

Is it time for the West  
to wake up and smell  
the vodka?



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# Wake up and smell the vodka

**The focus of British Defence, alongside most of its European and NATO allies has, for more than ten years, been firmly on the demands posed by Iraq and Afghanistan.** Arguably the British Army, in particular, eschewed the responsibility to keep an informed eye on the full range of other problems with which it may be faced as it sharpened its Afghan focus.

Indeed, so focused was the Army on Afghanistan at the expense of everything else that in January 2009 it implemented 'Operation Entirety' (there's a clue in the title). The concentration of effort and attention was understandable as that Afghan fight 'needed to be won' – although whether the winning of the tactical fight has, in the long run, actually led to a strategic or even operational gains for the allied participants is another matter.

Alongside this Middle Eastern and Central Asian focus, the lingering so-called strategic peace-dividend as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union has meant that the potential for interference with Britain's interests by an increasingly obstructive Russia has been allowed to simmer quietly on the back burner.

The last decade has seen a progressively interventionist and belligerent Russia: the cyber attack on Estonia in 2007, the intervention in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the extended intervention in the wider Ukraine throughout 2015 are actions that step very close (or even over) the borders of the EU and NATO. That, surely, must be a major concern to those who are treaty-bound to both of those organisations?

With the above in mind it was considered very timely to open the CHACR's reflections for 2016 in January with a seminar, attended by those listed left, to pause and reflect for a day on the context and implications of Russian activity in its near abroad. This collection of papers is a product of that workshop. It is published on a 'Chatham House' basis and as such is not attributable to any one individual but is offered as a collection of 'individual views'. Should authors subsequently wish to use their own papers, attributable to themselves, they are of course free to do so.

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# RUSSIA AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF DEFENCE

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the UK's armed forces, and Western forces more generally, have tended to be deployed, and when necessary employed, as a non-decisive instrument of national power. Following rapid and seemingly decisive interventions, most notably in Iraq and Kuwait in 1991, Afghanistan in 2001 (albeit using the proxy land force of the Northern Alliance), and Iraq again in 2003, conflict has perpetuated. In the case of the latter two interventions the conflicts quickly morphed into highly complex, de-stabilising insurgencies fuelled by violent extremism and, at times, brutal sectarianism. Campaigning in Iraq and Afghanistan has been devastatingly costly in blood and treasure and political settlement remains elusive.

A consequence of the West's experience of employing force since 1990, but particularly since 2001, has been the prominence afforded to security over defence. This is a perfectly sound policy position, as reflected in Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) 10, in the absence of existential threats to the nation. However, for the first time in a generation Russia is challenging the primacy afforded to security and we are beginning to witness the re-emergence of defence – both at a national and alliance (NATO) level. Although the threat from violent extremism, at home and abroad, continues to dominate political bandwidth and public discourse, it is Russian opportunism that arguably poses the greatest existential threat to the nation. SDSR 15, following on from the strong commitment to collective defence and security through NATO at the 2014 Wales Summit, identifies the resurgence of state-based threats and notes that “Russia has become more aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist, increasingly defining itself in opposition to the West”. Interventions in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, employment of force in Syria in 2015, and even the Russian response to the findings of the public inquiry into the killing of the former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko are all indications of Russian/Western confrontation; the so-called ‘hot peace’.



*Demanding deployment: A Royal Air Force Chinook arrives to extract troops at the end of an operation in Afghanistan, which proved a devastatingly deadly campaign in blood and treasure.*

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At a national level, and without being overly alarmist, we should also start the process of preparing society for an era of confrontation that perhaps presents the greatest risk to our security and prosperity since the end of the Cold War

Albeit a pattern one can trace back to Putin's rise to power, Russia is accelerating the preparedness of its society and armed forces for war, and it has regained its position as a global and regional power appropriate to its self-perceived standing. But to understand Russia's mobilisation one has to consider Russian national interest through its lens. If one does then it is possible to identify an arc of crisis in Russia's western and southern orbit – Western intervention in Central Asia and Syria; interference in so-called ‘Colour Revolutions’ including a conflict for regional domination in Ukraine; and the expansionist policies of Euro/Atlantic institutions (NATO and the EU). Current UK doctrine stresses the importance of understanding – the context for the decision-making process that informs the application of national power and the development of knowledge to such a level that it enables insight (knowing why something has happened or is happening) and foresight (being able to identify and anticipate what may happen). Without promoting appeasement of Russian actions, it can be argued that the West has been guilty of a miscalculation in terms of its treatment of Russia – a miscalculation borne of a failure to understand Russian history, geography, demography and spirit. The failure to seriously consider Russia's perception of NATO's ‘open-door’ enlargement policy is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, one can plausibly argue that Russia's behaviour is not neo-imperialist but rather the rational act of a regional hegemon.

Russia's assertiveness poses profound implications for the West. First and foremost we need to better understand Russia and improve our comprehension and decision-making in relation to national and Alliance interest. For example, Georgia's accession to NATO would surely serve to provoke more than it would stabilise. To avoid appeasement or a loss of credibility the West needs to identify its ‘red lines’, stick to them, and seek to deter or coerce. A more realist approach to international relations is required with a new focus on deterrence, full spectrum deterrence, as we must not be seduced solely by the prospect of ‘industrial’ force on force conflict. Hard power remains important of course, but Russian ‘New Generation Warfare’ will seek to target political will as much as an enemy force.

Militarily we need to study Russian intentions, capabilities and ways in warfare. Warfighting at scale, resilience, reconstitution (including industrial capacity) and interoperability with allies all become topics of conceptual and practical importance. At a national level, and without being overly alarmist, we should also start the process of preparing society for an era of confrontation that perhaps presents the greatest risk to our security and prosperity since the end of the Cold War.

# THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN POLICY

*These lines are written not by a Russia 'expert' but by an historian of European geopolitics who has noted some recurring patterns.*

Russia perceives the West as a threat in two ways. First, as a territorial and military challenge. She has repeatedly been invaded from that side over the past 300 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 400 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-most 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 which would give him some kind of global parity with the other world 'poles'.

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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 Kruschchev 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



*Familiar ground: British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks form up on the Polish landscape for the start of Exercise Black Eagle in 2014. The author of this paper argues that such armour should be deployed in Poland today as a deterrent to Putin's Russia.*

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 recent referendum in the Crimea, hardly the actions of a government concerned about ‘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 which weakens our response to Russian aggression.

Since then, the West has woken up to the threat of ‘hybrid warfare’. “It’s not just the old Fulda gap, for those who remember the Cold War issue of tanks crossing over,” US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter said recently, “it’s 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.



# UNDERSTANDING RUSSIA BETTER THROUGH HER HISTORY: SEVASTOPOL, AN ENDURING GEOSTRATEGIC CENTRE OF GRAVITY

Recent events in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine and Syria have brought Russia's increasingly assertive foreign policy and burgeoning military power into sharp relief. Such shows of force surprised those in the West who thought that a new, pacific and friendly Russia would emerge from the former Soviet Union. That has never been Russia's way as a major world power. This monograph argues that Vladimir Putin's Russia has done no more than act in an historically consistent and largely predictable manner. Specifically, it seeks to explain why possession of Sevastopol – the home of the Black Sea Fleet for more than 200 years – provides Russia with considerable geostrategic advantage, one that is being exploited today in support of her current operations in Syria.

Sevastopol, and more particularly its ancient predecessor, the former Greek city of Chersonesos, has a highly-symbolic place in Russia's history and sense of nationhood. Here the Slavs were first converted to Christianity during the late 10th Century. That's why President Putin refers to Sevastopol's "invaluable civilisational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism"<sup>1</sup>. From the time of Peter the Great, Russia's rulers desired to challenge Ottoman supremacy in the Black Sea region, to establish a warm water port, and to facilitate the export of grain harvested from the rich black soils of Ukraine. The modern city of Sevastopol – meaning 'august' city – was founded in 1783, the year in which Catherine the Great annexed Crimea from its Tatar rulers, and Prince Grigory Potemkin founded the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol – one of the world's best natural harbours.

Possession of Sevastopol – the home of the Black Sea Fleet for more than 200 years – provides Russia with considerable geostrategic advantage – one that is being exploited today in support of her current operations in Syria

Cities' of the former Soviet Union.

The presence of the Black Sea Fleet and associated naval infantry and airpower, together with its highly-sensitive

aerospace industries, made Sevastopol a closed city during the Cold War. Thereafter, despite being under Ukrainian jurisdiction until March 2014, it remained very much a Russian city, in which the Russian national flag always flew higher than the Ukrainian.

Furthermore, the Russian Navy continued to control the port leased from the Ukraine, including its navigation systems. Sevastopol's population, containing many military retirees and their dependants, remained fiercely loyal to Russia and never accepted Ukrainian rule – which they judged as a historical accident at best, or, at worst, a criminal betrayal<sup>2</sup>.

During the Maidan 'coup' – to Russian eyes – of February 2014 in Kiev, Russian commentators feared that Sevastopol would be handed over by a nationalist Ukrainian administration to NATO and the American Sixth Fleet. Although there is scant foundation for this concern, perceptions do matter: many thousands of Sevastopol's population stood in the streets ready to defend their homeland. Seeing both the risk and the opportunity, Putin acted decisively to secure the Crimea and, most importantly, Sevastopol. It is now one of three federal cities of Russia, along with Moscow and Saint Petersburg; it is thus a completely separate entity from Crimea<sup>3</sup>.

The Russian Navy has a proud and long history, in which Sevastopol's role remains significant to Russia's sense of place in the world, and her ability to project military power as desired. It was Peter the Great who wrote that "the Navy is very significant for the state: the state possessing an army has got one hand, but possessing a navy also, has got both hands"<sup>4</sup>. And none other than Putin who declared in 2003: "If we want Russia to flourish and be [a] powerful, self-sufficient and influential country in the world we must play proper attention to the Navy<sup>5</sup>." At that time, few in the West paid attention: the Black Sea Fleet had been run down to

<sup>2</sup>The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution authorising the move of the Crimean Oblast from Russia to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine on 19 February 1954.

<sup>3</sup>In terms of international law (as interpreted in the West), despite this *de facto* arrangement, both Crimea and Sevastopol still belong to the state of Ukraine. Russians would argue that the people of Crimea and Sevastopol voted overwhelmingly in favour for the Russian Federation.

<sup>4</sup>Peter the Great, from the Russian Marine Regulations (1720).

<sup>5</sup>Vladimir Putin, in his Preface to *The Russian Navy* (St. Petersburg: Maritime Publishing House, 2003).

<sup>1</sup>Vladimir Putin, Presidential address to the Federal Assembly on 4 December 2014.



Picture: Volodymyr Khodaryev

*“A highly symbolic place in Russia’s history and sense of nationhood”:* The iconic Monument to Flooded Ships at Sevastopol was built in 1905 to mark the 50th anniversary of the first defence of the city (1854-1855), during which Russia deliberately scuttled its own ships and used naval cannon as additional artillery to protect the natural harbour from French, Ottoman and British forces.

a shadow of its former, Soviet-era, self. Over the last ten years, however, it has been modernised: new warships have been laid down. Sevastopol has provided a vitally important mounting base for operations in Georgia (2008) and in Syria (2015). The Fleet’s flagship, the guided missile cruiser *Moskva*, has recently (early December 2015) been despatched ‘for drills’ in the Mediterranean.

By way of crude comparison, the naval base of Sevastopol remains as important to Russia as Portsmouth is to the United Kingdom and Norfolk, Virginia, to the United States. It was, and remains, a true hub of military power, an enduring geostrategic centre of gravity. Knowledge of Russia’s history helps us to appreciate how this state thinks and acts today: its president remains determined to restore his mother country to the centre of the world stage, as did both Catherine the Great and Nicholas I. Sevastopol has already played a major part in that journey. Speaking on 18 March 2015, Putin concluded: “Exactly one year ago, Russia... showed amazing togetherness and patriotism in supporting the aspirations of the people of Crimea and Sevastopol to return to their native shores... The issue at

stake here was the sources of our history, our spirituality and our statehood, the things that make us a single people and single united nation<sup>6</sup>.”

Sevastopol’s story is but one example of illustrating the role of history in understanding the policies, concerns, emotions and associated actions of a state such as the Russian Federation<sup>7</sup>. To comprehend Russia better, perhaps we should remember the wise words of Thucydides: “It was under the compulsion of circumstances that we were driven at first to advance our empire to its present state, influenced chiefly by fear, then by honour also, and lastly by self-interest as well<sup>8</sup>.”

<sup>6</sup>Speech at a public event held in Red Square, Moscow.

<sup>7</sup>Monitoring developments in Russian military strategic doctrine and in the organisation, equipment and tasks of its armed forces constituted the *raison-d’être* of the former Conflict Studies Research Centre, which grew out of the Soviet Studies Research Centre. Its disbandment in 2011 deprived the Ministry of Defence and Britain’s armed forces with an internationally recognised and highly-valued source of information and advice. Therefore the new Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research has some big shoes to fill. It needs to become an equally expert institution with the wherewithal to commission detailed research.

<sup>8</sup>Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I. LXXV. 3

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# THE RE-EMERGENCE OF RUSSIAN MILITARY POWER AS A TOOL OF STATE POLICY

The political imperative to cut defence spending in the UK and other Western countries has made it difficult to acknowledge that classic kinetic warfare is still important, even if its relative utility has changed. New forms of power ('hybrid warfare') have not rendered it obsolete. Indeed, in some parts of the world, such as in the Indian sub-continent, it still retains much of its 20th Century significance. In Europe, it is a key, and increasing, element in Russia's development of multi-dimensional warfare, which includes the use of nuclear weapons.

As European countries have reduced their forces and defence cost inflation has cut their size even further (making equipment and manpower unaffordable on a large scale), and as our societies are ever more unwilling to suffer losses in lives, finance and lifestyle, our own ability to fight classic warfare and our ability to mount a credible, effective deterrence to Russia's use of classic 'hard power' are in doubt.

## Russia's strategic challenge

It is not a budding crisis we face with Russia, it is a strategic challenge. It cannot be dealt with by crisis management, however cleverly and skilfully it is applied. It needs a strategic response based on strategic thinking, backed up by operational capability and capacity.

The extent to which Russia's strategic challenge to the West can be laid at Putin's door can be debated. But there can be no doubt that, in defining Russia as different from the West, as not needing the West, and as morally superior to the West, Putin has set Russia's course for the foreseeable future. His information and influence campaign has been highly successful in Russia itself. As evidenced by the now vituperative rhetoric coming out of Moscow, Putin has let the genie out of the bottle. He has successfully made an enemy of the West in the eyes of many of his people and in the eyes of virtually all of Russia's defence and security establishment – the 'power ministries' – army, interior troops, emergency troops, intelligence and security services. Their sense of affront and resentment of the West today is palpable. Any successor to Putin would find it difficult to change this, even if he wanted to.

The West is therefore seen as hostile and out to get Russia; Russia will be secure only when it controls its neighbours; a zero-sum gain is the determining feature of relations with the West. With this as the dominant narrative in Russia, the last two years have seen a rapid evolution of thinking, attitude and now action in Russia. The Army is back on the scene as an important player in Russian foreign policy.

## The revival of the military's role in Russian grand strategy

When Putin came to power 15 years ago, he laid much of the blame for the collapse of the Soviet Union on the uncontrolled drain on the economy made by the military.

Russia maintained a military which was large in comparison to its immediate neighbours and could still intimidate them, but it was only a fraction of the size of the Soviet Army and did not have the latter's massive mobilisation capacity. Not surprisingly, it maintained much of the Soviet doctrinal thinking and, crucially, the Soviet concepts and design bureaux for weapons acquisition – a valuable heritage. But it lost much of its former sense of purpose and political influence. Putin preferred to conduct his strategic challenge to the West by developing and learning to use the weapons of hyper-competition – arguably the main KGB heritage. Putin's attitudes betray his Soviet origins. He recognises that, just as in Soviet times, the West is vastly stronger than Russia overall; in economic terms; in technology and cyber; in the health and robustness of its societies and its political systems. Moreover, the gap is getting wider. He also recognises the



Picture: Stocktributor

West's weaknesses and divisions, and has played his poor hand of cards very well in order to exploit these. But as a good student of Marx, he knows that when the chips are down, then in any conflict with the West in which the West has time to mobilise and operationalise its many advantages, Russia will lose. EU officials protest in vain that the EU has no military arm. To Putin, that is exactly the role NATO plays at the grand strategic level.

The last Russian ruler to try to improve Russia's competitiveness was Gorbachev. He attempted internal reform and it cost him his job. Putin will not make this mistake. He is trying to improve Russia's competitiveness by changing the environment, the ecosystem in which Russia and the West both exist. He is breaking the rules of the post-war world in order to remake them in Russia's interest. He is out to break the European Security System which he, and now most of Russia, sees as "encircling, suffocating and trying to dismember" Russia, just as was the case in Soviet times. Russia's domestic

ailments and foreign policy reverses, such as the 2014 Maidan events in Ukraine, the coloured revolutions, the Arab Spring, the drop in the oil price etc. are portrayed not as being result of Russia's own incompetence or as the incidental effects of globalisation, but as a direct result of Western hostility. Conspiracy theory wins every time.

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The last two years have seen a rapid evolution of thinking, attitude and action in Russia. The Army is back on the scene as an important player in Russian foreign policy

Furthermore, as we noted above, the Western order is itself looking shaky. Western interventions to impose a Western order (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria) have resulted in disorder. Putin is offering a new kind of order. Some countries prefer his model (Argentinian former President Kirchner, for example). In Russia, this manifests itself as traditional xenophobia and extreme nationalism, and in the strategic challenge we have been describing. It is into this framework of thinking that the Russian military have inserted themselves; they have seen a benefit in strengthening and promoting this narrative and, in doing so, have found a new sense of purpose.



# MAKING THE MILITARY TOOL USEABLE AGAIN

The military have re-established themselves in Putin's eyes as having a real political utility. Firstly, in co-operation with the FSB [Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation], they have made a significant contribution to the success of Russia's campaign in Ukraine. In doing so they have evolved and refined the use of military forces as an important element of what we are calling 'hybrid' or 'ambiguous' warfare. In recognition of this utility, Putin has given the task of organising the employment of all forms of power and developing doctrine for their use to the General Staff, who have set up the National Defence Centre in Moscow to this end. Their understanding of 'doctrine' includes not just best practice but also future concepts; it is a disciplined framework of thought, not a stultifying process.

Secondly, and most significantly, we are seeing the development of a new operational concept for employing the Armed Forces. The General Staff are redeveloping the utility of classic military power as an important element of conflict and competition. This new military concept owes a great deal to Soviet strategic and operational thinking. For the General Staff, this co-ordinated use of all forms of power, including kinetic, is just modern warfare, and an innovative use of old tools designed to break up the integrity of NATO and the EU.

Putin seems to appreciate this new and useful role that the Russian Armed Forces can play in advancing his objectives and helping to 'break out' of Russia's perceived 'encirclement' by the West. We are now seeing the result: greatly increased defence spending; new weapons prototypes; aggressive rhetoric; demonstrative tactical challenges. This increased strength of the military in policy does not mean that Putin will let the military dominate Russian policy and strategic thinking as they did in Soviet times, but it does mean that the Russian military have now become a useable weapon/tool of policy once again and that this faces us with a very serious challenge indeed.

The best recent example of this new Russian strategic thinking can be seen in two recent exercises which, taken together, deliver an interesting message.

Internal: Between 2-10 April 2015, Interior Ministry troops (70 per cent of whom are now regular rather than conscript) conducted a large-scale, operational-strategic exercise code named 'Zaslon ['backstop' or 'barrier'] 2015'. Announced as being held to deal with circumstances similar to Ukraine's Maidan, it included defence of state borders, supporting civil order, and the protection of built up areas and infrastructure objectives. It covered most of European Russia, viz. the North West, Central, Volga, North Caucasus, Southern and Crimean Federal Districts. For the exercise scenario, the situation 'developed as it has recently done in a neighbouring country', necessitating the deployment of troops on public order, anti-terrorist and anti-extremist duties, where they faced hostile crowds throwing bottles and stones.

Coordination of the troops with the civil authorities, the FSB and Federal Narcotics Control Service was exercised, as was the whole range of special weaponry of these organisations, including individual equipment, tear gas, water cannon, conventional military equipment and weapons, and non-lethal weapons. This whole 'anti-Maidan' exercise could equally have applied to putting down trouble in the Baltic states, Belarus or Russia itself.

External: A month earlier, in March 2015, the Russian MOD Armed Forces had been put through an even larger scale, no-notice 'snap' exercise, and a post exercise report was delivered to Putin by Russian MOD Shoygu and CGS Gerasimov on 24 March (a translation of which can be read on pages 12-13). This evaluation of the snap test of the Russian Armed Forces' combat readiness demonstrates that it was a truly strategic exercise involving multiple theatres. Moreover, there was no scripted scenario; the forces' reaction times were in minutes and hours; the CPX which accompanied the FTXs in the military districts involved the whole Armed Forces; the different theatres were deployed for different tasks; Belarussian Forces were integrated into the Russian command system.



In event of any escalating crisis, Russia would deploy its military at a very early stage, giving the West a much shorter reaction time than perhaps we have heretofore been expecting

The strategic thinking behind the exercise seems to have been to deny the West access to key strategic areas; a kind of 'pre-emptive forward defence'. One of the main implications of this is that, in event of any escalating crisis, Russia would deploy its military at a very early stage, giving the West a much shorter reaction time than perhaps we have heretofore been expecting.

This stratagem, to move so quickly that the Russian forces can seize and hold strategic objectives before the West can react, thereby presenting us with a *fait accompli*, is consistent with traditional Russian and, before that, Soviet military doctrine. Crimea is an excellent example.

It is conceived as a defensive measure designed to neutralise the West's perceived superiority in modern technology and our domination of the global economic and political system. It is also, therefore, a deterrent to our attempting to use or threaten the use of force at all in event of such a crisis. This deterrent is backed up by nuclear weapons to neutralise our use of the nuclear card. It is also consistent with other aspects of their doctrine which we have seen displayed in Ukraine, such as the manipulation of the form, scale and tempo of an operation so as to keep activity below our reaction threshold.

The more effectively this forward conventional and nuclear shield can be pre-emptively established, in comparison to our ability to deploy forces rapidly forward, the more emboldened Russia will feel to press its challenge across the board, taking advantage of what Putin sees as the West's divisions, our lack of appetite for confrontation, our preoccupation with other concerns, our unwillingness to contemplate or prepare for war over 'a small country, far away, of which we know nothing'. Unfortunately, the West no longer has the tools it had in the Cold War to track and respond to Russian actions. We

have lost much of our capacity for conceptual thinking on nuclear strategy. We have lost our intellectual ‘critical mass’ to understand deterrence, as well as too much of our military conventional deterrence capacity, the conventional ‘deterrent ramp’ we had during the Cold War, and much of the conventional forces that used to support the nuclear submarines. We have no NATO ‘indicators and warning’ mechanism to monitor preparation and escalation and keep our political leaderships aware of the situation on the basis of shared understanding. We have lost the capability to educate and exercise our political and military leaderships together in strategic thinking and acting.

It is important to appreciate that the reaction of our political, military and economic/financial establishments, both national and international, to every Russian military and diplomatic activity is closely monitored by Russia. We have traditionally underestimated the effort Russia puts into this activity, just as

we consistently underestimate the effort Russia puts into trying to shape our perception of events. During the Cold War we understood that we were in strategic competition. Putin’s actions make it clear that we are, once again, in a deadly serious strategic competition, even if the global environment and weapons employed are in many cases different. But neither our populations nor, it seems, our politicians, understand this.

The means and ways may be ‘ambiguous’ but the end is not: the West is facing a direct strategic challenge from Russia to which it is not yet responding adequately, and which some in Europe are not even willing to recognise. The West’s consequent failure to react adequately may be interpreted in Moscow as the West’s inability to react, and may encourage further Russian action which will make things even worse. It is no longer unthinkable that ‘Hot Peace’ might become ‘Hot War’.

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We have lost our intellectual ‘critical mass’ to understand deterrence, as well as too much of our military conventional deterrence capacity, the conventional ‘deterrent ramp’ we had during the Cold War, and much of the conventional forces that used to support the nuclear submarines



*Sub standard support?: HMS Victorious, one of the four Vanguard-class submarines currently tasked with providing the UK with a continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent, pictured in the Clyde estuary.*

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# THE RUSSIAN MOD SHOYGU AND CGS GERASIMOV'S REPORT TO PUTIN ON THE MARCH 2015 SNAP EXERCISE

*Translated by an attendee of the CHACR Russia Workshop*

## **24 MARCH 2015 – 1710, Moscow, the Kremlin**

Vladimir Putin had a working meeting with Minister of Defence Sergey Shoygu and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Valeriy Gerasimov. During the meeting they assessed in particular the results of the large-scale test of the combat readiness alert of the Armed Forces, conducted outside the standard exercise schedule, that took place in March.

**V. PUTIN:** Sergey Kuzhugetovich, a phase of the active work relating to the latest sudden test of the Armed Forces has concluded, this time in those regions that you had designated during our initial decision to carry out those activities. I note that this is only the beginning of this year's training for the Armed Forces. I know that on the whole you assess the results as positive. Let's talk about this in more detail.

**S. SHOYGU:** Thank you, Vladimir Vladimirovich. In accordance with your instruction, a no-notice test was carried out from 16-21 March and, following your supplementary instructions, the Southern Military District, the Eastern Military District and the Baltic Fleet were included. The main objective was to assess the real capabilities of the newly-formed joint strategic command of the Northern Fleet to ensure the country's military security in the Arctic region, as well as to build up groups of forces at short notice on other strategic axes.

Apart from that, it was important for us to establish how effectively the Russian Federation's newly-created National

Command and Control Centre could resolve command and control issues.

On 16 March, the air assault troops, formations and units of the Northern Fleet, and command elements of the long range and military transport aviation, were brought to full combat readiness. Within the first few days we had verified the temporary norms for bringing troops to the highest degree of combat readiness. On the next day, formations and units from all military districts, including the Baltic and the Black Sea Fleets, were activated on the other strategic axes.

All together up to 80,000 service personnel, 12,000 major pieces of equipment, 65 naval ships, 15 submarines and more than 220 combat aircraft and helicopters were deployed. The special feature of this test was that the troops acted on isolated axes according to a single plan, and command and control was exercised by the Russian Federation's National Centre for Defence Command and Control.

The task you set us in May of last year – that most activities of this type should be controlled by a single lever, by a single button – this task has been tested and, on the whole, has proved sufficiently effective thanks to the employment of all supplementary assets: the newly-formed National Centre and the centres in the military districts.

In the Northern Fleet the ships at permanent readiness were deployed into the Barents Sea, where they formed four groups to hunt foreign submarines, sweep for mines and help civilian vessels caught in the battle zone.



Picture: V. Zahuravlev

The strategic missile submarines were also exercised. Aircraft of the military-transportation aviation dropped Spetsnaz sub-units from the Air Assault Troops on the Kola Peninsula, on the islands of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago, on Franz Josef Land and elsewhere.

In a very limited time, despite the difficult weather conditions, the air assault troops reinforced the Northern Fleet's grouping of forces and secured critical infrastructure sites on the islands. Battalions from the tactical groups of the Motor-Rifle Brigades carried out a march in thick snow in the training area near the state border, where they conducted tactical exercises. By this means we avoided templated tasks and pre-scripted scenarios. Practically every hour we were given amendments to the axes of action for the tactical battalion groups.

Sub-unit commanders exercised control based on data from all types of intelligence and reconnaissance, and on reports from subordinates on the real situation. Naval infantry sub-units were landed on an undefended coast in winter conditions for the first time.

Throughout these tests, significant attention was paid to the versatile use of the Northern Fleet's aviation. Ship-borne, fighter, bomber and anti-submarine aircraft provided cover for the transport and air assault on the Novaya Zemlya Islands and on Franz Josef Land. You checked out Franz-Josef Land and, as you probably remember, this is quite a long trip by sea. Naturally, therefore, all this time we provided cover by all types of aviation so as to secure the assault landing of the land forces grouping. At the same time, the aviation was also hunting foreign ships and submarines.

In the Baltic we conducted tactical exercises to cover the state border with sub-units of the 25th and 138th separate motor-rifle brigades, along with the 76th assault-storm division. The forces grouping in the Kaliningrad Oblast was reinforced by rebasing eight aircraft from operational-tactical aviation.

The whole Baltic Fleet tackled combat-readiness problems, submarines hunting and destroying the main adversary's ships, and sailing in difficult weather conditions. Coastal troops were deployed onto training areas where they exercised all training and combat tasks. Supported by army aviation helicopters from the Southern Military District, units from the 7th assault-storm division and the 810th naval infantry brigade exercised improving their mobility and ability to re-group quickly at long distances by combining methods.

Naval aircraft from the Black Sea Fleet carried out strikes on potential air and naval adversaries in the South-West of the Black Sea.

Sub-units of the 11th Engineer Brigade exercised loading and railway transportation designed to support a pontoon

bridge across the Kerch Strait. By my decision, in view of the worsening floods in the country and following appeals by governors, the brigade was re-directed to provide aid to the population.

In the Central Military District, standard timings for creating a force grouping for a peace-keeping/enforcing duty were verified. Special attention was paid to manning them with contracted service personnel able to be employed in different regions. Monitoring activities and tactical training for peace-keeping/enforcing were conducted on training areas, as well as training for long distance deployment.

The Eastern Military District worked on how to reinforce troops on the island of Sakhalin. Strategic bombers and fighters made routine overflights of the seas of Japan and Irkutsk.

This order of testing enabled us objectively to evaluate the planning and command and control capabilities of the headquarters being tested and of subordinate forces – their capabilities to do their designated tasks. Currently, all command elements and forces are returning to their permanent locations in an organised fashion.

To demonstrate openness and transparency, all European countries were officially notified through the OSCE at the start of the troops' activities. This was done despite the fact that the parameters of the exercises did not exceed the established limits and that we did not need to do this. In this way, the first snap exercise for this year has been completed. After the no-notice exercises of 2013 and 2014, we drew serious conclusions and we briefed these to you. Many of the things that then hindered us have been removed. We will brief you separately on the details that we are still analysing.

**V. PUTIN:** Good. Valeriy Vasilyevich, how does the General Staff assess the command and control capability, coordination and communications?

**V. GERASIMOV:** Vladimir Vladimirovich, our assessment is that the Joint Strategic Command of the Northern Fleet is now an effective Joint Strategic Command. For the first time during this training we transmitted command and control signals according to a new scheme, from the general on duty at the National Centre directly to the naval strategic nuclear forces' weapons systems.

I checked this personally, finding myself in the Northern Fleet, and I must report both that the combat crews are trained sufficiently well, and that we have a reliable system of command and control and transmission of signals that can guarantee the reception and confirmation of those signals.

**V. PUTIN:** Good.

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Supported by army aviation helicopters from the Southern Military District, units from the 7th assault-storm division and the 810th naval infantry brigade exercised improving their mobility and ability to re-group quickly at long distances by combining methods

# RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE WAKE OF THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION

From the beginning of his presidency, Putin has promoted Russia as a global power. But for much of the past 15 years, there has been a disconnect between Putin's idealised vision of a new multipolar order in which Russia plays a central role, and a world disorder in which it is largely peripheral. Against this background, events over the past 18 months have been seen as a game-changer. First the annexation of Crimea, then the conflict in southeast Ukraine, and most recently the military intervention in Syria have thrown the spotlight on Russia's place in the world. Today, the issue is no longer whether it will play a significant role, but what kind of influence it will exert.

## Russia's military intervention in Syria

To understand this, we need first to look at the motivations behind the Russian military intervention in Syria. Moscow has multiple aims, the most important of which is to preserve its influence in the Middle East. If the Assad regime were to fall, Russia would not only lose its only ally in the Middle East, but also suffer a major blow to its international prestige. Conversely, an effective intervention would reinforce Russia's position in Syria. Although Assad's survival is an instrument of policy, rather than a goal in itself, the Kremlin sees him as its best bet for the time being.

Second, Putin is keen to expose the limits of American power in the Middle East and beyond. The motivation is partly personal, but mainly strategic. Intervention is intended to prove that Russia is an indispensable global player, without whom there can be no international security. The other side of the coin is that Russia can make a bad situation worse if its interests and status are not 'respected' by the West.

Third, Putin views intervention in Syria as a means of undermining Western sanctions over Ukraine. If Russia can cooperate with the West, sanctions may be lifted. But if they remain in place, Moscow can increase the pressure by further destabilising the situation in northern Syria, and exacerbating the refugee crisis in Europe. The larger message is that the West, and the Europeans in particular, must deal with Russia on Moscow's terms. More broadly, the Syrian intervention offers an opportunity for Russia to regain some strategic flexibility. By re-engaging with Europe, it would lessen its dependence on China.

Fourth, Putin wishes to protect his personal image at a time of mounting domestic pressures. Russia is bogged down in Ukraine, with no obvious end in sight to sanctions. The economy is in recession, while global oil and gas prices remain

depressed. The intervention is a means of revitalising the Kremlin narrative of a dynamic Putin.

Finally, there is Moscow's public justification for intervention: the need to defeat Islamist extremism at its source, rather than allowing it to become a direct threat to Russia. When air-strikes were first launched at the end of September, this was more a pretext than a genuine motive. However, the downing of the Russian airliner in Sinai has led to a partial adjustment; combating IS has become an objective in itself, although still secondary.

## Putin's world-view

The intervention in Syria reflects Putin's view of the world as a harsh place, in which the strong prosper and the weak get beaten. Geopolitical influence and military power are the primary virtues; the major powers run things; and smaller states are objects of great power policy. In this world, Russia must fight for its interests by whatever means necessary, including military.

According to Putin the era of American global leadership and liberal universalism is over. The 21st Century world is multipolar – or rather tripolar. Along with the United States and China, Russia is an independent centre of global power.

Putin's world-view translates into three broad foreign policy goals: (i) to facilitate an external environment that supports the stability of his regime; (ii) secure Western compliance with Russia's interests in the post-Soviet space; and (iii) promote Russia as one of the world's leading powers, while maintaining strategic flexibility. Seen from Moscow, current international trends – above all the decline of the West – make these aims achievable.

## Is Putin winning?

Putin's conduct of foreign policy is routinely portrayed as masterly. This view is misleading. While he has enjoyed tactical successes, Russia's international position reveals major weaknesses. The flaws are especially apparent in four areas: global governance; the post-Soviet space; Asia; and relations with the West.

## Global governance

Notwithstanding recent events, Russia plays only a peripheral role in global governance. Moreover, its influence is essentially preventative; it can obstruct and destabilise, but it has shown little capacity to create. This sets real limits on what it can achieve in the longer term. Putin is committed to replacing the



Picture: Zerophoto

existing Western-led international system with an alternative world order in the form of the BRICS. Thus far, however, the practical outcomes have been disappointing. While many non-Western countries resent the dominance of the West, they are unwilling to follow Moscow's lead. In the Middle East, for example, Moscow is at loggerheads with Ankara, has strained relations with Riyadh, and faces intense Western and Chinese competition in courting Tehran.

### **The post-Soviet space**

Putin seeks to re-establish a dominant Russian influence in the post-Soviet space. But with few exceptions, this is in decline. Policy toward Ukraine has been a fiasco. Although Putin has gained Crimea, and made southeastern Ukraine ungovernable, he has lost in every other respect. Kyiv is more committed than ever to European integration. NATO has rediscovered a sense of purpose. Russia is strategically dependent on China. The economy is suffering badly from Western sanctions. And Putin's Eurasian Union project is in trouble.

### **Russia's turn to the East and the Sino-Russian relationship**

Moscow's much-trumpeted 'turn to the East' has under-achieved. Despite several energy agreements with China, Russia's footprint in Asia remains very modest. Aside from the partnership with Beijing, its relationships in the region are weak and underdeveloped.

Despite Putin's attempts to portray a Sino-Russian entente

as the basis of an emerging world order, this remains a partnership of convenience. Moscow and Beijing cooperate in areas where they identify common interests, but the notion of an authoritarian alliance against the West is bogus.

Over the past 12 months, the balance of their relationship has tilted strongly in Beijing's favour. Chinese influence across Eurasia has expanded considerably, while the global energy glut has undermined one of Moscow's few levers of influence over Beijing.

### **Relations with the West**

Russia-West relations are on a path of negative continuity: a general decline, punctuated by periodic crises, and, more rarely, brief upturns. Clashing world-views, stark policy differences, and shrinking common interests have sapped the desire for cooperation. Today, there is scarcely a single issue where Russia and the West are in agreement, even in areas where their interests

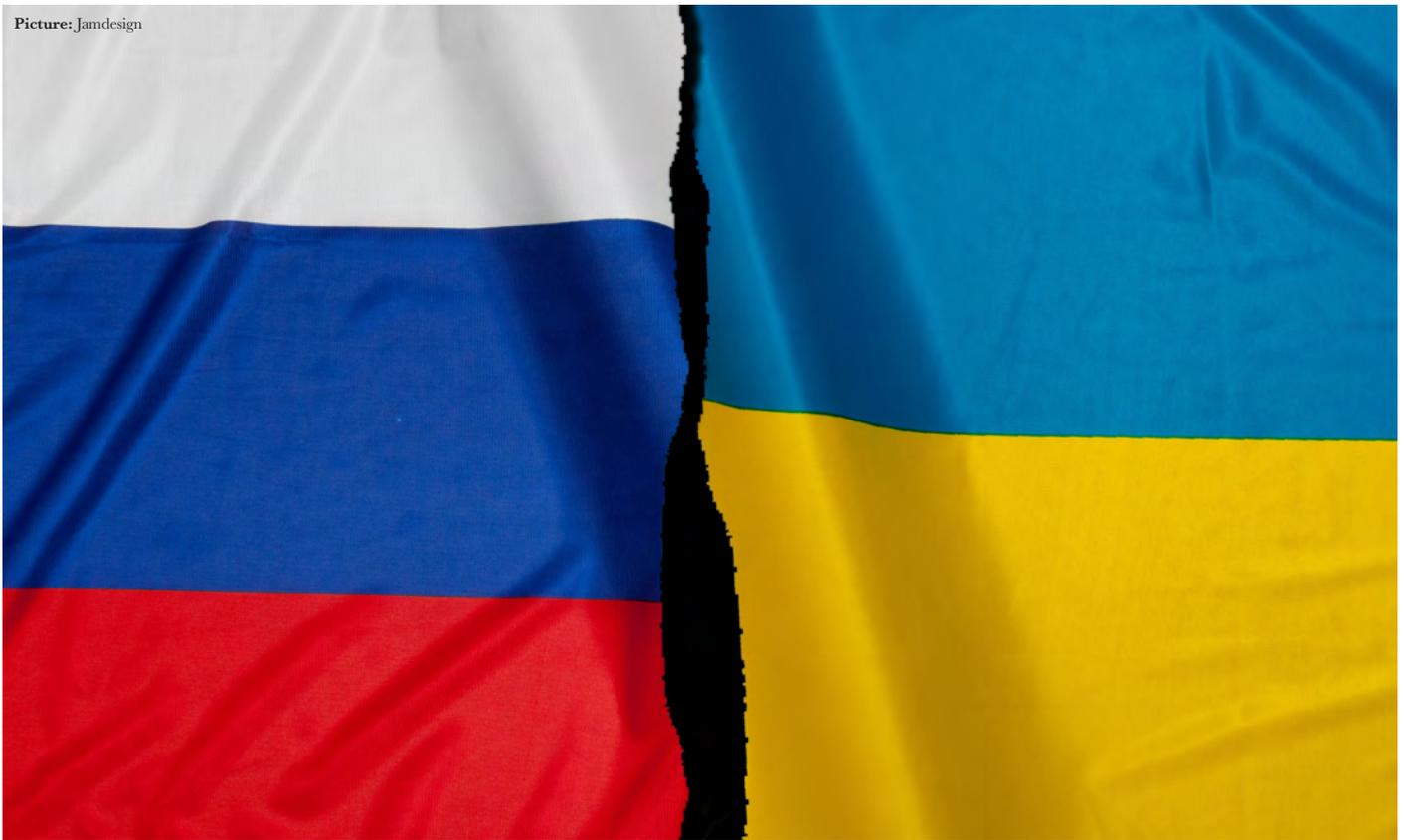
should coincide, such as countering Islamist terrorism and WMD proliferation.

Russia-US relations are worse than any time since the mid-1980s. Although direct confrontation is unlikely, the risks have increased. The situation is not much better with Europe. Hopes of a common European vision, or even accommodation, have given way to mutual alienation.

### **Outlook**

Russian foreign policy is unlikely to soften much over the next few years. Putin is convinced that it has been overwhelmingly

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 Russia-West relations are on a path of negative continuity – clashing world-views, stark policy differences, and shrinking common interests have sapped the desire for cooperation



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Russia's deteriorating domestic circumstances represent a long-term challenge to the legitimacy of the Putin regime. But such vulnerability also increases the likelihood of more reckless behaviour, including a major military build-up, continuing pressure on Ukraine and the Baltic states, and open antagonism toward the United States

successful – and most Russians agree. They see a resurgent global power emerging from the humiliation of the 1990s. Russia's deteriorating domestic circumstances represent a long-term challenge to the legitimacy of the Putin regime. But such vulnerability also increases the likelihood of more reckless behaviour, including a major military build-up, continuing pressure on Ukraine and the Baltic states, and open antagonism toward the United States.

#### **Lessons for Western policy-makers**

The feebleness of Western policy-making toward Russia has contributed to the problems in our relations. We therefore need to draw the right lessons from recent events.

We should not delude ourselves that Putin is committed to cooperation for its own sake. This is only of interest if it serves his often narrowly self-interested purposes. It is vital to keep this in mind when we discuss with Moscow ways of managing the conflict in Syria, combating IS or stabilising Ukraine.

We should expect the unexpected. Russia's weakening domestic and international position leaves Putin with few strategic options. But it also increases the temptation for him to launch tactical 'masterstrokes'. We need to be more ready and less shockable.

We must be as resolute as Putin in defending our interests. It is naïve to imagine that 'understanding' Moscow's 'legitimate concerns' will result in more reasonable behaviour. Vacillation and half-heartedness encourage Putin to strive for more. And we need to avoid being suckered into transactional 'deals', e.g. Ukraine for Syria.

Notwithstanding the obvious difficulties, we should not abandon hope of cooperation. It is possible to find common ground, even if only on an occasional, case-by-case basis. But to do so we must shed any illusions about a broader likemindedness, and concentrate on small steps rather than grand visions.

Potential areas of cooperation include conflict prevention in Ukraine, combating IS and countering transnational crime. We also have to recognise that any progress will be painstakingly slow and fragile.

Finally, we will only be able to engage effectively with Russia if we put our own house in order. This means doing much more to restore the credibility of norms, institutions and economies within the West. In Europe, it means getting serious about security, and developing a truly pan-European response to the refugee crisis and other existential challenges facing the continent.

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# THE RUSSIAN PSYCHE: HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON CURRENT POLITICAL THINKING

## Past and present: Collectivism, individualism and the Russian soul

Russia has a very long history of peasant servitude, which was abolished only in 1861. Most peasants were organised in social units called mir. These units had a certain degree of independence from the state and the aristocracy, who formally owned the serfs, in managing joint agricultural and administrative activities. The Bolsheviks carried on a similar system of managing and controlling the peasantry in units, this time called kolhoz (collective household). Urban dwellers were organised in cells and generally the life of a Soviet citizen was controlled and organised by the state. The term vsem mirom, derived from mir, is still very much in use today and refers to a collective decision-making process and the system of thinking where individualistic stands are not welcome.

In contrast, the transitional period of the 1990s and its accompanying free market reforms introduced a completely different mentality, where an individual was seen responsible for his own personal success in life and, in many cases, his economic survival. As a result of this radical shift, a new generation, usually those born in the 1980s-1990s, express individual thinking and leadership skills and abilities and can thus outplay their older colleagues. They also have a much better education, more language skills and a higher income. Representatives of the previous generation tend to demonstrate slower reactions to events and lack even rudimentary foreign language skills. For example, Vladimir Putin has just given an English language textbook to Vitaly Mutko, the minister of sport, as a birthday gift, openly referring to the minister's famously poor level of English.

One should also acknowledge that there have been a small number of very capable state officials born in the 1960s, such as Vladislav Surkov, who served as personal adviser to Vladimir Putin and authored the concept of 'sovereign democracy', as well as Jahan Pollyeva, the leader of the presidential speechwriting team. However, neither of these two individuals is currently in the president's inner circle.

The main theme of classic Russian literature by such authors as Gogol, Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, has been a search for spirituality. Despite the Bolsheviks' 80-year anti-religion campaign, Russians managed to remain their zeal for matters spiritual. The 'Russian soul', often described as 'great' and 'mystical', is a vaguely defined concept that is used by Russians to describe themselves. It is often characterised by extreme patience, almost passivity, leading to the development of the ability to embrace and overcome extreme deprivation. This deprivation could mean a shortage of basic goods as well the curtailment of personal and political freedoms under soviet dictatorship and contemporary authoritarian rule. These traits of the Russian national character are widely

accepted by historians to explain how the Russians survived such a long history of serfdom, the horrors of the Second World War and Stalinism in particular. Another unique Russian concept is avos, which describes a lack of planning and ungrounded expectations that events can and will settle down on their own. It is not fatalism, but it is rather a lack of preparedness and absence of a clear plan to address a possible event. In its turn, this could lead to unpredictable actions and reactions, another trait which Russians themselves admit to.

Pre-Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union were empires and carried significant weight in the international arena. An expansive foreign policy and industrial progress once fed the national pride of the Russian people. The collapse of the Soviet Union and a further loss of international influence by the Russian state have led the Russian people to generally feel nostalgic about old times. Interestingly, it is a trans-generational trend. The annexation of Crimea was partly made possible by the existence of many young Russian speaking residents of the region who hoped for some manner of renaissance of the Soviet life, which had more stability and where national pride was commonplace: these same feelings explain why Russian citizens approve of the annexation of Crimea.

## Putin's character

Vladimir Putin is his parents' only surviving child and was born while they were relatively old. His mother, Maria Ivanovna, almost died from starvation during the Second World War and lost her other son. Putin's father, Vladimir Putin Senior, took part in the battle for Leningrad and was severely injured. This explains why Vladimir Putin has always spoken about his parents and the Second World War with much filial piety.

The average Russian family has lost one or more relatives in the war and this subject remains very sensitive to this day. Any attempt to reconsider the role of the Soviet army in the victory over Germany and to downplay the Russian contribution to freeing Europe from the Nazi regime creates much irritation and resentment.

Putin started his career in the KGB, the Soviet Secret Services, and was based for a number of years in East Germany. The job required constant cautiousness and secrecy. Arguably, Putin has retained this habit of hiding details of his private life and being publicly reserved. After his return to Leningrad, at the end of the Cold War, Putin joined the Leningrad City Council under Anatoly Sobchuk who had chosen him as his assistant mayor. The exact nature of the relationship between Putin and Sobchuk, who arguably acted as his first political benefactor, is still being debated by historians and Putin's political opponents. Most of them concede that Putin covered up Sobchuk's criminal activities, but used this as leverage and outplayed his boss, eventually leaving his team to embark upon a judiciously timed high-flying political career. Some, such as Marina Salie, even allude to Sobchuk's death

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The collapse of the Soviet Union and a further loss of international influence by the Russian state have led the Russian people to generally feel nostalgic about old times

as having taken place under suspicious circumstances of coercion.

Putin is also known for a lack of trust and as a result is known to frequently rotate people in and out of his inner circle. There are very few people whom he truly trusts. This explains why Sergey Shoigu, the minister famous for a series of extraordinary political gaffes and catastrophes, has recently been appointed to the crucial post of Russian defence ministry. Similarly, a number of events indicate that Putin does not fully trust Dmitry Medvedev. For example, in 2012 he was sent abroad while Putin took care of the crucial business of nominating members of the government.

Unlike his predecessors, Putin fully understands the role of the media in creating and supporting his public image. For example, the Russian media depicts him as living a simple and self-disciplined – almost ascetic – life, masking the reality of vast personal wealth and property. Direct contact with the Russian people is another feature that he values greatly. Twice a year, Putin's team organises the opportunity for citizens to ask questions and submit direct complaints to the President. While some citizens ask Putin a question out of curiosity, many use this opportunity to solve their problems, especially if they are caught up in the corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy. These presidential 'bridging' events are believed to bring results to all submitted requests. In many of his interviews and a recent film dedicated to the events surrounding the annexation of Crimea, Putin refers to his love for his motherland and the desire to

raise up Russia to prosperity, sentiments which appeal to the majority of the Russian population. Opinion polls concerning Putin's effectiveness are frequently organised and they usually report that Russians approve of their president and his personal ratings remain extremely high.

At the beginning of his presidential career Putin seemed to be quite open with his Western partners. He had several things in common with then British prime minister Tony Blair, such as a legal background and birth date and in the past Putin claimed to like Blair. However, in his populist documentary *President* (released in 2015), Putin spoke of how he gradually lost his "romanticism" and lost his trust in the Western partners, including Blair. Putin's only real Western friend appears to be Silvio Berlusconi, the billionaire former prime minister of Italy, although Victor Orban, the authoritarian prime minister of Hungary has made admiring comments referring to the Russian president's policies and actions. Putin has, however, publicly acknowledged Berlusconi as his close personal friend and the two have organised several private visits to one another's properties. With his recent trip to the Crimea, Berlusconi is the only senior western leader or political figure to recognise the Russian reunification with Crimea. Italian media has even cited rumours that Berlusconi could move to Russia and be given a post in the government. In contrast, Putin maintains distance in his relations with the leaders of the post-Soviet states. While he often uses the term 'friends' in relation to the Ukrainian and Belorussian partners, this is done in an obviously sarcastic way.



Picture: Vagant

# RUSSIAN STRATEGY: MOBILISING FOR A 21ST CENTURY OF INSTABILITY

After nearly 25 years in which it barely featured in Western strategic thinking about security, Russia suddenly returned to prominence with the eruption of war in Ukraine in 2014. The war has stimulated much discussion in NATO and its member state capitals of Russian anti-Western aggression, and about a 'return to the Cold War' and the emergence of a new 'Russian style' of 'hybrid' warfare. But this has often thrown more light on Western interests and problems than Russian strategy and Moscow's intentions and priorities. Indeed, it has often highlighted how poorly Russian strategy and intentions are understood in the West – largely because of the significant differences in how Moscow sees international affairs.

Two initial points should be made about Russian strategy. First, there is an important long-term dimension in Russian thinking, a broad continuity in purpose for over a decade that seeks to frame an outlook to 2020 and beyond. Since 2000, the Russian authorities have led a deliberate and consistent effort to reorganise Russian strategic planning and strategy making. As a result, Moscow has published a series of national strategies, concepts and doctrines in which it has outlined an agenda framed in the May Decrees of 2012 that is both complex and ambitious, asserting Russia's position as a sovereign international power.

Strategy is not merely the formulation of plans, however, but the creation of power through the coordination of resources to achieve their implementation, and this leads to the second point, which is that the Russian leadership has found strategy

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The Russian state system is often dysfunctional – infrastructure remains limited (and in places decrepit), resources are inefficiently distributed, ministries and agencies often do not coordinate well, and problems such as corruption beset the political and economic landscape

which Moscow views developments in international affairs. Throughout the last decade, Moscow has often stated its concerns about trends in international affairs, its concerns about the failure of the international architecture, both in

difficult. While Moscow has framed a political agenda, they have struggled to implement it. This is partly because of what might be called the 'opposition of events', which derails plans. It is also because the Russian state system is often dysfunctional, only working when the authorities micro-manage it. Infrastructure remains limited (and in places decrepit), resources are inefficiently distributed, ministries and agencies often do not coordinate well, and problems such as corruption beset the political and economic landscape. This means that power is created only unevenly and adaptability is limited.

This context is important for understanding Russia because it frames the concern with

the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond, and growing instability and competition for resources and values, particularly since the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Vladimir Putin has suggested, for instance, that "new hotspots are appearing across the world", and that there is a "deficit of security", combined with an increasing intensity of conflict and military, economic, political and informational competition. He suggested in 2014 that "today we see a sharp increase in the likelihood of a whole set of violent conflicts with either direct or indirect participation by the world's major powers".

The view from Moscow, therefore, is of an arc of crisis around Russia's borders and a range of wider challenges, from an arms race involving the leading powers, to a competition for resources, one which senior military figures suggest may lead to an attack on Russia. Moscow is specifically concerned about the destabilising role of the West, particularly the USA, both in international affairs more broadly, and more directly regarding Russia.

Indeed, perhaps the main concern of the Russian leadership is Western, particularly US-organised intervention in the internal affairs of states, advancing a regime change agenda (known in Russia as an agenda of 'colour revolution').

Aware that war is a test of society, and that Russia is not ready for such tests, the Russian authorities are executing a range of measures to address problems. In effect, this is piecemeal and preparatory mobilisation, moving Russia onto a war footing to meet what is seen to be a 21st Century of instability.

This mobilisation has two main features. First, given the looming two-year election period starting next year, it seeks to 'colour revolution proof' Russia. Para-institutional organisations such as the All-Russian Popular Front have been established to create a direct link between the authorities and society and monitor the bureaucracy's implementation of orders. The authorities have also invested in the Interior Ministry and security, and conducted major exercises to prepare to counter a 'colour revolution' scenario.

Concurrently, after years of under-investment, the Russian leadership is substantially investing in the modernisation of the armed forces, with transformative consequences. The stated intention is to ensure that the Russian armed forces have 70 per cent modern equipment and half-a-million men under contract by the end of the decade. Major exercises are being conducted to test responsiveness and deployability, and

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efforts to coordinate command and control are illustrated by the opening of a National Defence Centre.

There are undoubtedly ongoing problems. But results are already visible, both in how they have operated in the Ukrainian theatre, and how they have deployed to Syria, illustrated by the cruise missile strikes launched from the Caspian Sea and the large bomber raids.

The naval deployment to Australia at the time of the G20 in 2014 similarly demonstrates the intention to develop such capacities. This transformation of the armed forces reflects a modernisation of Russian military thinking, developing

the capacity for expeditionary warfare, while also seeking to deter military threats to Russia, including from the West.

Russian mobilisation is revealing, therefore, of a number of aspects about Russian strategy. First, it illustrates the balance between Russian strength and weakness, and the doubts and difficulties faced by Moscow. Second, it suggests that Russia is attempting to adapt to a 21st Century of instability, in which power projection is necessary to meet a host of military threats; effectively, Moscow seeks to be at the table, because if it is not, it will be on the menu. Third, it means that by the end of the decade, dealing with Russia will be a very different proposition for NATO and its member states.

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Picture: Sloniki

# RUSSIA: HYBRIDITY AND AMBIGUITY

*The Army has been thinking about Russian strategy and what it means for the UK. The following is an extract from Agile Warrior 2015/16, produced by Army HQ Concepts Branch.*

“Although Russia demonstrated new principles of warfighting in Crimea, most of the tactics and doctrine displayed represented traditional Russian or Soviet warfighting principles refitted for modern war... but Russia integrated military tools with other tools of pressure in innovative ways, and made use of a seamless transition from peace to conflict.”<sup>9</sup>

What are some of the key deductions we might draw as a military from Russia’s recent approach in Ukraine and elsewhere?

- It has been thinking seriously about modern conflict.
- **It has maintained persistent understanding of the environment allowing it to achieve persistent influence over time.**
- In its operations over the last few years, Russia has increasingly displayed a real focus on a whole of government, full spectrum approach. This includes areas that are not considered legal under national or international law.
- **It seeks to integrate all activities within a strategic design drawing on all national means to achieve its ends.**
- It has now brought together all agencies, joining them up in a single National Defence Control Centre.
- **This single decision location provides it with the opportunity to outpace the opponent – giving substance to the notion of ‘fast power’, which is supported by strong centralised control.**
- It exploits the increasing power of the information terrain, particularly connectedness, to achieve influence in conflict, in which we see ‘mass consciousness as an arena for struggle’.
- **Its approach encompasses many forms of power – information, cyber, technical, economic, political, cultural, subversion, espionage, military, organised crime, NGOs, proxies, orthodox religion, intelligence, special forces and nuclear, for example. This is why it is often referred to as ‘hybrid’, particularly because it mixes levers traditionally associated with both a state and with non-state actors.**
- Within this approach, it has seriously modernised and professionalised its military.
- **The key is the whole and how it fits together, in**

**a “war on all fronts” as the Russian CGS General Gerasimov calls it.**

- While we can give Russia’s approach labels such as ‘ambiguous’, ‘hybrid’, ‘non-linear’, ‘contactless’ or ‘new generation’ warfare, it is perhaps simply Russia exercising grand strategy.
- **It is also about realising that developments in the information space bring about a strategic-to-tactical compression and an even greater ability for politicians to engage across the continuum from grand strategy to tactics.**
- A skilful deployment of strategic art also understands that contemporary and future conflict has more blurred lines – this is a strategic influence operation of persistence – this is the “constant competition” that our own CGS talks of, the blurring of war and peace (or ‘war in the grey zone’), as well as the blurring of threats external and internal.
- **It seeks to prevail without resorting to the threshold of a full blown traditional war – and this is where ambiguity comes in: after all, why take on the West in a traditional war, where the West can translate its economic and technological edge into decisive military superiority (perhaps why China also developed its ideas of ‘unrestricted warfare’). Instead, why not sap an opponent’s will to fight?**
- ‘Ambiguous’ warfare adds the additional complication that the question of whether ‘war’ is taking place, and who exactly is a party to it, is opaque.
- **However, while it is easy to be seduced by many of the ‘non-conventional’ aspects of Russia’s approach, it is clear that land forces were still central to Russia’s efforts to assert power and advance its interests. This serves as a reminder to us to not underestimate the part played by the operations or threat of operations of a conventional land force, including a resurgence and/or development in a number of capability areas including:**
  - Unmanned Air Systems (UAS) ranging from very long and long range strategic and operational surveillance UAS through medium and short range UAS for targeting, to very short range for tactical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and battle damage assessment, which have collectively proved both hard to target and to protect against.
  - **Artillery and rockets, particularly for massed, rapid area fires with significantly increased lethality and range, and also including direct fire artillery and associated counter battery radar. It has also been increasingly decentralised.**
  - Armour, particularly with improved Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) protection, providing a decisive effect.

<sup>9</sup>Ven Bruusgaard, K. *Crimea and Russia’s Strategic Overhaul*. Accessed on 4 December 15 at [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/Parameters/Issues/Autumn\\_2014/11\\_BruusgaardKristin\\_Crimea%20and%20Russia’s%20Strategic%20Overhaul.pdf](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/Parameters/Issues/Autumn_2014/11_BruusgaardKristin_Crimea%20and%20Russia’s%20Strategic%20Overhaul.pdf)



Picture: Frag

*Show of brute force on the Black Sea: A Russian Navy frigate launches a missile during a military parade near the city of Sevastopol in the southwestern region of the Crimean Peninsula*

► **The resultant need for greater protection in lighter vehicles, especially against artillery and ATGMs.**

● Russia's approach also highlights several age-old Russian concerns and concepts, including:

► **Traditional Russian concerns with conducting and protecting against espionage, subversion and sabotage.**

► Maskirovka (deception) – whether from the mongols finding canny ways to fight on the flat Central Asian steppes or in the setting up of a Maskirovka school as early as 1904.

► **The idea of operations throughout an opponent's depth generated in the inter-war years. This is also linked to the idea of simultaneity: forcing an opponent to deal with multiple and varied threats and dilemmas at the same time.**

► A culture of influence including:

- **The Soviet idea of reflexive control – 'conveying specially prepared information to an opponent to incline him to voluntarily make a predetermined decision desired by the initiator'.**

- Soviet 'active measures' – which were 'aimed at exerting useful influence on the political life of a target, its foreign policy' and 'misleading an adversary, undermining and weakening his position, and the disruption of his hostile plan'.

● **Russia's approach, however styled, is perhaps nothing new in many respects, but studying it has utility to help us address deficiencies in our response to it, from grand strategy to tactics. The variety of means employed, including a powerful conventional land force element, the simultaneity, the integration, and the particular focus on exploiting the potential of the information terrain and related technology, are hallmarks of this approach.**

● Finally, if we do choose to use 'hybrid' to describe the Russian approach, then we must not regard it as some kind of middle-of-the-road threat. In this instance, it is a potent mix of high- and low-end capabilities, and a far broader range of means (both state and non-state), that we must be prepared to face.

- **Regardless of whether Russian actions in Ukraine are a sign of strength or weakness, Western militaries should study and learn from it, in order to address the challenges of contemporary and future conflict.**

## SO WHAT?

Presentations and discussions during the CHACR study day highlighted that Russia is transforming not only its military structures and hardware, but pursuing a new defence policy in response to its own threat and opportunity perceptions. So why is such a policy shift unfolding and what, ultimately, are its intentions? Russian activities in Eastern Ukraine, Syria and potential future plans for engagement in the Balkans and Black Sea were discussed at length, as were Russia's historical perspectives, structural capacities, domestic political developments and her reading of the global developments.

As can be seen in different sections of this edition of *Ares & Athena*, the questions raised by Russian resurgence are not merely intellectual. Geo-politically, Russia asserting itself poses serious foreign policy challenges for the UK. As a NATO member the UK is obliged to act together with its allies if a risk is posed to their territorial integrity. While a scenario that can invoke an Article 5 response, and thus involve direct clashes, might not be an immediate risk, proxy conflicts and expressions of political resolve are likely to demand deployment of UK forces. This is visible in the deployment of UK personnel in Eastern Europe, the latest example being Poland. The close proximity of Russian activities to NATO borders do bring the risk of unintended skirmishes and tensions that would require committed diplomatic efforts to de-escalate. The recent incident of a Russian jet being shot down by Turkey is an example of this. Therefore, it is important to maintain direct engagement with Russia to mitigate the risks posed by forces operating in close proximity to one another.

Russia also poses a direct challenge to UK engagement in the Middle East. This is most visible in the case of Syria. While the UK welcomes any effort to contain and to respond to Islamic State, the Russian campaign in Syria has been primarily about ensuring the survival of the Assad regime, which directly opposes the UK policy. Similarly, Russian jets

and Russia-backed Syrian units attacking Syrian opposition groups undermine the work of UK and its allies, and fuels the grievances that serve as fertile recruitment grounds for Islamic State. The Russian military build-up in Syria will likely remain in the country for a long time, and may include permanent bases that extend Russia's naval and air reach, thus further challenging UK interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, Russia's deepening involvement in the Syria crisis, as well as its responses to the threat of jihadi networks in Caucasus and its homeland, might provide opportunities for engagement. Jihadists that emerge from Caucasus pose a serious threat to Europe and Russia alike, and shared information on their recruitment and activities could benefit both the UK and Russia. While it undermines the UK's policies on one hand, Russian presence in certain parts of Syria could play a stabilising factor. Yet, what this might mean in the long run, and how much weight Russia can carry as a pressure point to achieve compromises from the Assad regime, is far from clear. In fact, recent signs that the Assad regime is not too keen to give a wider influence in the future to Russia are reminders of limits of Russia's proactive engagement in the Middle East.

The CHACR study day concluded that the UK cannot ignore the increasing Russian military capability, new generation weapon systems, bold foreign policy moves and deployment of forces abroad. These require continual monitoring, assessment and long-term policy responses. To that end, further research on the issues, and recruitment of country-specific expertise and language skills, should be considered in order to assure the UK's defence, the security of its NATO allies and the projection of its foreign policy interests. Above all, the day underlined the importance and urgency of the UK restoring its capability to conduct war fighting at scale. This is a subject to which CHACR will return later in 2016.



Picture: V. Zahuravlev



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## CHACR MISSION STATEMENT

**To conduct and sponsor research and analysis into the enduring nature and changing character of conflict on land and to be the active hub for scholarship and debate within the Army in order to develop and sustain the Army's conceptual component of fighting power.**

For further information about CHACR and its activities, please contact NSC on 01276 673855 or [chacr@nsc.co.uk](mailto:chacr@nsc.co.uk)

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