

**Article title: Russian responses to the changing character of war**

**Author: Bettina Renz, School of Politics & IR, University of Nottingham**

**Forthcoming in *International Affairs* (accepted on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2019)**

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States and its allies expected that future competition with Russia would revolve around economic and not military matters.<sup>1</sup> Given Moscow's low prioritisation of maintaining military strength and modernising its armed forces at the time, this was not an unreasonable assumption. During the final years of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev had started to steer the country away from its reliance on military power for global competition and instead pursued a wider variety of state instruments for asserting international status. In the early 1990s Yeltsin continued on the course of restoring the country's status not through military might, but through pursuing political and economic stability and cooperation with the West. Under his leadership, in the matter of a few years, the size of the former Soviet military had been cut in half, spending on defence was reduced by three quarters and the procurement of new military equipment ground almost to a halt.<sup>2</sup> Within this context, the United States and its allies worked on the assumption that Russia intended to continue to demilitarise and took active steps to support this process. Significant financial support was provided to aid the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, to dismantle the nuclear arsenal and to convert the military industrial complex into civilian production.<sup>3</sup> Efforts at building defence cooperation with Russia were also made, both bilaterally and under the umbrella of the NATO Partnership for Peace. Assisting Moscow in transforming the remnants of the Red Army into a force geared towards local conflicts and 'soft' security threats, including peacekeeping and emergency response, was a particular focus, because it was assumed that this would be the major area of Russian military activities in the future. The hope was that by cooperating with Moscow in this way, it would be possible to 'help steer Russian military planning toward international peacekeeping missions rather than great-power rivalry' and to assist the country's modernisation at the same time as preventing a future challenge to US military superiority.<sup>4</sup>

The view that the ultimate aim of Russian military modernisation was, or at least ought to be, the creation of armed forces configured mostly for local, low-intensity wars, was a mainstay in Western expectations until the 2010s. A military that was 'mobile, flexible and...combat-ready for scenarios like local conflicts and asymmetrical warfare'<sup>5</sup> was considered to be in Moscow's

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this article is based on the author's book, *Russia's Military Revival*, which was published by Polity Press in 2018.

<http://politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9781509516148>

<sup>2</sup> Goure, 'Moscow's vision of future war', pp. 66-7.

<sup>3</sup> Astrid Wendlandt, 'Pacifying Russia: international aid and NATO expansion', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 22(2), 1998, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Sumner Benson, 'Will modern technology remilitarise Russia?', *Orbis*, 39(9), 1995, pp. 404-5.

<sup>5</sup> Margarete Klein, 'Towards a "New Look" of the Russian Armed Forces? Organizational and Personnel Changes', in R McDermott, B Nygren and C Vendil Pallin (eds.), *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, p. 43.

best interest in order to enable it to deal with the ‘small-scale soft security threats [Russia] should anticipate in the future’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, an army geared for small-war fighting was seen as sufficient for addressing the country’s ‘legitimate security concerns’ vis-à-vis areas of instability in its neighbourhood,<sup>7</sup> whilst at the same time preventing the ‘familiar Soviet pattern of engaging in far-flung adventures’.<sup>8</sup> Such views on the future of the Russian military persisted in spite of the fact that its military doctrines since 1993 continued addressing ‘traditional’ conflict scenarios and the need for requisite war-fighting capabilities. Although Kremlin leaders, at least since the mid-1990s, never unambiguously indicated that the country had relinquished its great-power ambitions, including in the military realm, there was a tendency to explain the expression of concerns about scenarios and capabilities beyond local conflict management as concessions made to conservative generals unable to move on from the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> It is within this context that Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military aggression against Ukraine since 2014, followed by the involvement in the Syrian civil war from 2015, took many in the West by surprise. These actions did not correspond to expectations about the future of Russian military power, instead signalling the country’s unexpected return to ‘geopolitical rivalries’.<sup>10</sup>

This article argues that small war renewal was never the major focus of Russian views on military transformation and the utility of force. Tracing the country’s experience of war and conflict regionally and internationally since the end of the Cold War, and the impact this had on the Kremlin’s views on what kind of armed forces it desired, the article sets out to show that Moscow’s military ambitions started to diverge dramatically from Western expectations as early as the mid-1990s. Small war renewal was an aspect in Russian deliberations on the future of military power. However, as a result of what Jakob Kipp described as a ‘strategic culture rooted in its Eurasia setting, committed to its great power status and defined by persistent concerns over foreign intervention in its periphery’, Moscow never really saw armed forces geared towards new-war type scenarios as sufficient for the protection of national interests and security.<sup>11</sup> Growing concerns over the US monopoly on the use of force and the portrayal of Western military interventions as a threat to regional and international stability meant that the pursuit of ‘full-spectrum conventional, unconventional and nuclear capabilities’ soon returned to the core of military ambitions.<sup>12</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, moreover, growing preoccupation with internal order and regime stability has reinforced official discourse of a West hostile to Russia’s interests in order to justify the increasing centralisation of domestic

---

<sup>6</sup> Zoltan Barany, ‘Defence Reform Russian Style: Obstacles, Options, Opposition’, *Contemporary Politics*, 11(1), 2005, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew J. Pierre and Dmitri Trenin, ‘Developing Russia-NATO relations’, *Survival*, 39(1), 1997, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Lambeth, ‘Russia’s wounded military’, *Foreign Affairs*, 74(2), 1995, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel de Haas, *Russia’s military doctrine development (2000-2010)*, in S Blank (ed.), *Russian Military Politics and Russia’s 2020 Defense Doctrine*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011, p. 27; Barany ‘Defence Reform’, p. 35; Klein, ‘Towards a “New Look”’, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Russell Mead, ‘The return of geopolitics: the revenge of the revisionist powers’, *Foreign Affairs*, 93(3), 2014, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, ‘“Smart defense” from new threats: Future war from a Russian perspective’, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1), 2014, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> David Johnson, ‘Russia’s approach to conflict: implications for NATO’s deterrence and defence’, NATO Defence College, Research Paper No. 111, 2015, p. 2.

political process. In combination, these factors meant that Russia's military revival, which came to the world's attention in 2014, has been long in the making.

### *Small war renewal*

The end of Cold War superpower competition meant that small wars, intra-state conflicts and insurgencies, which at best had been seen as a peripheral task of the armed forces, started to emerge as an increasingly important concern both in for the United States and for Russia. Both superpowers' militaries had been configured for large-scale conventional warfare in land and naval theatres, as well as for strategic defence against existential external threats. This left them militarily, doctrinally and politically unprepared for the task of dealing efficiently with wars at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. The United States started the process of transforming its armed forces from a position of strength, having emerged from the Cold War as the world's sole superpower with an intact military and economy. In the absence of a defined state competitor to measure its capabilities against, it decided to size its military on the 'two-war' standard, which meant maintaining armed forces strong enough to deal with two concurrent major regional wars. Russia, in contrast, entered the new era as a mere shadow of its former self and faced the challenge not only of building a national military from the remnants of the Soviet army, but also of fundamentally rebuilding its political system and salvaging a collapsed economy.<sup>13</sup> Preoccupied with the demands of urgent political, social and economic problems, the systematic adaptation of security and defence policies was not an immediate priority and there was a distinct lack of clarity on guidelines and doctrines regarding Russia's security interests and the military reforms required to protect them.<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1990s, for the newly established Russian Federation, its armed forces' unpreparedness to deal with small wars and insurgencies quickly emerged as the most immediate concern. The rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the eruption of a number of violent clashes on Russia's periphery and within its own borders. Its armed forces were drawn into conflicts in Moldova (Transnistria), South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia), Tajikistan and later Chechnya before relevant guidelines and doctrines had been worked out. According to some estimates, by the end of 1992 more than 27,000 Russian soldiers were engaged in various trouble spots in the area, increasing to 36,000 by the end of 1993.<sup>15</sup> Chaos and contingency determined Russia's involvement in some of these conflicts almost by default. Before the political and military leaderships had a chance to decide on a clear strategic vision, soldiers that were still stationed in Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan came under fire from local paramilitary forces, often demanding weapons. The situation became so serious that in 1992 defence minister Pavel Grachev permitted troops in conflict zones to defend themselves without direct orders from Moscow.<sup>16</sup> As a result, as Pavel Baev put it, in the early 1990s the Kremlin had no choice but to 'adjust its course of action according to the military realities'.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Goure, 'Moscow's vision of future war: so many conflict scenarios, so little time, money and forces', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1), 2014, pp. 65-6.

<sup>14</sup> Pavel Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, London: Sage 1996, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Pavel Baev, 'Peacekeeping and conflict management in Eurasia', in Roy Allison and Christopher Bluth (eds.) *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998, p. 218.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1798-2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 273.

<sup>17</sup> Pavel Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, London: Sage, 1996, p. 35.

The eruption of violent clashes across the former Soviet region was a regional and international security concern and, in the absence of other actors willing or able to step up to the task, Russian military intervention there was almost inevitable. The civil war in Tajikistan quickly turned into a threat to the entire region.<sup>18</sup> Its long and poorly defended border with Afghanistan stoked fears over lawlessness, crime, insurgency and extremism spilling over into Central Asia and beyond. The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia caused concern about the potential overspill of hostilities and instability into the Russian side of the North Caucasus, which already was unstable.<sup>19</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia was the only country in the region that had anything even approximating a functioning military and some of the other newly independent states looked toward it as a provider of security.<sup>20</sup> A Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit in 1992 had agreed to establish a joint corps of military observers and units for peacekeeping missions.<sup>21</sup> In reality, however, only Russia was in a position to contribute troops to these operations, which meant that this mandate was only nominal.<sup>22</sup> These 1990s interventions did not correspond to international norms of peacekeeping. They were dominated by Russian forces, rarely impartial and often criticised for excessive use of force. 'Peacekeeping' forces were deployed where Russian soldiers already had been fighting and, in some cases, these were drawn from the same troops.<sup>23</sup> At a summit meeting in Moscow in 1994 US President Bill Clinton reminded Yeltsin that peacekeeping had to adhere to internationally accepted principles. However, he also conceded that Russia had a role to play in the region similar to the US's commitments in Panama and Grenada.<sup>24</sup>

Given developments on the ground, the need to develop relevant guidelines and capabilities for fighting small wars and insurgencies became an important aspect in Russian strategic thinking and doctrine. The country's first military doctrine adopted in 1993 focused on the threat of ethnic and internal armed conflict, because this was an immediate military challenge to national security. Subsequent versions of the doctrine published in 2000, 2010 and 2014 also reflected changing international security priorities. 'New' challenges to stability in the form of extremism, ethnic strife and religiously motivated terrorism within Russia's own borders, in its neighbourhood and beyond, took an increasingly important place. In the early 1990s, the Russian leadership saw engagement in UN peacekeeping as an important way to integrate with international security organisations. Russian troops contributed to various protection and stabilisation forces in the Balkans from 1992 and worked alongside NATO troops as part of

---

<sup>18</sup> Roy Allison, *Russia, the West and Military Intervention*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 54-5.

<sup>19</sup> Sergei Markedonov, 'The paradoxes of Russia's Georgia policy', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 5(2), 2007. [https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_8551](https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_8551)

<sup>20</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, 'Sovereignty and the "near abroad"', *Orbis*, 39(3), 1995, p. 361.

<sup>21</sup> This article refers to the CIS region as the former Soviet region minus the Baltic States. All newly independent states with the exception of the Baltic States were founding states or joined as member states of the Commonwealth by 1994. Georgia and Ukraine ceased all participation/cooperation with the CIS in 2008/2014.

<sup>22</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, 'Boris Yeltsin, the Soviet Union, the CIS, and me', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Fall 2016. <https://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/the-lasting-legacy-of-the-cold-war/boris-yeltsin-the-soviet-union-the-cis-and-me/>

<sup>23</sup> Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: the case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, London: Macmillan, 1999, pp. 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Nichol, US -Russian Summit, January 13/14, 1994: Outcomes and Implications for US Interests, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 94-80 F, 3 February 1994.

KFOR until 2003. Russian peacekeeping there differed considerably from the operations in the CIS. Experience gained through cooperation brought Russian peacekeeping doctrines more into line with the views of the UN and also informed reforms of its security apparatus.<sup>25</sup> KFOR improved interoperability with NATO and led to the development of a Generic Concept of Joint NATO-Russian Peacekeeping Operations.<sup>26</sup> Recognising that many 'new' security challenges transcend national borders and require an international response, Russia also started seeking more cooperation in areas such as emergency response, disaster management, counterdrug operations and counterterrorism under the auspices of the UN, the NATO-Russia Council and on a bilateral basis.<sup>27</sup> Following 9/11, Moscow pledged support to the US in the 'Global War on Terrorism' and continued cooperation in this area even when relations became tense at the time of the Iraq war in 2003. Russia-NATO military-to-military cooperation in the area of emerging security challenges continued until it was stopped after the annexation of Crimea.<sup>28</sup>

Lessons from regional conflicts during the early 1990s informed Russian thinking about what kind of armed forces the country required. Given the military's poor performance, particularly in Chechnya, it soon became a consensus view that the creation of armed forces able to deal effectively with regional conflicts, especially in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia, was essential.<sup>29</sup> Personnel from various paramilitary forces, for example the Ministry of Emergency Situation's civil defence troops and the FSB's counterterrorism units, were able to make up for the shortcomings of the regular armed forces in some areas. However, it was clear that the mass mobilisation military relying heavily on conscription was a relic in urgent need of reform. Throughout the 1990s, an important strand in Russian strategic thinking pressed for a significant increase in the number of professional soldiers (or even a fully professional military), as well as for improvements in permanent readiness, mobility and rapid reaction.<sup>30</sup> Some progress in improving capabilities in small war fighting was made during the 1990s, as the improved operational performance in the second Chechen war from 1999 onwards demonstrated.<sup>31</sup> However, only the 2008 reform programme led to fundamental change in this area. Heavily influenced by those strategists that had pushed for improving capabilities required to deal with small wars and insurgencies,<sup>32</sup> serious changes were implemented with impressive speed. Legacy mobilisation units manned only by a skeleton staff of officers were

---

<sup>25</sup> Isabel Facon, 'Integration or retrenchment? Russian approaches to peacekeeping' in Rachel Utley (ed.), *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2006, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Nikitin, 'Partners in peacekeeping', NATO opinion, 1 October 2004. [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions\\_21119.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions_21119.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>27</sup> Bettina Renz, 'Crisis response in war and peace: Russia's "Emergency Ministry" and security sector reform', *World Defence Systems*, 17, 2007 pp. 148-52.

<sup>28</sup> Yulia Boguslavskaya, 'Russia and NATO: looking for the less pessimistic scenario' in R. Czulda and M. Madej (eds.), *Newcomers No More? Contemporary NATO and the Future from the Perspective of the "Post-Cold War" Members*, Warsaw: International Relations Institute, 2015, pp. 213-15.

<sup>29</sup> Aleksei Arbatov, 'Military reforms in Russia: dilemmas, obstacles and prospects', *International Security*, 22(4), 1998, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> Tor Bukkvoll, 'Iron cannot fight – the role of technology in current Russian military theory', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34(5), 2011, pp. 697-701.

<sup>31</sup> Quentin Hodgson, 'Is the Russian bear learning? An operational and tactical analysis of the second Chechen war, 1992-2002', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26(2), 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Bukkvoll, 'Iron cannot fight', p. 701.

replaced with smaller, more deployable units with permanent readiness. The number of professional soldiers steadily increased. Troops were provided with modern equipment and changes were made to education and training in order to enhance mobility and combat readiness. New Special Operations Forces, trained for deployment across various combat missions, including counterterrorism, were also created in 2011.<sup>33</sup> As the annexation of Crimea demonstrated, the 2008 reform programme led to advances in tactical art, operational skills and equipment that turned the Russian military from a blunt instrument into a force equipped to deal efficiently with the requirements of wars at the lower end of the conflict spectrum.

### *Status and military power*

Contingency and insecurity drew Russia into a variety of conflicts in the CIS region in the early 1990s. The poor performance of its armed forces there turned small war renewal into an important consideration for the configuration of its future forces. However, regional and international status concerns soon emerged as a reason for why military modernisation above and beyond improving capabilities for small wars and insurgencies again became a priority. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's future role in the region was uncertain and subject to significant domestic disagreement.<sup>34</sup> It is clear, however, that Moscow always assumed that its dominant position there was a given and would be recognized both by its neighbours and the world. In addition to the need to counter sources of instability on its periphery, a dominant position in the former Soviet region was seen as essential to protect economic and strategic interests and to ensure reliable allies, which the country had traditionally lacked. As early as 1992, the chair of the Russian Supreme Soviet's Committee for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations, Evgenii Ambartsumov, asserted that 'as the internationally recognized legal successor to the USSR, the [Russian Federation] must proceed in its foreign policy from a doctrine declaring all the geopolitical space of the former Union as the sphere of its vital interests...and must seek the world community's understanding and recognition of its [special] interests in this space'.<sup>35</sup>

By 1993 a moderate nationalist vision, where Russia, as a *primus inter pares*, would carry out its responsibilities as security guarantor in the CIS - preferably through multilateral organisations but also unilaterally if required - emerged as a consensus view in the political elite.<sup>36</sup> The foreign policy concept issued in the same year laid out Russia's claims to what it saw as its interests, rights and responsibilities and the 1993 military doctrine implied the intention to play greater role in the region. As Yeltsin explained it:

Russia continues to have a vital interest in the cessation of all armed conflict in the territory of the former USSR. Moreover, the world community is increasingly coming to realise our country's special responsibility in this difficult matter. I believe the time

---

<sup>33</sup> Aleksey Nikolsky, 'Little, Green and Polite: The creation of Russian Special Operation Forces' in Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov (eds.) *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, Minneapolis, MN: Eastview Press, 2014, pp. 124-` 34.

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Babak, 'Russia's relations with the near abroad', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 27(1), 2000, p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Stephen Page, 'The creation of a sphere of influence: Russia and Central Asia', *International Journal*, 49(4), 1994, p. 794.

<sup>36</sup> Allison, *Russia, the West and Military Intervention*, pp. 122-3.



has come...to grant Russia special powers as a guarantor of peace and stability in this region'.<sup>37</sup>

Until the mid-1990s the United States and the West, preoccupied with developments within Russia itself, did not treat the rest of the CIS as a priority area. Criticism of the military interventions there, like that voiced by Clinton above, tended to focus on Russian violations of norms of international behaviour, but did not fundamentally question the country's right to seek stability in the region.<sup>38</sup> It is not inconceivable that Moscow, at least implicitly, understood the West's relative lack of interest as tacit approval of its self-declared role as the regional security guarantor and hegemon.

By the mid-1990s it emerged, perhaps unexpectedly for Russia, that neither the West nor its CIS neighbours shared its long-term vision for the region. As the CIS states developed their own foreign and security policies, they cooperated with Russia when it suited them, but also kept an open mind to other options. The United States and its allies started taking a stronger interest in the CIS region, politically and economically, but also in the area of security. This included tougher diplomatic positions on Russia's approach to the ongoing conflicts and promises of financial aid and closer ties with NATO to the countries affected. Emboldened by Western support, political leaders of those states fearing Russian domination became more outspoken in their criticism of Moscow's policies like Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, who called for a 'Bosnian model' solution to the conflict in Abkhazia with a stronger role for NATO.<sup>39</sup> In Moscow, the view of Western cooperation with its CIS neighbours as a strategy for isolating and containing Russia started to emerge.<sup>40</sup> In 1994, cautioning against NATO enlargement towards the East, Yeltsin told his CIS neighbours that 'the euphoria of free sailing in the stormy sea of independence was over', and warned the West that the downsizing of Russia's armed forces as a 'unilateral concession' would end.<sup>41</sup> In 1997, he reiterated that his country was not prepared to stand by while the West was trying to 'nullify Russia's presence' in the region, stating unambiguously that he would do everything to prevent the formation of 'anti-Russian buffer states'.<sup>42</sup>

In spite of these loud rejections of what the Kremlin perceived as unwarranted Western encroachment into its declared sphere of interest, Russian military activities in the CIS region in reality became more restrained around the mid-1990s. The quagmire in Chechnya and growing resource constraints on the military were likely reasons for this, but also the fact that Russia at the time simply did not have the power – militarily and economically – to pursue its desire to keep the West out of the region. Some observers in the West mistakenly assumed at

---

<sup>37</sup> Page, 'The creation of a sphere of influence', p. 800.

<sup>38</sup> Maxim Shashenkov, 'Russian peacekeeping in the "near abroad"', *Survival*, 36(3), 1994, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Kubicek, 'Russian foreign policy and the West', *Political Science Quarterly*, 114(4), Winter 1999-2000, p. 565.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, 'The pawn of Great Powers: the East-West competition for Caucasia', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1(1), 2010, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Sneider, 'Yeltsin speech: the answer to Russian woes is a strong state', *Christian Science Monitor*, 25 February 1997.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1994/0225/25072.html>

<sup>42</sup> Kubicek 'Russian foreign policy', p. 566; Paul Goble, 'Russia: Analysis from Washington – Yeltsin's CIS ultimatum', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 9 April 1997. Available at <https://www.rferl.org/a/1084280.html>

the time that this signalled Russia's readiness to 'back down' or to make a 'military-strategic retreat' from the region.<sup>43</sup> Fears over the encroachment of the West and of NATO into its declared 'sphere of interest', and the intention to counter this, continued being a central feature in foreign policy and appeared in all versions of the military doctrine since 1993. From 2010 onwards, the Russian military doctrine explicitly named NATO enlargement and the movement of NATO infrastructure closer to Russia's borders as the top external military danger to security.

Although the intensity of Russian military activities in the region waned in the mid-1990s, Moscow consistently maintained a significant military presence in various CIS states, including large numbers of troops in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>44</sup> This gave it a permanent foothold in strategically significant 'outposts' and also offered a powerful future lever for political influence and pressure. Operations in the CIS region during the 1990s were presented in the language of multilateral peacekeeping, which the Kremlin saw as preferable at a time when it assumed its dominant role in the region was a given. Its conduct there became more aggressive when some of the CIS states took a decisive turn to the West, a process that, in the eyes of the Kremlin, the latter actively encouraged. When Russia's military and economic strength started to recover, it abandoned the image of benign security guarantor and demonstrated, both in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014, that its dominant status in the region was non-negotiable.

Fears over losing its political, economic and military-strategic sphere of influence to the West, and especially to NATO, strongly informed Moscow's views on the required scale and scope of future military transformation. With regards to asserting dominance over the CIS countries themselves, improving capabilities for small war fighting would have been sufficient. Although the operational performance of Russian forces during the 1990s was far from stellar, they never risked a comprehensive defeat, because in terms of quantity and quality they outrivalled the capabilities of all other former Soviet states. Small war competencies did nothing, however, for feelings of weakness vis-à-vis the United States' conventional superiority and insecurity in the face of NATO's growing influence in the CIS region. Russian concerns were exacerbated by the display of NATO's strength in the Balkans. When Operation Allied Force (OAF) forcefully disposed of the Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, in spite of strong opposition from Russia who regarded him as an ally, this further fanned fears that, unless its military weakness was dealt with, Moscow would not be able to prevent potential intrusions by the West into its more direct sphere of influence in the future.<sup>45</sup> As the Russian defence expert, Aleksei Arbatov, had noted already in 2000, OAF 'marked a watershed in Russia's assessment of its own military requirements and defense priorities'.<sup>46</sup>

Russia's growing preoccupation with its regional status went hand in hand with concerns over the permanent loss of its international status as a major global power. Fears that the United

---

<sup>43</sup> Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 16; Kubicek, 'Russian foreign policy', pp. 567-8.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Kramer, 'Russian policies towards the Commonwealth of Independent States: recent trends and future prospects', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55(6), 2008, pp. 5

<sup>45</sup> Allison, *Russia, the West and Military Intervention*, p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Aleksei G. Arbatov, 'The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons learned from Kosovo and Chechnya', *The Marshall Centre Papers*, No 2, June 2000, p. 7.



States, relying on military might, was intent on establishing itself as the hegemonic power whilst keeping Russia on its knees and preventing Moscow from having a say in the solution of developments of global importance emerged as early as 1992. The need to counter this eventuality became an established view from the mid-1990s with the appointment of Evgenii Primakov as foreign minister, and a mainstay of Russian foreign policy following OAF in 1999.<sup>47</sup> In the run-up to OAF, Moscow had argued that decisions on actions taken against Milosevic should be made by the UN and authorised by the Security Council, which included Russia and other major powers. When NATO proceeded without a Security Council Resolution, the Kremlin viewed this as a blatant disregard of international law and as evidence, as Charles Ziegler put it, that ‘Washington expects Russia to subordinate itself to the US-dominated international hierarchy that emerged after 1991.’<sup>48</sup> NATO’s justification of OAF as a humanitarian intervention was a particular bone of contention and exacerbated the Kremlin’s fears over its future ability to pursue an independent foreign policy in its near abroad and beyond. Moscow’s conviction that the West was using humanitarian principles as a pretext to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states to expand its own power and influence emerged. As Yeltsin noted in an address to the OSCE in 1999, European security was endangered, in his view, by ‘calls for “humanitarian intervention” – a new idea – in the international affairs of another state, even when they are made under the pretext of defending human rights and freedoms’.<sup>49</sup> The crisis in the Balkans, including joint peacekeeping efforts, seemed to offer an opportunity to establish closer cooperation between Russia and the West in solving global security issues. Ultimately, Moscow’s perception that its views were not taken sufficiently into account meant that it led instead to the first serious breakdown in relations. The feeling of being excluded from decision-making motivated the Kremlin to adopt a more confrontational approach towards the West, because it confirmed to the political and military elite that the country ‘has to rely on military strength, rather than on illusions about justice and good intentions in international relations’.<sup>50</sup> From 2000 onwards, strengthening the military became a priority as this seemed indispensable to protect the country’s ability to act as an independent pole in international politics, whose views could not be ignored. Interventions leading to regime change in Iraq in 2003 and in Libya in 2011, which Moscow had strongly opposed, were seen as further evidence that military weakness curtailed the country’s international clout and freedom of actions. As Putin put it in 2012:

The basic principles of international law are being degraded and eroded, especially in terms of international security. Under these circumstances, Russia cannot fall back on diplomatic and economic methods alone to settle contradiction and resolve conflict. Our country faces the task of developing its military potential as part of a deterrence strategy and at a sufficient level. Its armed forces, special services and other security-related agencies should be prepared for quick and effective responses to new

---

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Monaghan, ‘Calmly critical’ – Evolving Russian views of US hegemony’, *International Affairs*, 29(6), 2007, pp. 988-992.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Ziegler, ‘Conceptualising Russian foreign policy: realist and constructivist perspectives’, *International Politics*, 49(4), 2012, p. 412.

<sup>49</sup> Boris Yeltsin, ‘Changes in the international climate’, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 66(5), 1999, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> Vladimir Baranovsky, ‘The Kosovo factor in Russia’s foreign policy’, *The International Spectator*, 35(2), 2000, pp. 124-5.

challenges. This is an indispensable condition for Russia to feel secure and for our partners to heed our country's arguments in various international formats.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, owing to the decay of conventional military capabilities, Russia relied on a strong nuclear arsenal for securing itself against the potential of existential threats to its security. Whilst this was sufficient for deterring potential invasion and direct attack by a conventionally superior adversary, it soon became clear that the effectiveness of nuclear weapons against less direct threats to interests that were nonetheless seen as vital – such as protecting its dominant position in the 'near abroad' or its ability to curtail what it saw as the United States' monopoly on the use of force - was limited. The need to balance a strong nuclear deterrent with conventional capabilities for a more flexible response, including cutting-edge technologies for land, air and naval warfare and a substantial degree of mobilisation and mass, became an important focus in Russian thinking and reform efforts.<sup>52</sup> The expensive journey towards the revival of conventional military power started in earnest from 2000 onwards when, aided by a recovering economy and a Gross Domestic Product that experienced impressive growth rates from 1999 until 2008, the defence budget increased dramatically. Efforts to rebuild a serious conventional force accelerated with the modernisation programme in 2008. A key element of this was an ambitious State Armament Programme with the aim of modernising 70 percent of all equipment by 2020. Although not every target was achieved in full, an impressive quantity and quality of new hardware, weapons and equipment has been delivered to all branches of service.<sup>53</sup> An element of conscription was maintained to ensure the desired size of the armed forces, which has been fixed at a maximum of a million by presidential decree. At the same time, the number of professional soldiers has been growing especially in rapid reaction units and in specialist positions involving the operation of advanced equipment and weaponry.<sup>54</sup> Structural changes, technological renewal and increasing professionalization were complemented by adjustments to the education and training of troops in order to enhance combat readiness. Increased funding meant that large-scale military exercises, which were unaffordable for almost two decades, were reintroduced in 2009.<sup>55</sup> Since 2011, inter-service exercises involving up to 150,000 men have been held on a regular basis, preparing the all armed services for joint and combined combat operations.<sup>56</sup>

Increased funding and more systematic attention paid to the armed forces had already led to serious improvements in conventional capabilities by the time of the war against Georgia in August 2008. On the one hand, the operations revealed that significant shortcomings, especially

---

<sup>51</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Being strong: why Russia needs to rebuild its military', *Foreign Affairs*, 21 February 2012. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/21/being-strong/>

<sup>52</sup> Kristin ven Bruusgaard, 'Russian strategic deterrence', *Survival*, 58(4), 2016, pp. 9 and 19; Bukkvoll, 'Iron cannot fight', pp. 687-697.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Connolly and Cecile Sendstad, 'Russian rearmament', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 65(3), 2018, pp. 143-160.

<sup>54</sup> Anton Lavrov, 'Towards a professional army', *Moscow Defense Brief*, 4(48), 2015. The exact size of the Russian armed forces is unknown. Estimates in 2018 range between 850,000 and 900,000 personnel.

<sup>55</sup> Dmitry Trenin, 'The revival of the Russian military: how Moscow reloaded', *Foreign Affairs*, 95(3), p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Johan Norberg, 'Training to fight: Russia's major military exercises, 2011-2014', Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) Report, 2015. <https://www.foi.se/report-search/pdf?fileName=D%3A%5CReportSearch%5CFiles%5C3321ba7b-6c7a-41a6-aa0a-696dbe845b3a.pdf>

in the area of command, control and communication had yet to be overcome, and these were addressed by the modernisation programme announced in the autumn of the same year. On the other hand, Russia achieved its aim of expelling Georgia – a conventional opponent using similar equipment and tactics – from South Ossetia within a matter of five days, demonstrating that its capabilities had ‘improved considerably compared with the 1990s’.<sup>57</sup> During the air strikes in Syria from 2015, the Kremlin showed that the modernisation of its conventional military might had yielded the the sea and airlift capabilities required for out-of-area operations on a global scale. This air campaign would have been categorically beyond the realm of possibilities just a decade earlier.<sup>58</sup>

In terms of spending, combined manpower, sophistication of available technology and combat experience, Russia’s conventional military power still has a way to go to catch up with the United States and NATO. However, the achievements of reforms and increased spending since 2000 have made the Kremlin much more confident in having the power to maintain its grip over its sphere of interest and to have a say in the course of international events. Russia’s aggression against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine since 2014 sent a stark warning to all CIS states that any attempts to break from its orbit would come at serious cost. Arguably, conspicuous display of regained conventional capabilities and the evident willingness to use them will also play into considerations by NATO and the West about their future role in the region. In Syria, Russia showed that it now had the capabilities to challenge what it saw as the US’s monopoly on the use of force on a global level and to get a say in the course of events relevant to its national interests. Certainly, this will have to factor into the West’s use of military force in certain situations in the future, because the danger of spiralling tensions and escalation with Russia will need to be taken into account.

### *Regime stability*

The need for equipping the armed forces with the skills to deal more effectively with sources of instability on the country’s periphery and the protection of the country’s status, both regionally and globally, have not been the only factors influencing Russian thinking about military transformation and the future of war and conflict. Concerns over threats to internal order and regime stability have also influenced this thinking, especially since the turn of the millennium. As Lilia Shevtsova wrote towards the end of Putin’s first two terms in office, ‘Russia’s foreign policy has become an important tool for achieving the Kremlin’s domestic objectives. And a key foreign policy objective is to create the image of a hostile international environment and demonstrate a strong reaction to which it can legitimize the hyper-centralization of Kremlin power, top-down governance, and its crackdown on political pluralism’.<sup>59</sup> In other words, in the Kremlin’s thinking about future war and conflict, ‘the outer aggression and the inner repression are reinforcing each other’.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin and Frederik Westerlund, ‘Russia’s war with Georgia: lessons and consequences’, *Small Wars and insurgencies*, 20(2), 2009, p. 401.

<sup>58</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, ‘What Russia’s military operations in Syria can tell us about advances in its capabilities’, PONARS Policy Memo 424, 2016.

<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/advances-russian-military-operations>

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Goure ‘Moscow’s vision of future war’, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Jakob Hedenskog, Gudrun Persson and Carolina Vendil Pallin, ‘Russian security policy’ in Gudrun Persson (ed.) *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016*, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2016), p. 122.

Moscow's criticism of what it describes as Western meddling in the domestic affairs of other states – through humanitarian intervention, but also by political means and democracy promotion – has been based on the argument made consistently since the end of the 1990s that such actions violate the core principle of sovereignty of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. This criticism dates back to OAF as noted above and accelerated with the 2003 war in Iraq and the intervention in Libya in 2011. As Putin noted in an article published in *Moskovskie novosti* in 2012, 'armed conflicts that are launched under the pretext of humanitarian goals are undermining the time-honoured principle of state sovereignty. They are creating a void in the moral and legal implications of international relations'. With reference to developments in the Arab Spring and the Libya intervention in 2011, he continued:

Russia sympathised with those seeking democratic reforms. However, it soon became clear that developments in many countries did not follow a civilised scenario. Instead of establishing democracy and protecting the rights of the minority, there was a push to dispose of an opponent and to stage a coup, replacing one dominant force with another, even more aggressive one [...] The deterioration of the situation in this case was the result of outside intervention in support of one party in an internal conflict'.<sup>61</sup>

Since 2003, popular demands for political change across various countries in the CIS region that became known as the 'colour revolutions' have been increasingly designated as a security threat in official Russian discourse. Based on the allegation that these revolutions were instigated and encouraged by external political meddling, 'colour revolutions' are routinely conflated with Western military interventions and thereby militarised as a potential threat to Russia's own sovereignty.<sup>62</sup> As Putin noted already in 2004 following the Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine:

As far as all post-Soviet space is concerned, I am concerned above all about attempts to resolve legal issues by illegal means. That is the most dangerous thing. It is the most dangerous thing to think up a system of permanent revolutions – now the Rose Revolution, or the Blue Revolution. One should get used to living according to the law, rather than according to political expediency defined elsewhere for some or other nation – that is what worries me most.<sup>63</sup>

By 2014, in the aftermath of Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity and the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin had linked what it routinely describes as Western-instigated 'colour revolutions' to extremism and portrayed this as a threat with serious implications for external and internal security.<sup>64</sup> As Putin explained at a meeting with the Security Council:

---

<https://www.foi.se/en/our-services/fois-reports--publications/summary.html?reportNo=FOI-R--4326--SE>

<sup>61</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Rossiia i meniaiushchiisia mir', *Moskovskie Novosti*, 27 February 2012. <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>

<sup>62</sup> Yulia Nikitina, 'The "colour revolutions" and "Arab spring" in Russian official discourse', *Connections*, 14(1), 2014, p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Press conference with Russian and foreign media', 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2004. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22757>

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Bouchet, 'Russia's "militarisation" of colour revolutions', *Policy Perspectives*, 4(2), 2016, p. 2. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/PP4-2.pdf>

In the modern world extremism is often used as a geopolitical instrument to rearrange spheres of influence. We see the tragic consequences of the wave of so-called ‘colour revolutions’, the turmoil in the countries that have undergone the irresponsible experiments of covert and sometimes blatant interference in their lives. We take this as a lesson and a warning, and we must do everything necessary to ensure this never happens in Russia [...] As we assert our freedom of choice, the right to hold meetings, marches and rallies, we should not forget that we are responsible for our words and deeds. We must know and bear in mind that [...] particularly calls for a violent overthrow of the existing regime are direct manifestations of anti-national thinking and extremism.<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, a principled stance on international norms and the principles of sovereignty (as Russia’s blatant violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty in 2014 also confirmed) is not the central driver for Moscow’s professed concern over humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion. Instead, ‘the politics of fear’ about a West that is hostile to Russia have become ‘major instruments of maintaining authoritarian equilibrium’.<sup>66</sup>

Concerns over threats to internal order and regime stability have led to growing centralisation and state control over many aspects of domestic politics and society under Putin since 2000. This has included restrictions on media freedom and civil society through registration laws, punitive law enforcement and other means. These concerns have also influenced Russian thinking on traditional security and defence. As such, the Kremlin’s portrayal of external political influence, especially by the way of information, as a threat to political stability, is not a recent development. Even during the 1990s, at a time of relative democratic freedom, there were fears, as Timothy Thomas noted in 1996, that ‘in an unstable public-political and socio-economic situation, the entire population could serve as a target of influence for an enemy campaign’. Management of information in particular was therefore seen as essential to the maintenance of stability in the country.<sup>67</sup> In 2000, Putin signed the first version of the ‘Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation’. This addressed subjects, such as the moral content of the media and clearly indicated the prioritisation of information as a matter of national security.<sup>68</sup> The 2014 version of the Military Doctrine for the first time included in its section on domestic military dangers the notion of external threats to the information space and internal order. Specifically, it referred to the danger of ‘subversive information activities against the population, especially young citizens of the State, aimed at undermining historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions related to the defense of the Motherland’.<sup>69</sup> It also listed as one of the armed forces’ main tasks the reduction of the ‘risk of using information and communication technologies for military-political purposes to undertake actions running counter to international law, directed against sovereignty, political independence or territorial integrity of states or threatening international peace and security, and global and regional

---

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Putin, ‘Security Council meeting’, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/47045>

<sup>66</sup> Hedenskog et al, ‘Russian security policy’, p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> Timothy Thomas, ‘Russian views on information-based warfare’, *Airpower Journal*, Special edition 1996, p. 31. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a529685.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Bacon et al, *Securitising Russia*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>69</sup> The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, section II 13.c, 25 December 2014.



stability'.<sup>70</sup> External political influence over the population as a military danger has also been reflected in the work of influential strategists, most notably Valerii Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff, in his now infamous article penned in 2013. In this article, which later erroneously became known as the 'Gerasimov Doctrine',<sup>71</sup> he outlined his views on trends in Western and specifically US approaches to warfare. Tracing these trends back to the 1991 Gulf War, he discussed them within the framework of the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya. In Gerasimov's eyes, these conflicts demonstrated the growing potency of non-military tools, such as political and information influence over enemy populations, blurring the lines between war and peace, with serious implications for the character of war and utility of military force.<sup>72</sup> The article, which was based on a speech directed at officers at the Academy of War Sciences, was an appeal to the Russian military establishment for the need of innovation in military thinking in this area as part of the modernisation programme. This was required, in Gerasimov's eyes, in order to avoid falling behind the West in this respect.<sup>73</sup> As such, the article highlighted the growing centrality of outside political and information influence as a major threat to internal order and regime stability in contemporary Russian military thinking.<sup>74</sup>

Strengthening conventional capabilities has been one way of securing Russia against the potentiality of outside meddling by military force. The renewal of strong conventional capabilities, and the development of advanced high-precision weapons in particular, is seen as essential for maintaining an edge in modern and future warfare in contemporary Russian military thinking, including by strategists like Gerasimov.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, growing fears over external political and information influence have meant that the need to develop capabilities for using non-military tools of warfare, both defensively and offensively, have become another important feature in strategic thinking. Since the turn of the millennium they have evolved as a central element in the concept of 'strategic deterrence', where nuclear, conventional and non-military tools are used during war and peace both offensively and defensively in what could be described as a 'combined strategy of containment, deterrence and coercion'.<sup>76</sup> As Kristin ven Bruusgaard found in her study of 'strategic deterrence' in Russian military thinking, the concept is not yet fully developed and there is some disagreement amongst strategists about its utility. Moreover, the role of non-military tools is the least developed element in the concept and it remains unclear how exactly non-military deterrence

---

<sup>70</sup> The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, section III 19.s, 25 December 2014. Official translation available at <http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Galeotti, 'The mythical Gerasimov Doctrine and the language of threat', *Critical Studies on Security*, published online February 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2018.1441623>

<sup>72</sup> Valeri Gerasimov, 'Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii', *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, 8(476), 2013, pp. 1-3; a partial translation of the article is available in Mark Galeotti, *The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian non-linear war*, Moscow's Shadow Blog, 2014, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrineand-russian-non-linear-war>

<sup>73</sup> Ulrich Franke, *War by non-military means: Understanding Russian information warfare*, FOI Report, FOI-R-4065-SE), Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2015, p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Bartles, 'Getting Gerasimov right', *Military Review*, January-February 2016, p. 36.

<sup>75</sup> Roger McDermott and Tor Bukkvoll, 'Tools of future wars – Russia is entering the precision-strike regime', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 31(2), 2018, pp. 191-213.

<sup>76</sup> Bruusgaard, 'Russian strategic deterrence', p. 7.

can be operationalised. However, it is clear that Russia has successfully experimented with information operations in the past and the centrality of the topic in contemporary thinking indicates how the country may seek to influence opponents in the future.<sup>77</sup>

Concerns over internal order and regime stability have led to a process whereby paramilitary forces tasked predominantly with internal security and public order have been strengthened and modernised. Especially the creation in 2016 of the National Guard Service, a sizeable outfit with the combined numerical strength of an estimated 320,000-4230,000 personnel, needs to be understood in this context.<sup>78</sup> The Service's remit, according to presidential decree, is to ensure 'the security of the state and society' and to 'protect human rights and the freedom of citizens'. Its tasks also include cooperation with the Interior Ministry in protecting public order during emergency situations.<sup>79</sup> Yurii Baluevskii – a former Chief of the General Staff and now adviser to the director of the National Guards, Viktor Zolotov – explained the need for this new service in a long article published in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie* in May 2017. Following a familiar attack on what he described as Western and US instigated violent conflict and regime change in Serbia, Georgia, the Middle East and Ukraine, he asserted that 'the prevention of mass disorder in our cities also needs to be approached with the terminology of war. The coup d'état in Kyiv, of course, was one of the reasons for the creation of the National Guards'. He highlighted the Service's role in countering external attempts to influence the population with information:

Information war, whether we want it or not, will be fought and the National Guards will participate in this war and respond to it [...]. Countering information warfare is the same or even more important for the protection of public security than a violent confrontation with thousands of people [...]. Information warfare...includes the monitoring of public opinion, the analysis of information obtained from various sources, the preparation of forecasts and recommendations on instruments that can be used to ensure the safety of citizens.

From this point of view, it is clear what the Service's task of protecting of the 'human rights and freedoms of citizens' means in practice. As Baluevskii concluded:

The National Guards were created not to repress, but to prevent the thoughtless actions of those wishing to destabilise the situation within the country in order to push the state to the same level of, for example, Libya, Syria and Ukraine today. Our task is to protect our citizens, public order and security and, ultimately, to prevent colour revolutions.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusions

---

<sup>77</sup> Buusgaard, 'Russian strategic deterrence', pp. 11, 14-15.

<sup>78</sup> Iliia Kramnik and Konstantin Bogdanov, 'Kardinal'nye gvardeitsy: v Rossii sozdali parallel'nuiu armiiu', *lenta.ru* news service, 6 April 2016, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/04/06/ng/>; Aleksei Nikolsky, 'Russia's new national guard: foreign, domestic and personnel aspects', *Moscow Defense Brief*, 52(2), 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Presidential decree No. 157, 'Voprosy Federal'noi sluzhby voisk national'noi gvardii Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 5 April 2016; Federal Law No. 226, 'O voiskakh natsional'noi gvardii Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 3 July 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Yurii Baluevskii, 'Voina ne konchaetsia, ona – zamiraet', *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 26 May 2017. [http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2017-05-26/1\\_949\\_rosgvardia.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2017-05-26/1_949_rosgvardia.html)



The Russian Federation's views of future conflict and the utility of force were never limited to small wars and insurgencies. Local conflicts were the most immediate concern in the early 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the eruption of several violent conflicts on its periphery and within its own borders. Initially, Moscow sought multilateral approaches and cooperation. Within the CIS such cooperation was seen as expedient for legitimacy and financial burden sharing. Regarding the West, joint peacekeeping in the Balkans and cooperation with NATO in various emerging security challenges were considered useful for improving the armed forces' capabilities in these areas and as opportunities for Russia to solve important international problems on a par with other great powers. However, Moscow never signalled the intention to integrate as a member of the Euro-Atlantic security community, where a demilitarised Russia would take a position subordinate to the United States. As soon as it emerged that neither its CIS neighbours nor the West shared its long-term vision of the region as its exclusive 'sphere of interest' and Moscow felt that it was being side-lined in international decision making, the need for strong conventional forces returned to the centre of Russian thinking and it adopted a more confrontational approach. During the 1990s the methods of confrontation were limited to official rhetoric and doctrine, because of the constraints of a weak economy and decaying armed forces. As the economy and military recovered from 2000 onwards, the Kremlin's possibilities for pursuing its interests regional and global ambitions changed, and enabled more aggressive action.

The prioritisation of military reforms since 2000, which accelerated with the modernisation programme announced in 2008, has meant that Russia today is again in a position to deter what it sees as the West's encroachment into its declared 'sphere of interest' and to ensure that its views on the course of international developments, like in Syria, are taken into account. This poses a serious challenge to its neighbours, because of the restrictions this poses on their pursuit of an independent foreign policy, particularly regarding future membership in NATO and the European Union. For the United States and the West, Russia's apparent willingness and confidence to use its military for the pursuit of interests also beyond the CIS region, will have to factor into future decisions over the use of military force, because the danger of spiralling tensions and escalation needs to be taken into account. Russia's neighbours and NATO have started taking measures intended to deter the eventuality of future aggression by a Kremlin increasingly confident in the utility of its armed forces as an instrument of foreign policy. The potential success of containing Russia in this way is far from guaranteed, because it plays into the hands of a political elite relying on the instrumentalization of the rhetoric of a hostile West in order to justify democratic crackdowns for the purpose of regime consolidation.