2</sup> As it is an operational-strategic command, the Western MD Commander has operational control of all MVD Interior Ministry Troops, FSB Border Guard Troops, Emergency Situation Troops (MChS), as well as all other relevant units of other government ministries and departments, operating within the Western MD's 'zone of responsibility', (including the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Pridnestr region of Moldova).<sup>3</sup> In terms of its land borders, the Western MD has hundreds of kilometres of border with a number of NATO member-states (Norway, Estonia, Latvia) as well as with Finland, Ukraine and Belarus'. As Kaliningrad oblast' is also part of the MD, this means that, technically speaking, the MD also shares a common border with another two NATO member-states, namely Lithuania and Poland. If nothing else, this further adds to the interest of the MD for a

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1 *Miranovich, G., Pochiniuk, O., 'Severo-zapadnyy rubezh', Krasnaia Zvezda, 6/3/20102.*

2 *Miranovich, ibid. Since December 2014, the Northern Fleet has been transferred from the Western MD command and is now the main command organ for the newly-created operational-strategic command, 'Sever', (Morskoi sbornik, 2, 2015, 11).*

3 *Miranovich, ibid.*



Western Military District HQ Building in St Petersburg. Photo Andrew Butko, GNU Free Documentation License, Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike 3.0 Unported License, Wikimedia

Western audience. In the words of one Russian analyst ‘without fear of exaggeration, one can say that it [Western MD] is Russia’s leading edge.’<sup>4</sup>

### **Early Days**

Appointed by presidential decree, dated 28th October 2010, the first Commander of the MD was Colonel-General Arkady Viktotovich Bakhin, himself a native of Lithuania. 15 months after assuming command, Bakhin had this to say about the MD’s early history:

*...the exercises and manoeuvres undertaken during the first year of existence of the Western MD showed that the combat potential of the intra-departmental group of troops and forces, created within the district, were able to adequately react to the emerging threats in the region by using ground, naval and air force components. During the first year of operations of the Western MD, more than 3,000 exercises and manoeuvres were conducted. Pilots doubled their flying time. During this*

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4 *Ibid.*

*period, particular attention was paid, during the combat and operational preparation, to working out methods of joint operations of both combined ground force units, naval, Air Force/PVO and parachute units.<sup>5</sup>*

Although the word was not used by Bakhin, already one can detect a new 'intensity' being shown by the forces deployed in the Western MD, the word itself having now become very much a part of the every day lexicon of the reformed Russian Armed Forces. Bakhin described the early thinking behind the reform being carried out in the MD:

*..it was necessary to gather together in one fist [my emphasis] all the various troops and forces, to smooth out a system of control so that all the forces and means (including the nuclear element) would be able to cooperate [together] in a regime of real time...Probably it is still too early to assert, and I will not take on the responsibility of doing so, that the cooperation of the commanders and staffs of the various forces in the District is as smooth as it should be...However, the main thing, and this is the common opinion, has been achieved: a principally new organ of military control has been created – the unified strategic command (USC 'West') , in which is concentrated all the forces and means, designed for joint operations in the Western strategic axis ['napravlenii']<sup>6</sup>*

As will be shown below, given subsequent events, it certainly would appear that Bakhin was correct in his initial assessment of the work undertaken in the first couple of years of the operation of the Western MD: as the intensity and depth of the military exercises continues unabated. The Western MD may be the 'lead' MD, in some respects, in terms of the practical implementation of the military reform conducted in the past 3 years, in particular, but it would be foolhardy for us in the West to assume that such 'intensity' was not being carried out in Russia's other operational-strategic commands (most notably in the 'North' and the 'South' for obvious geo-political concerns) and work should be undertaken, as a matter of some urgency, to analyse what has been going on in the other commands, thereby allowing us the possibility of better understanding of - and reacting to - any subsequent shifts in Russia's geopolitical stance, either in Europe, or on the wider global stage.

### **Post-Bakhin (2012-2016)- Sidorov and Kartapolov**

Following Shoigu's appointment as Minister of Defence in November 2012, Bakhin was promoted to the post of First Minister of Defence with responsibility, amongst other

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<sup>5</sup> *Miranovich, ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

things, for combat training in the Armed Forces.<sup>7</sup> This obviously meant a change in the command structure of the Western MD: appointed to (temporarily) head the MD was Lieutenant-General Anatoliy Alekseyevich Sidorov, (by December of that year, however, the appointment was made permanent).<sup>8</sup> Sidorov has an interesting military career, having seen active military service both in Afghanistan and in Chechnya. Indeed, similar to Bakhin, he is also on the official Ukraine sanctions list for his participation in the plan to annex Crimea in early 2014.<sup>9</sup> Before leaving the Western MD late last year, Sidorov made an important presentation to a military-scientific conference held in Moscow earlier in the year. Since it was a presentation analysing Russian perceptions of the threat in the West, it is worthy of examination and may help the reader better understand Russian current military thinking on the threat from NATO in Russia's strategic hinterland.<sup>10</sup>

Sidorov did not lose any time in describing Russia's current geopolitical condition:

*....an analysis of the activities of the USA and Western countries shows that, against the Russian Federation, is being conducted the first phase of a hybrid war, consisting of a thought-out destabilisation of the internal political situation of the state by a [variety] of political and economic measures, [using] international and European structures under their [USA and Western countries] control. The USA, using as an excuse, the increase in the intensity of measures of operational and combat readiness of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the Western strategic axis, as well as the reunification of the Crimea, are creating an image of Russia as an aggressor to European states. Within the parameters of the NATO operation, 'Atlantic Readiness', the military presence of the Alliance in Eastern Europe has increased significantly. The anti-Russian course of the military political leadership of the Baltic countries has allowed the additional deployment of leading groups from 3 motorized division of the US Ground Forces on the territory of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, an additional 1,000 men...On top of that, the situation in the region is marked by the conduct of an information campaign, whose fundamental aim is the development in society of a solid, anti-Russian mood.<sup>11</sup>*

7 Shoigu, Sergei Kuzhugetovich: *Ministr oborony*, (<http://structure.mil.ru/management/minister.htm?fid=1&print=true> Accessed 18/4/2016; Bakhin, Arkady Viktorovich ([https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%BD,\\_%D...](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%BD,_%D...)) Accessed -8/4/2016; *Voennaya elita Rossiyskoi Federatsii. Kratkiy entsiklopedicheskiy spravochnik*, M.2014, 140.

8 *Na strazhe Rodiny*, 1/12/2012; *Na strazhe Rodiny*, 29/12/2012.

9 Sidorov, Anatoliy Alekseyevich (<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%80%D0...>). Accessed - 15/4/2016.

10 Colonel-General A A Sidorov, 'Karakter ugroz voennoi bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii na Zapadnom strategicheskome napravlenii i sposoby protivodeistviia im vo vzaimodeistvii s ob'edinennym strategicheskim komandovaniem Severnogo flota', *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, no.2 (51) 2015, 40-42.

11 Sidorov, *ibid.*, 40.

And if this was not enough, Sidorov also outlined the activities of the 'non-friends' - countries like Sweden, Finland, Moldova - and continuing attempts by both the USA and the European Union 'to turn' Belarus' - 'our most steadfast ally in Europe' - against Russia.<sup>12</sup> Vital to Russia's long term economic prosperity and, therefore, the country's political stability, Sidorov outlined the military threat to the Arctic:

*....the main threats to the military security of the RF in the Arctic Ocean region continue to remain the possibility of territorial claims, by other states, to the Russian shelf, as well as the status of the Northern Sea Route. On top of that, the military-political leadership of the USA, Norway and a number of other states, have already declared their plans concerning increasing their military presence in the Arctic, which could lead to a breach in the existing balance of forces in the region, including strategic weapons.<sup>13</sup>*

Thus, on the face of things, from a Russian perspective, the situation would appear to look pretty grim and, given Russia's inherent distrust of many things emanating from the West, Sidorov's publicly stated views, like those of his successor examined below, would appear to be indicative of many held by the country's senior military-political leadership. This being the case, although many in the West would not accept such views, we do, at least, need to try and understand them. From the little bit of Russia, sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland - Kaliningrad oblast' - to its not inconsiderable border with a number of NATO states in the West and, at the time of Sidorov's presentation, Russia's Arctic territory, in the mind-set of the senior Russian military, Russia is being 'hemmed in' and the subject, already, of what Sidorov et al. would argue is in the first phase of the 'hybrid war' being conducted against the state. Should the situation deteriorate further, Sidorov outlined what the next course of action should be for the forces in the Western MD:

*...in the period of direct preparation for, and repulsion of, aggression, it will be necessary to undertake the following: transfer of the troops (forces) of the Western Military District to the corresponding level of combat readiness; maintain a state of martial law; putting into effect steps for territorial defence, as well as carrying out, within the established order, measures for civil defence; deploying groups to the areas most under threat; repulsing mass missile-air strikes of the probable enemy, liquidating the means of air attack, directed against*

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<sup>12</sup> Sidorov, *ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> Sidorov, *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

*those targets, located in the heart of the European part of the Russian Federation.*<sup>14</sup>

No timetable given, obviously, so it is impossible to assess how much time Sidorov thought would be necessary to put all of the above into effect. Certainly, as will be shown below, the Western MD would appear to have improved its performance considerably through the use of 'snap' inspections, better training facilities, better kit, etc. It would also appear to be the case - briefly touched upon earlier - that the Russian soldier now spends more time learning what he needs to know in order to be able to carry out his primary duty of 'defending' Russia. Given Russia's current level of military activity, it would be fair to assume that the West is facing a very different military force compared to the one 5, never mind 10, years ago and part of the credit for that must belong to men like Sidorov and Bakhin who, having been through combat, knew first-hand in what ways the Russian Army needed to reform to become an effective fighting force.

September 2015 brought mixed results for Sidorov, not only was he included on Ukraine's sanction list, but at a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, his candidature for the post of Chief of Staff of the Unified Staff HQ of the organisation was unanimously approved. On 10th November 2015, Putin signed the relevant decree and Sidorov took up his new appointment on 23rd November 2015.<sup>15</sup>

### **Kartapolov, Andrey Valerievich**

Following on from Sidorov's promotion, the Western MD was not to remain in want of a new leader for long: on 10th November 2015, Putin signed the decree appointing the former Chief of the Main Operations directorate, deputy-chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General A V Kartapolov to the post.<sup>16</sup> Kartapolov had been a previous Chief of Staff of the Western MD back in 2013-2014, but came to more prominent attention more recently as one of the main spokesmen for the Russian Armed Forces in describing to the media the Russian air campaign in Syria.

In his address to the assembled military and civilian staff, Shoigu outlined a number of the qualities of the new Commander:

*Andrey Valerievich is well known in the Armed Forces. In his service record - responsible posts in the Far Eastern, Siberian, North Caucasus and Western regions. He has passed through all the ranks from commander of motor rifle squad to command of the largest combat army.*

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sidorov, Anatoliy Alekseyevich... ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Minstr oborony predstavil novogo komadiushchego', Na strazhe Rodiny, No.44, 27/11/2015; [http://structure.mil.ru/management/info.htm?id=11960036@SD\\_Employee&\\_print=tr...](http://structure.mil.ru/management/info.htm?id=11960036@SD_Employee&_print=tr...) Accessed-18/4/2016.



*Colonel-General Kartapolov, head of the Western Military District, 2016. Photo, Mil.ru, Ministry of the Russian Federation, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence, Wikimedia*

*He has been Chief of Staff-1st deputy commander of the Western MD, acquired the experience of solving complicated and responsible tasks, placed in front of a Unified strategic command. In June 2014, Andrey Valerievich headed the Main Operations directorate of the General Staff. This burden coincided with the period of the intense conduct of strategic exercises and snap inspections of combat readiness of the Armed Forces. He showed himself to be a skilled military leader with a broad operational outlook. The successful actions of our group in Syria - this is his work.<sup>17</sup>*

Of course, how much credit can be given to Kartapolov for his contribution to the 'success' of Russia's air campaign in Syria, only time can tell but, what can be in little doubt, is that the new Commander of the Western MD is a 'thinker', as well as a practitioner. Addressing the same conference as Sidorov last year, Kartapolov's presentation outlined his views on the nature of recent conflict and the potential course of future conflict and represents the single, most comprehensive and publicly accessible statement of Kartapolov's views on the subject. As such, it is worthy of detailed examination.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Kartapolov, Andrey Valerievich Lieutenant-General 'Uroki voennykh konfliktov, perspektivy razvitiia sredstv i sposobov ikh vedeniia. Priamyie i nepriamyie deystviia v sovremennykh mezhdunarodnykh konfliktakh,' (Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk, No. 2(51), 2015, 26-36.*

He began his presentation, emphasising economics as one of the main causes leading to conflict amongst the country's leading states:

*...historical experience shows that, at the heart of practically all modern international conflict lies the economic interests of the world's leading states. At the present time, in conditions of a reduction in the quantities of natural resources and climate change, the economically advanced states strive to gain access to the energy resources of other countries by all accessible means.<sup>19</sup>*

This being the case, what he terms as 'the state-aggressor' piles on pressure on 'the state-victim', using 'non-traditional means of conflict':

*....the state-aggressor puts pressure on the state-victim, more and more often using non-traditional method of conflict...with the aim of securing legitimacy for the unleashing of military conflict.<sup>20</sup>*

He proceeded to outline the 'elements' in the overall process eventually leading to conflict:

*....first of all, the state-victim is chosen. Then you think through, organise and present to the international community more or less incontestable evidence proving the threat to international security, emanating from this state. An active information campaign is waged, the aim of which is to convince the international community that there is no alternative to the use of military force. In relation to the opponent-state, sanctions are imposed. On those countries, opposing the policies of the Western countries in the region of the conflict, political, economic and other forms of pressure are applied. A coalition of interested states is formed, ready to use their armed forces in order to achieve their aims...Groups of troops (forces) are created in the area of the future armed conflict. A decision of the UN's Security Council for the use of military force is achieved. The last condition is becoming more and more often not compulsory. Examples of the deployment of such a scenario have been the military operations of interested states against Iraq and Libya. Today, the countries of the West have positioned themselves in the position of the main 'architects'*

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<sup>19</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 26.

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

*of the international relations system and the USA - the world's sole 'super power'. This stance was reflected in the renewed national security strategy of the USA, which was presented to the American Congress by President Obama on 6th February this year.<sup>21</sup>*

This may seem at best, a very cynical approach to contemporary international relations over the past 20 years or, at worse, a sign of the increasing mis-match between the way we approach the world and the way the Russians approach the world. However, this should not be used as an excuse either not to examine their position on world issues, or attempt to explain, as best we can, why Russia adopts a certain course of action, directly contrary to our own. *We cannot hope to understand their position, if we do not, at least, make an effort to find out what it is.*

Immediately following on from his brief description of the scenario unfolding between the 'state-aggressor' and the 'state-victim', Kartapolov made an odd statement:

*...however, not all states, including Russia, have the possibility of conducting an equal military struggle [‘ravnopravnoe voennoe protivoborstvo’] with the American armed forces.<sup>22</sup>*

He then accused the US of conducting a policy of 'strategic containment' against Russia, designed to, 'at any price maintain its [USA] leading geopolitical and economic position, not allowing the creation of new centres of power.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 26, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

*Tactical exercises of 137th Guards Airborne Order of the Red Star Regiment 106th Guards Airborne Division.  
Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, Wikimedia*



So, the Western powers combined are, more or less, in cahoots with one another to ensure that Russia stays within its own borders and thwart any other country's right to challenge the global hegemony of the USA. In many ways, this is 'old thinking', an idea further underlined a few sentences later when he accuses the USA of using tactics from the era of the Cold War:

*demonisation of the opponent, break in communications, knitting together of an ideological campaign, advancement of American and NATO infrastructure to our borders, unleashing an arms race, manipulation of the energy markets, involving us in smouldering, regional conflicts.*<sup>24</sup>

Hard to imagine, given the current leadership in control, Russia becoming involved in a conflict that it had no desire to be involved in. There is a growing call for Russian soldiers to fight, in effect, solely for Russia's interests as defined by the state itself, so it is difficult to imagine exactly what Kartapolov has in mind when he writes about 'smouldering regional conflicts', unless he means the situation, for example, in the Russian South? However, a strong argument could be made that in relation to the Caucasus, Ukraine, Moldova, etc. Russia is pursuing its own very distinctive aims in the region.

Emphasising the 'fact' that the USA and its allies have used military force on more than 50 occasions 'in recent decades', Kartapolov, also made a clear correlation between the USA and its allies subverting countries not through direct military pressure, but by employing other 'means of influence':

*...in modern military conflicts more and more apparent is the tendency, when their [USA and its allies] aim is not the physical liquidation of the enemy or the infrastructure of the state, but the complete subjugation of the leadership and the elite to their [USA and its allies] will. This is achieved by various technologies and means of influence.*<sup>25</sup>

Thus, regardless of the actual reality of events on the ground, Kartapolov made the case that the USA and NATO's leading member-states are actively employing new 'hybrid' methods of warfare:

*...the USA and the other leading countries of NATO for 20 years have already actively practised 'hybrid methods' in the interest of achieving*

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 28.

*their military-strategic aims in different parts of the world. This became especially more evident after the operation conducted by the Russian Federation forcing Georgia to peace in 2008, when certain Western countries were sharply critical of NATO in the inadequacy of its methods of inter-state conflict to contain Russia.<sup>26</sup>*

Kartapolov is convinced that, using non-direct methods of force will allow the USA to achieve two of its long-term goals:

*...rock the economy of our country by the blows of sanctions and hinder the strengthening of the independent activity of the European Union and its main 'locomotives' - Germany and France.<sup>27</sup>*

Differentiating the classical forms of warfare from the new, 'indirect' forms of warfare, Kartapolov argues that 'the essence' of the 'indirect' forms of warfare 'lies in their hidden influence, directed at inflaming internal contradictions in the state of the opponent, or in making use of 'third force.'<sup>28</sup>

In his evaluation of the practice of 'indirect operations' in modern conflict, Kartapolov noted one particularly important feature, the lack of open hostility:

*...the peculiarity of indirect operations is that, on the eve of war, there may be no hostility between the conflicting sides. But certain third parties, either from inside or from the outside, artificially form and fan the flames of discourse, and then incite the sides to military conflict in their own interests.<sup>29</sup>*

Kartapolov expanded on what he understood by the phrase, 'third parties/third force' ['tret'le sily']:

*individual countries, or blocs of states, influential international organisations, trans-national companies, individual political forces within the state, international extremist organisations - anyone interested in such a war, he who gains most from it.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Not a long list, but a fairly comprehensive one. It fits a whole range of potential 'enemies' to the state. Since, in his analysis, there must be someone who has the power to 'order' such a turn of events, he described the 'customer':

*such a 'customer' ['zakazchik'] does not rush to the direct use of force: he tries to secure his interests, operating 'behind the wings', egging the conflicting sides to active hostile actions, feeding one side, or the other, with money, weapons, advisers, information. The true role, place, interests and aims of the 'customer' are removed from the public's attention, hidden behind an 'information barrage' in the form of political campaigns about violations of human rights, production of weapons of mass destruction or the lack of democracy.<sup>31</sup>*

It could be mere coincidence but, in the next paragraph, he discussed the role of the US law 'on supporting the freedom of Ukraine', the activity of NGOs in Russia, helping 'to disorganise the national development of Russia.'<sup>32</sup> With further reference to events



*Member of the 45th Separate Reconnaissance Unit demonstrate their skills in the Wings of Victory Airborne Forces demonstration in Kubinka, 2008. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, Wikimedia*

<sup>31</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

in Ukraine, Kartapolov saw the effect of information war being 'comparable with the results of a large-scale use of troops and forces.'<sup>33</sup> He also emphasised the 'twenty year campaign of 'hate towards the Russian language and the Russian people by the modern Ukrainophiles' that, in his opinion, 'has led to a whole generation of people, radically predisposed against Russian culture and Russia.'<sup>34</sup>

We would be wise not to dismiss such views out of hand: we may find them uncomfortable to read but, given the position of the author and the intellectual level of the audience he was addressing, we would compound his error by ignoring such views, or dismissing them out of hand. In expanding his overall thesis about the importance of information as a tool of the new type of war now being fought, Kartapolov made an important point about the delay, shown by various leaderships, to the rapidly unfolding nature of events taking place:

*...a peculiar feature of the developing conflict is that the leadership and population of the state-victim, under the influence of the information pressure, do not realise at once what is happening...The uncertain attempts by the political leadership to stabilise the situation in the country often end in failure. In conditions of the lack of outside aggression, inside the state suddenly appear 'peaceful' meetings, demonstrations and anti-government actions of resistance of opposition forces. In this situation, the government is placed in a very difficult situation. There haven't been such types of war before, and how [best] to react to 'peaceful' demonstrations of your own people-very difficult to determine.<sup>35</sup>*

This led him to assert that the 'frontline' now goes through 'the consciousness of the public and inside the head of every person.'<sup>36</sup> In this sense, non-government organisations can be used as a cover for the activities of those wishing to undermine, if not overthrow, the ruling regime:

*...the region of conflict or military operations is flooded by representatives of a multitude of various international and foreign non-government organisations - humanitarian, medical, social, legal. Under their cover can operate foreign intelligence services, provocateurs and bandits of all hues. As a result, it is difficult to understand who is fighting for what, where is the truth and where is the lie.<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 31.

Again, we may find such views hard to understand, but they do clearly show that, in their analysis of military conflict, both current and future, the Russians have their own distinctive view and, unless we understand the essence of what the differences are, then the West will continue to be 'caught out' by Russia's future interventions in the affairs of others. Pointing out that the vast majority of victims of this new type of warfare are civilians, Kartapolov draws the inevitable conclusion and a bitter historical parallel:

*...modern war more clearly assumes the character of genocide - mass liquidation of the population, the bitter experience of which our people endured during the Great Patriotic War.<sup>38</sup>*

Similar in thought, almost in word, to a famous pre-WW2 Soviet military theorist - G I Isserson - Kartapolov made the obvious distinction between this new type of warfare and the 'classical' type of years gone by:

*..as different from classical operations in previous wars with a diplomatic note at the beginning of the war and a peace treaty at the end of it, wars of the new type are never announced and never end.<sup>39</sup>*

Further comparing and contrasting the two very different approaches to war, Kartapolov stated that:

*..the classical war of the XX century usually consisted of 80% force, 20% propaganda. Wars of the new type are 80-90% propaganda and 10-20% force.<sup>40</sup>*

But there was still an important place for the conduct of 'classical' military operations:

*...in spite of the cardinal changes in the means of the conduct of modern military conflict, one cannot forget or ignore the classical operations in conducting war...During the course of holding exercises...still great attention should be paid...to raid operations, seizing the commanding heights, conducting operations on encircling and carving up the enemy, tank strikes... But the most important thing in all of this is the principle of activeness in operations, regardless of whether it is offensive or defensive. The passive*

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* For more on this particular theme, see Steven J Main, "You cannot generate ideas by orders: the continuing importance of studying Soviet military history – G.S.Isserson and Russia's current geo-political stance", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2016, vol.29, 48-72.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



*Demonstration of recon battalion of 2nd Guards Tamanskaya Motor Rifle Division in 2014 at the Alabino Training Centre near Moscow. Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, Wikimedia*

*conduct of combat operations...will inevitably lead to a loss of control of your own groups [of forces] and, eventually - defeat.<sup>41</sup>*

In short, the Russian Armed Forces have to be ready for all types of conflict:

*...in these difficult conditions, the Russian Armed Forces have to be ready for operations in all types of armed conflict, threatening the security of*

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

*the Russian Federation, regardless of their complexity, scale and use of weapons. At the present moment in time, all the necessary decisions taken to improve combat capabilities of the army and the navy have been taken and are being put into effect.<sup>42</sup>*

## **Conclusion**

The Western MD has been and is commanded by men with previous combat experience, who have a very definite and different world view than their equivalent NATO opposite numbers. As such, their views have to be examined, analysed and understood so that, in the future, Western military and political leaders are not taken by total surprise by future Russian military action, particularly within Europe. The views quoted here may leave us wondering what the ultimate end game is, as viewed by Russia's senior military command in the West. Is Russia preparing for unleashing the new type of war, or laying the groundwork in order to protect itself against the new threats to its national security? Should such views frighten us, give us food for thought, or should we continue to ignore them as part of an agenda, which we cannot hope to understand?

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<sup>42</sup> Kartapolov, *ibid.*, 35.



*Open water competition was held on 6th August in Vladimir oblast east of Moscow in the WMD. Here T 80 tanks come ashore. Russian team took the first place, China was the second and Serbian team was the third.  
Photo Vitaly V Kuzmin, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence, Wikimedia*



*Berkut guards man a entrance checkpoint to the Crimea Peninsula, March 10, 2014. Photo Sasha Maksymenko, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License, Wikimedia.*

# Russia's Security Establishment: Towards Understanding Russia's Actions?

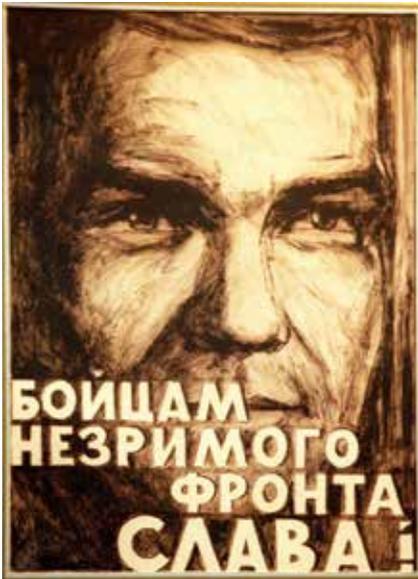
*This article by Andra-Lucia Martinescu, Former Research Fellow at CHACR, was originally published in BAR 168 Winter 2017, and it explores Russia's internal power politics, focusing on its security, military and intelligence establishments.*

Active measures (aktivka) of espionage, political subversion or even targeted assassinations abound throughout Russia's history. Yet, it is the prevalence and worrisome expansion of such practices on the European mainland, and beyond, that should raise concerns. Russia's pervasive security and intelligence apparatus controls a vast tactical 'arsenal', unrestrainedly deployed to serve a geopolitical vision that mirrors the Kremlin's immediate interests. By generating instability abroad, Russia's security bureaucracy thrives and survives internally.

In a similar way, President Vladimir Putin's regime 'feeds' on external threats - an encroachment of Russia's interests, its vital spheres of influence, borders or nationhood - to compensate for domestic deficiencies. The use of threat, however, is not new and its roots can be traced historically. Tsarist Russia exhibited a similar siege mentality, whereby the acute perception of external and internal threats inflicted a permanent state of emergency, which in turn, required extraordinary measures of control. At a larger scale, the Soviet bureaucracy relied on similar mechanisms to identify, manipulate and eliminate dissent. Internal repression (the systematic targeting of political opposition or perceived 'enemies') and external destabilisation function as two facets of the same coin - a means of safeguarding the system of privileges and favouritism that devolves from the seat of power to its patrimonial networks. That is, maintaining the leadership's established interests and practices unchallenged.

Today, old practices resurface under new guises. To sustain this almost permanent and politically opportunistic siege mentality, the Kremlin's numerous and often-overlapping 'special services' pursue economic and political destabilisation through various methods spanning from non-military measures (propaganda) to covert military operations and the 'implausibly deniable' aktivka (active measures). These actions serve the short-term or intermediate goals of those who have consolidated, and wish to further consolidate, their grip on power - clusters of loyalists, the siloviki who, like the President, share a background in the military, security or intelligence services. They reinforce, execute and (at times) partake in the informal, yet highly centralised decision-making - the power vertikal. By and large, Russia's deep-rooted state-security tradition governs both domestic and foreign policies.

Hence, the systemic connection between foreign policy and internal politics should not be underestimated. On the contrary, a brief foray into Russia's institutional power politics will point to an autocratic regime that uses its various capabilities and institutions to strengthen its own domestic power base. There is indeed a blurred delineation between internal and external aims. For example, Vladimir Putin's leadership met high approval ratings following the 2nd Chechen war (2003), after the Georgian campaign in 2008, and more recently after Crimea's annexation. As one astute observer noted, it seems that he 'is pitching military victories to maintain legitimacy'. It is not the accuracy of this statement that matters but rather what it alludes to - tactics do not necessarily



*Showpiece of the exhibition dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Russian foreign intelligence service. The Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 at Poklonnaya Mount, December 2000. Photo RIA Novosti archive, image #654319 / Dmitry Korobeinikov / CC-BY-SA 3.0, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Wikimedia*

inform a long-term strategic outlook, but are essentially conflated with political opportunism. Although Vladimir Putin unleashed the agencies' overarching control, the security and intelligence establishment is far more divided, with various branches competing for resources, influence and access to the Kremlin's power structures. Survival in Darwinian terms has become the norm.

### **A Post-Soviet History of Security and Intelligence**

In the post-Soviet era, the security establishment has gained new scope and impetus. Paradoxically, this is both a successful continuation of a Soviet-style 'cadre policy' and a departure from the Soviet political model. The KGB was the Communist Party's (CP) 'sword and shield' or 'combat division', a state within a state, but with no authority over decision-making. In delivering the Politburo's (the CP's main decision-making body) surveillance and repression functions, the KGB (and its predecessors) had built a vast infrastructure of cadres (operatives and collaborators) infiltrated in key strategic positions, and essentially all walks of life. These penetrative tactics were maintained by the KGB's successor organisations whose power, influence and pervasiveness increased with Vladimir Putin's coming to power. Thus, there is a clear continuity in both practice and ideology between the former KGB and the post-Soviet security services.

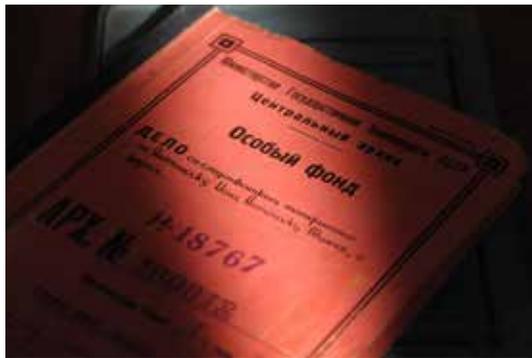
The dissolution of the Soviet Union fostered some hope that a democratic outlook would replace the 'old ways'. Following glasnost and perestroika politics of liberalisation and a rise of opposition forces, however timid, created a historic opportunity for the KGB's liquidation. Instead, chaos and instability settled in. Cutbacks in defence budgets temporarily suspended the agency's reach, but reforms lacked actual intent and structural depth. As President Boris Yeltsin admitted at the time, 'the system of political police has been preserved and could be resurrected'. Though he failed to dismantle the KGB altogether, his prophecy has been painfully validated decades later. The security establishment is more powerful today than it was in the past.

Symptomatic of a shared optimism that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, many (including Western leaders) placed their trust in President Boris Yeltsin's reformist impulses. His mandates, however, were marred by deep running tensions between a nominal ambition for democratisation and the parallel intent of maintaining personal power and control over all-state operations. Although Yeltsin had a decisive role in dismantling the Communist Party and severing the planned economy, his authoritarian tendencies coupled with political bankruptcy and abuse of power undermined any meaningful changes. Ultimately, the structural weaknesses that characterised Russia's 'democratic and economic' transition provided fertile ground for the security services' reinvigorated monopoly.

Attempts at reforming or even legalising the former KGB proved superficial. Despite its formal dissolution the agency survived, not in name but in ethos. The First Chief Directorate tasked with espionage was spun off into a separate intelligence service, the FSK, subsequently renamed the FSB. Other branches were also divided into several autonomous institutions. The KGB's organisational culture remained very much alive, although the KGB corps was largely excluded from the post-Soviet redistribution of assets, which at the beginning of the 1990s led to the meteoric rise of a new, politically opportunistic oligarchic elite. In an unstable climate plagued by rampant criminality, this new elite sought to safeguard its fortunes. High and low ranking officers (from the former KGB or its spinoffs) entered the service of the nouveau riche as private security consultants in charge of corporate security departments, or even bodyguards. As cohorts of agents effectively migrated to the private sphere, the negative impact on intelligence assets and their recruitment proved severe. It was a serious, and equally humiliating, blow given the KGB's heavy reliance on its human resources.

To understand the recentralisation of power and return to authoritarianism one must look at the failures and frustrations cumulated during the spurious attempts at reform. Rife with the influence of criminal networks, Boris Yeltsin's bid to privatise state assets and strategic resources spiralled into widespread instability. The 'shock therapy' market reforms failed to deliver results, promoting instead very few politically endorsed groups

(mostly the President's circles of trustees) that siphoned state-resources at the expense of a generally impoverished population. These manifold administrative and economic inefficiencies, nepotism and rampant corruption deepened public discontent. Towards the end of his second mandate, Yeltsin believed that reviving a strong-handed security establishment would help restore law and order. A (then) relatively unknown figure, Vladimir Putin (former KGB operative and director of the FSB) was groomed to become his successor. Unlike his predecessor, Putin believed that the Soviet Union's demise was a geopolitical catastrophe and so proceeded to recover Russia's seemingly weakened power status.



*Files from the criminal cases fund of the FSB Central Archives. RIA Novosti archive, image #926077 / Sergey Pyatakov / CC-BY-SA 3.0, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Wikimedia*

As Yeltsin's infrastructure crumbled under Vladimir Putin, a centralised patrimonial network, faithful to the Kremlin's new leadership, subdued the transition's alternative sources of power. Soon after he assumed 'command' Putin moved to confiscate and renationalise assets owned by the most influential, Yeltsin-made business magnates. Coincidentally, those targeted were also the most politically active. Only a few were left unscathed and managed to bolster their fortunes even further. Roman Abramovich was one of them. Perhaps part of the succession arrangement, Yeltsin himself and his closest entourage (mostly relatives) were granted amnesty and immunity from prosecution. With the President's overt support a new ruling elite replaced the defunct one. This 'new nobility' in Nikolai Patrushev's (former internal security chief) words swiftly colonised public and private sectors, appropriating all the posts deemed of leverage. Siloviki, translated as men of force, designates a group of former KGB, or operatives from successor organisations (including the military) who accumulated substantial powers, effectively controlling the economy, media, as well as the military and security sectors. Their clout also extends to state companies, which enables unimpeded access to vast financial resources. Although the dispossession of former oligarchs eliminated the

siloviki's domestic opponents, it also deepened divisions between the newly empowered security clans, and their competing financial-corporate interests.

With their shared beliefs and similar backgrounds, these new elites appear as a homogenous group. Nonetheless, competition runs deep in the veins of Russia's security turned-political-turned-corporate 'praetorians'. Within the power vertical, which essentially describes Russia's top-down command structure access to the President's inner circles of decision-making garners influence. Political and economic life is thus regulated by a system of favours bestowed on those loyalists able (and most willing) to deliver a promising agenda - an agenda that successfully meets or reinforces the leadership's expectations and worldviews.

The same competitive ethos applies to the KGB's successor agencies. Institutional 'turf wars' regulate access to resources and guarantee survival. In this sense, the President and partly his 'gatekeepers' - those already within the circles of trustees, and often acting as an informal Politburo - define and arbitrate success. They dispense the resources, deciding the future of these structures and whether mandates should be expanded or not. As long as they prove useful to the Kremlin the agencies and their leaders prosper. Conversely, any deviation from the status quo may result in disbandment, demotion or the restructuring of assets.

### **The Agencies - An Anatomy**

Russia's security (and intelligence) establishment comprises an array of agencies, many with overlapping functions, political agendas and territorial reach. Most key security agencies are subordinated to the President, and thus (at least in theory) able to brief him directly. This is a prized institutional capability, commensurate with the various services' (and their chiefs') status and success. Despite their ideological affiliation with Soviet state-security traditions, the KGB successors developed somewhat distinctive organisational and operational cultures.

The FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) is the main internal security agency and the KGB's principal successor. Its attributions ostensibly cover domestic affairs, counterespionage, the prevention of organised crime, terrorism and drug smuggling. In reality, the agency's remit is far wider, and involves intelligence gathering abroad, intimidation and targeted assassinations. In the 1990s, the FSB suffered from budgetary constraints and political uncertainty. Its status and capabilities were further eroded by corruption and an exodus of its most able officers, who migrated into the service of President Yeltsin's rising oligarchs. Only under Vladimir Putin did the FSB recover its privileged status and esprit de corps. The agency absorbed the Federal Border Guards Service and FAPSI, a former government agency responsible for communications and signals intelligence. Following an extensive restructuring campaign, Vladimir Putin placed the agencies under his direct control. He expanded the FSB's mandate and assets,



*Federal Security Service employees searching Moscow's Prague restaurant, August 2009. Photo RIA Novosti archive, image #421316 / Andrey Stenin / CC-BY-SA 3.0, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Wikimedia*

and so by the end of the 2000s the agency became Russia's dominant intelligence body. That Vladimir Putin is of FSB extraction, openly revering the legacy of its Chekist hardliners (the first political police) offers an indication as to why the FSB has been the disproportionate beneficiary of presidential favours. The FSB's strategic prominence over other armed branches, coupled with an enhanced capacity to project military power in outer-areas of geopolitical interest, mirror this dynamic.

Although the FSB is a domestic security agency, its extensive presence, influence and operations abroad blur the external-internal distinction. Preferable to, or perhaps more trusted than other agencies, the FSB also provides a cordon sanitaire of intimate loyalists, effectively taming the political ambitions of key military figures. This mistrust was not entirely of a subjective nature, but equally the by-product of the President's formation and embedded experience as an operative within the KGB, and later, at the helm of the FSB. In some ways, Putin epitomises the historical clash between two of Russia's most enduring organisational cultures, the armed forces, on the one hand, and security services, on the other.

The MVD, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs was, and continues to be, another key institution of state control, surviving both Imperial Russia and the Soviet era. It commands the police forces, as well as the Interior Troops, the latter acting as

a parallel army with its own ranks, culture and organisation. Plagued with corruption and underfunding during Yeltsin's presidency, under Vladimir Putin the MVD's budgets gradually recovered. The FSO (Federalnaya Sluzhba Okhrany) provides protection services for the Kremlin, State Duma (the Russian Parliament) and other government bodies. It derived from the KGB's 9th Directorate, which performed similar functions for the Soviet leadership.

Part of a reform plan for overhauling law enforcement agencies, the President announced the creation of a National Guard, to be headed by his long-time collaborator and bodyguard, Viktor Zolotov. In his speech, Vladimir Putin referred to ominous external enemies that try to destabilise Russia from within by fomenting uprisings and revolution. Such a development raises concerns for several reasons. Firstly, the National Guard acts as an army, capable of conducting military operations internally. Secondly, the agency will be invested with substantial powers, taking over key policing functions previously handled by Ministry of Interior forces. There are also some overlaps with the FSB. Thirdly, members of the National Guard are to be exempted from any responsibilities should they cause damage to individuals and legal entities. This lack of accountability means that individuals or groups can be randomly targeted without prior notification if deemed to pose a threat. Although the President declared the fight against terrorism and organised crime as the agency's main objective, recent exercises showcase the National Guard mobilising in scenarios of mass protest.

*Human rights activist, priest Gleb Yakunin (center of the second row) performing a service for the victims of the Stalinist political repressions at a stone from the then Solovetsky special-purpose camp (the Solovetsky Monastery) set up in front of the KGB headquarters in Lubyanskaya Square, Moscow, on October 30, 1990. Photo RIA Novosti archive, image #749019 / Alexander Makarov / CC-BY-SA 3.0, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, Wikimedia.*



This clearly signals the leadership's actual intent, that of creating a deterrence asset against social unrest and an instrument of repression similar to the Soviet regime's insidious political police. So far the mock-mobilisations have been received enthusiastically and it seems lawmakers embrace the proposal. It is just a matter of time until the State Duma (the legislature) signs the final bill. Upon ratification, the nascent agency will gain unhindered control over domestic security, with access to military capabilities, including armoured vehicles, heavy artillery, and attack helicopters. Moreover, the National Guard would become Vladimir Putin's private army, an extension of his powers beyond the regular armies, which are traditionally controlled by the Ministry of Defence. This can be interpreted as a balancing act, an insurance policy against potential contestations from within the circles of power. Some argue that Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu enjoys high levels of popularity following Russia's campaigns in Ukraine and Syria. In this sense, the President may be increasingly apprehensive of a coup, thus seeking to suppress any potential contenders, imagined or real.

The SVR (the Foreign Intelligence Service – Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki) and the GRU (the military intelligence directorate) are tasked with foreign intelligence gathering. The SVR is a successor of KGB's First Chief Directorate (the PGU), with Yevgeny Primakov as its first chief. Also the first civilian to hold the job, Primakov was astutely versed in foreign affairs, and an equally apt politician. He redirected the SVR's focus towards Russia's near abroad, maintaining a cautious, anti-Western position, particularly against NATO's expansion. In terms of outlook, not much has changed since Primakov's initial designs.

Part of the intricate security nexus, the GRU (the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff), the military equivalent of the foreign intelligence service, in command of the Special Forces (Spetsnaz) provides an interesting case. The GRU acted independently from the KGB and managed its own assets, an autonomy that survived the Soviet Union's dissolution. The fact that the GRU has had a historical predisposition for independent actions may have generated some unease among Kremlin's political circles, especially with Vladimir Putin's coming to power. In the not so distant past, the organisation witnessed a severe decline, with budgetary and personnel cuts, plummeting role and prestige. Other agencies (the SVR and FSB) but also the Army's territorial commands coveted its capabilities. The fate of the GRU was overturned in 2014 following a series of tactical successes. The role of the GRU Special Forces in the takeover of Crimea in 2014 and in the undeclared, low intensity, war that soon followed in Eastern Ukraine, led to the GRU recovering its position. For the time being the threat of its demotion within the services' power-hierarchy has been eliminated. However, this clearly indicates that 'turf wars' (for influence, resources or even personal reasons) are deeply ingrained in the organisational culture(s) of Russia's vast security establishment.



*An Alarm at the Khorgos border post in the Taldy Kurgan Region 1984. Photo RIA Novosti archive, image #630589 / Yuriy Kuydin / CC-BY-SA 3.0, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Wikimedia*

### **Some Considerations**

- *Vladimir Putin bolstered the role of the security agencies, employing them unrestrainedly to articulate his interests abroad and to maximise and safeguard the foundations of his power domestically*
- *By constantly (re)-structuring the security establishment, reshuffling assets between the branches, Vladimir Putin bends the agencies to his will. Thus, he achieves a balance of power by keeping potential contenders in check. The National Guard is a powerful example of how he intends to control both the elite and the wider population.*
- *Russia's key security agencies have overlapping functions, mandates and territorial reach. This competition is amply reflected in their operational practice. A significant increase in the use of covert tactics (distraction, assassinations, kidnappings, political and economic subversion) shows that risk-taking behaviours are not only preferred but also encouraged by the Kremlin.*

- *Such risk-taking propensities also mirror President's Putin's decision-making. Vladimir Putin's ambition to revise the international order goes hand in hand with his willingness to assume much-greater strategic risks than the supposed threats. Military ventures in Ukraine and Syria are risk-taking gambits, not feats in long-term strategic planning. Alas, this is unlikely to change.*
- *The agencies share and reinforce the leadership's worldview. To sustain a narrative of enmity and the permanent siege mentality security agencies feed on threats, real or imagined. Threats justify the need for continued destabilisation abroad, actions that essentially guarantee the agencies' survival.*
- *Military campaigns in Georgia (2008), Chechnya (2003), but also Ukraine (2014) witnessed an intense competition between security factions for tactical successes. Some may even argue that security hardliners compete to 'sell' external threats at the expense of more calculated strategic considerations, in a constant effort to maintain their institutions' status, assets and most importantly, access to the inner circles of decision-making. In this sense, personal and institutional interests are often inter-changeable.*



*Headquarters Building of the Belarusian KGB (still in use 2011) in central Minsk.  
Photo John Oldale, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 license, Wikimedia*



*Antiterrorist operation in Makhachkala". Russian Federal Security Service employees during a special operation in Makhachkala. One militant was killed and two terrorist attacks prevented. RIA Novosti archive, image #835340 / CC-BY-SA 3.0 Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Wikimedia*



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