

Russian Operational Concept: Factors that Influence a Slowly Emerging “Novelty”

A Monograph

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Abstract

The Russian Operational Concept: Factors that Influence a Slowly Emerging “Novelty,” by LTC Sergiu Cirimpei, MDA, 49 pages.

The Russian Federation has changed its operational concept. Russian Armed Forces fight differently today from how they did after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This monograph answers the question: what factors influenced the changes in the Russian operational concept after the collapse of the Soviet Union? The monograph argues that the following factors influenced the change: Russia’s assertive foreign policy, the perceived threat from the West, asymmetries with Western armies and their capabilities, untenable casualties, the generational change within Russian society and its armed forces, and the lessons that Russians learned from conflicts. Although most of these factors appear to be “commonsense knowledge” for Western countries, some of them represent, nevertheless, a “renewed thinking” for Russia.

The monograph first provides evidence that the current Russian operational concept is different from the operational concept inherited from the Soviet Union, and that there are seven major differences between the two “ways of war.” Subsequently, the monograph analyzes two case studies – the Chechen wars and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war – in order to identify what changes occurred during and after these wars. The monograph claims that the factors identified above did change the Russian operational concept, but this change was an adaptation rather than a paradigm shift. It was a “novelty” within the old paradigm, a continuity rather than a contingency.

The monograph then analyzes what these factors mean to other countries. The monograph asserts that these factors represent strengths and vulnerabilities, which if properly exploited, may help counter the operational concept that they themselves created.

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Introduction

The Russian military's operational concept has significantly changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following the independence of the Russian Federation, the Russian military inherited the Soviet operational concept. Today, nevertheless, there is evidence that the Russian "way of war" is different. There is sufficient literature describing how the Russian operational concept changed. However, fewer publications address the factors that influenced those changes.

The primary question this monograph answers is: what factors influenced the change in the Russian military's operational concept after the collapse of the Soviet Union? The monograph argues that aggressive Russian foreign policy, a perceived threat to Russia's national security, asymmetries with Western military capability and quality, generational change in Russian society, untenable casualties, and the lessons Russians learn from wars influenced the Russian military's change of operational concept.

The change from the Soviet operational paradigm did not occur immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The initial hypothesis was that Russian Armed Forces underwent a paradigm shift of their operational concept after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. However, as the monograph shows, it was not a revolution, but rather a slow adaptation to the prevailing paradigm – a slowly emerging "novelty."¹

According to US Army doctrine publication (ADP) 1-01, *Doctrine Primer*, an operational concept is "a fundamental statement that frames how Army forces, operating as part of a joint force,

¹ According to Thomas S. Kuhn, "novelty" is a change that emerges with difficulty. Moreover, "novelty" emerges against the background provided by an already existing paradigm. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 65.

conduct operations.”² For the purpose of this monograph, the Russian operational concept is a fundamental way that frames how Russian Armed Forces conduct operations.

Understanding the operational concept of a specific country is important because it is the core of doctrine and provides ideas about the potential future security policy.³ R. G. Collingwood suggested that in order to understand the writings of a philosopher, we must first understand what question the philosopher is trying to answer.⁴ By analogy, in order to understand the new Russian operational concept, which in itself is a philosophy, we must first understand why the change happened and for what purpose. The factors that influence changes are an indicator of the strengths, vulnerabilities, and subjective realities that Russia’s leaders had constructed. Consequently, NATO and countries that are located within Russia’s “near abroad” could affect those factors in order to either avoid or exploit Russia’s vulnerabilities in a potential conflict.

The monograph contains seven chapters. The first chapter gives background information about the thesis. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 analyzes the operational concepts that the Russian Federation inherited from the Soviet Union and Russia’s current operational concept. The purpose is to identify if there are differences between the two concepts, as well as what the main differences are. The next two chapters are the two case studies – the Chechen wars and the Russo-Georgia war. The purpose of these case studies is to reveal the path of the operational concept change, the change tempo, the specific changes that occurred, and the context in which those changes emerged. Chapter 5 identifies the specific factors that influence Russia’s operational

² Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1-01, *Doctrine Primer* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 4-5.

³ Marcel de Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14:4 (December 2007), 1, accessed 26 October 2016, DOI: 10.1080/13518040108430496.

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 12.

concept change. This chapter also analyzes potential implications of the new operational concept for NATO and countries that are within Russia’s “near abroad.”

The monograph has four tables designed to explain the main differences between Russian operational concepts at different times. Table 1 shows the differences between the 1991 and the current Russian operational concepts. The subsequent tables – Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 – explain the differences between Russian operational concepts during three distinct periods: from 1991 until 2001 (immediately after the Chechen wars); from 2001 until 2008 (immediately after the Russo-Georgian war); and from 2008 until present. Figure 1 provides a visualization of the tables and the way they relate to each other.

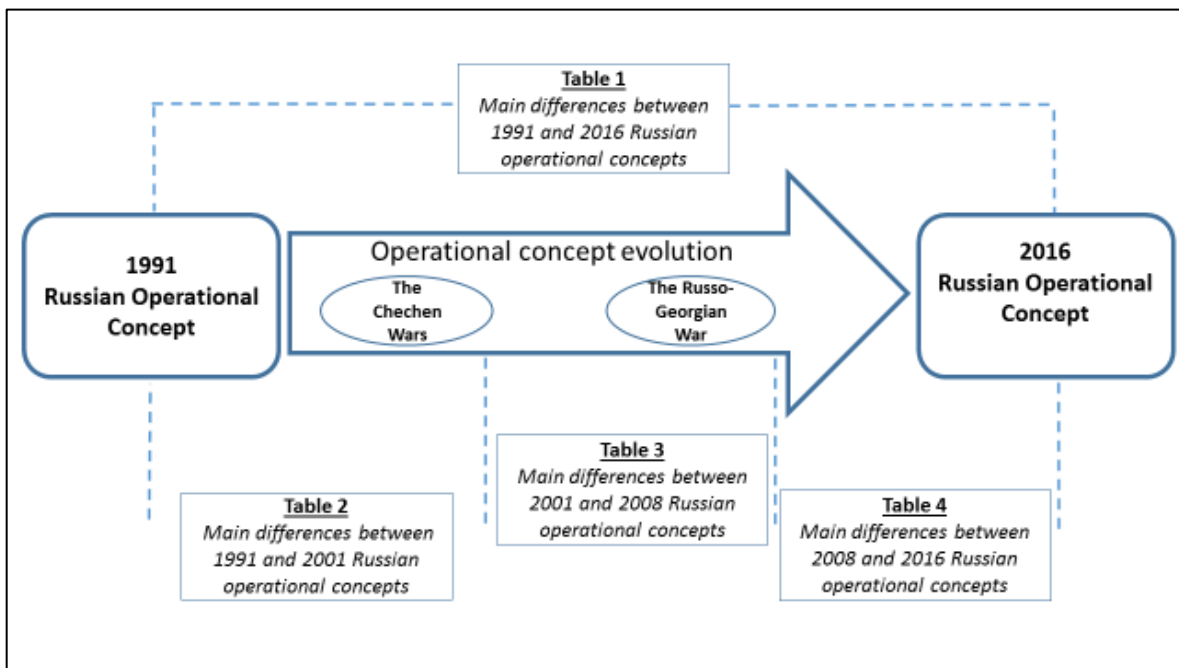


Figure 1. Table visualization. Created by author.

The following section describes and compares the operational concept the Russian military inherited from the Soviet Union with the current Russian operational concept. As the monograph demonstrates, there are important differences between the two concepts.

Russian Operational Concept – Adaptation or Paradigm Shift?

Before analyzing the evolution of the Russian operational concept, it is important to identify whether or not the operational concept changed and if it did, how significant the changes were. This chapter focuses first on describing the Soviet-Russian operational concept when the Soviet Union collapsed. The chapter then describes the current Russian operational concept. Subsequently, the chapter analyzes what the biggest differences and similarities between the concepts are, and whether there was a paradigm shift or an adjustment to the prevailing paradigm.

Emergent Russian Operational Concept after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia became an independent country. A few months after independence, the Russian Armed Forces continued using a doctrine that had great similarities with the draft 1990 Soviet Military Doctrine. Security policy of the Russian Federation was also based mostly on Soviet heritage.⁵ This was because the transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation was relatively fast and most of the documents did not change. The Russian military, as George Donovan notes, “was still focused on massive theater war with large, conscription-based mechanized armies requiring a huge industrial base to support. The Russian government was unable to support such a strategy, leaving the military ill-prepared for its wars, which the operations in Chechnya depicted to the world.”⁶

Moreover, all the officers of the Russian Federation Armed Forces came from the ranks of the Soviet Armed Forces. They had Soviet education and thus, even when they modified some documents, those changes were initially insignificant. For instance, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation modified the 1990 draft Soviet Doctrine. Russians added the

⁵ Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” 4.

⁶ George T. Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2009), 5.

economic aspect of security policy and recognized regional destabilizing factors, but these changes to the operational concepts were not significant.⁷

Another reason why the changes were insignificant was the lack of perceived external threats. A review of the Russian professional military journals from 1992 reveals that the politicians and high-ranking military officials appeared to have transitioned to a neo-liberal institutional worldview (although not for a long time). In an article published in 1992, General V. P. Luzianin, mentioned that there was a new, multipolar world order and that the Western countries were no longer enemies to Russia; Western countries were partners.⁸ This worldview provided an additional negative feedback mechanism to potential innovations or adaptation of the Russian military.

Overall, at the strategic level, the Russian Federation relied on nuclear deterrence, despite its “no-first-use” statements, until 1999.⁹ If deterrence failed, the Russian operational approach would have transitioned to the deep battle concept. The essence of the offensive battle in depth was the simultaneous and massed use of combat resources throughout the entire depth of enemy defenses, with the goal of encircling or annihilating the enemy.¹⁰ This clearly indicates that the Russian operational concept was not much different from the Soviet concept that relied on nuclear strikes and massive conventional operations. Reznichenko, in his book *Taktika*, emphasizes the conventional aspect of warfare and the reliance on firepower. He wrote: “The principal method of destroying the opposing enemy is to subject him to deep destruction by fire (nuclear destruction) combined with decisive actions from the front by combined arms formations (units), and with the

⁷ Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” 6-12.

⁸ V. P. Luzianin, “Strategicheskaya Stabilnost i Mnogopoljarnaja Modeli Sderjivanija,” *Voennaia Misli* no. 8-9 (1992), accessed December 21, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1992-vm/9635-strategicheskaja-stabilnost-i-mnogopoljarnaja>.

⁹ Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” 12.

¹⁰ Vailiy Gerasimovich Reznichenko, *Taktika*, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, (Moscow, USSR: 1988), 4.

wide use of airborne forces, airmobile troops, mobile combat and operational groups and special-purpose troops in the enemy rear.”¹¹

Although Reznichenko mentioned airmobile and special-purpose troops, these forces had a secondary role. They were in support of conventional operations, and many times executed conventional missions simply because they had better military training. Reznichenko further says that the ultimate aim in each battle is the enemy’s complete destruction.¹² Consequently, since the Russian Federation inherited Soviet doctrine, it visualized the most probable war as being an absolute war, waged primarily by conventional means, although this line of thought would slightly change in the following years.

Other evidence of a conventional, large-scale focus was the priority order in which the 1992 Russian Federation’s doctrine described various types of conflict. The first was global nuclear war, followed by the large-scale conventional war, and then local wars and local armed conflicts. The Russian Federation changed the order in its 2000 doctrine and put local armed conflicts first.¹³ This was probably one of the consequences of the Chechen wars.

One could argue that Russian doctrine was more defensive if compared to the Soviet doctrine. However, a defensive posture was the result of unfinished Soviet effort. During the last decade of the Soviet Union, Soviet theorists tried to rebalance the offensive posture of the Soviet army with a more defensive one. Accordingly, the defensive posture of operations became more obvious and gathered momentum.¹⁴ Ultimately, this emphasis on the defense transferred into the Russian doctrine, but only because of Soviet trends prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

¹¹ Reznichenko, *Taktika*, 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³ Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” 15.

¹⁴ Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 31.

Consequently, the Russian operational concept at the collapse of the Soviet Union can be described as air-land battle conducted by combined arms and three-dimensional combat operations, conventionally focused, firepower centric, ideologically influenced, aimed at paralyzing enemy formations in depth, with the aim of total victory. In a more generalized sense, the Russian theory of warfare, which drove the operational concept, approached what Clausewitz would call absolute war. Although Russia used elements of unconventional/hybrid war in the conflicts it created in Moldova, Georgia, and other countries, the overall operational concept still focused on large scale conventional operations, as the campaigns in Chechnya discussed in the following chapters show.

The Current Russian Operational Concept

While there is a relative consensus about the operational concept that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union, there are very different opinions about the current Russian operational concept. Some experts call it “hybrid warfare,” others call it “reflexive control,” yet others name it “asymmetric” or “non-linear warfare.” Whichever the description, this new Russian operational concept has distinct, although variable, characteristics.

The identification of “hybrid warfare” is probably one of the most common in the West. It derived primarily from the Russian operation in Crimea in 2014. From a Western standpoint, the key word in describing hybrid war is “multimodality,” a fusion of regular and irregular warfare.¹⁵ However, the Russian operational concept appears to be more complex than that. The mix of conventional and unconventional warfare is obviously part of the Russian operational concept, but as the monograph argues, it is not just this alone. Moreover, Russians themselves do not use the term “hybrid” when describing the Russian way of war. They assert that it is the West and the United States that conduct hybrid warfare.

¹⁵ Can Kasapoglu, “Russia’s Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control,” *NATO Defense College Research Paper*, no. 121 (November 2015): 1-2.

Instead, Russians describe their way of war as asymmetric and non-linear with the purpose of confronting a stronger opponent. For instance, Colonel P. A. Dulnev and Colonel (retired) E. A. Bzyugin, in their 2005 article, described the “asymmetrical” aspect of warfare as representing the way countries with weaker technologies, less advanced weapons and methods of fighting conduct warfare against stronger countries.¹⁶ The “fighting a stronger country” dilemma reappeared in the mid-nineties and has never disappeared. For example, Colonel I. I. Sobchenko, pointed out in 2000 that the Russian Federation could not have the same conventional capability with NATO and that there was an asymmetry in conventional forces. At that time, part of the solution to overcome the asymmetry was tactical nuclear weapons.¹⁷ Later, other theorists would propose different ways to counter a stronger opponent. Moreover, Russia realized that “asymmetrical” warfare is effective against weaker countries as well.

General Gerasimov, Russia’s Chief of General Staff, in his famous article in 2013, also explained the idea of using asymmetrical ways to achieve national aims. According to Gerasimov, “the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals may have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.”¹⁸ The emphasis on non-military means goes back to the same weaker state/stronger state dilemma.

According to Kasapoglu, Russian non-linear warfare is “an attempt to catch up conceptually to the realities of modern war with which the United States has been grappling for over a decade in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.”¹⁹ There is some evidence in support of this

¹⁶ Timothy L. Thomas, *Russia: Military Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2015), 96.

¹⁷ I. I. Sobchenko, N. F. Kravchenko, E. Nahmerov, “O Napravlenosti Regionalinogo Jadernogo Sderjivannia,” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (2000), trans. by author, accessed December 23, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2000-vm/9790-o-napravlenosti-regionalnogo-jadernogo>.

¹⁸ Kasapoglu, “Russia’s Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control,” 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

assumption. For instance, S. L. Pechiurov states in one of his 1996 articles that Russia should learn from the experience of the United States, especially about local conflicts.²⁰ However, Russians intend not only to catch up with the West; they intend to obtain a position of relative advantage in relation to it. Consequently, Russians believe that the non-linear asymmetric operations make it feasible to *offset* enemy superiority in armed warfare.²¹ The non-linear concept does not need the enemy to attack first; it is not reactive. The non-linear concept can be proactively employed. Russian non-linear warfare does not intend to catch up, but instead seize the initiative from its adversaries. This means that Russians may have developed the non-linear approach as a reaction to Western overmatch, but the intent behind it is not reactionary—it is offensive.

In order to increase the non-linear approach's effectiveness, Russia must address significant challenges. First, in contrast with Soviet doctrine, an asymmetric approach can achieve only limited aims. Second, there should be a strong Russian deterrent against a potential conventional reaction by the "stronger state" to the non-linear Russian approach. For the Russian Federation, as it was for the Soviet Union in the past, this deterrent comprises both conventional forces and, more notably, nuclear weapons. Third, the targeted state should be in relatively close proximity to the Russian Federation and should have a population vulnerable to Russia's propaganda. Lastly, there are certain conditions that Russia must set in the targeted country to make the non-linear approach feasible. The Russian Federation's Armed Forces have a great responsibility in the last two tasks of influencing the local population and setting necessary conditions for the success of the operation.

The setting of favorable conditions strongly relates to the concept of "reflexive control" which Russians have studied since the 1960s. "Reflexive control refers to the systematic methods of

²⁰ S. L. Pechiurov, "O Sisteme Operacij VS SShA v Mirnoe Vremja," *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (1996): 71-76, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8802-o-sisteme-operacij-vs-ssha-v-mirnoe-vremja>.

²¹ Thomas, *Russia: Military Strategy*, 108.

shaping the adversary's perceptions, and thereby decisions and latently forcing him to act voluntarily in a way that would be favorable to Russia's strategic interests."²² In other words, "reflexive control" makes the enemy leadership willingly take decisions that are not in their best interest. The armed forces represent an important part of the "reflexive control" approach, in the form of snap border exercises, employment of Special Operations Forces at early stages, or information operations intended to influence specific target audiences. Obviously, "reflexive control" does not rely on the armed forces alone. Instead, the armed forces must achieve what US doctrine today calls "unified effort."

Some analysts, like Kasapoglu, consider that Russian non-linear warfare reflects a "renewed" Russian military thinking, and not a strategy or concept, because it combines Soviet Deep Operation Theory and Reflexive Control Theory.²³ This appears to be true. Non-linear warfare is indeed based on the thought process behind old concepts. However, it is certain that even if Russia's "renewed thinking" relies on Soviet Deep Operation Theory, it does so in a different way. Russia does not rely on massive nuclear and conventional forces to achieve its aims; it relies on those forces only for deterrence. Instead, Russia puts significant emphasis on "non-contact clashes" between highly maneuverable units, within undeclared wars, peacetime military action, use of "armed civilians," and "management of troops in a unified information sphere."²⁴ It is through these "reflexive control"-driven non-linear operational approaches that Russia seeks to achieve its policy aims.

Therefore, the current Russian operational concept is a "reflexive control"-driven, non-linear form of warfare, in which unified action partners tailor non-linear operational approaches for

²² Kasapoglu, "Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control," 2 – 12.

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

specific missions to deceive and offset enemy superiority. The concept focuses on achieving limited aims at a minimal cost. In Clausewitz’s terms, Russian warfare today focuses primarily on wars for limited objectives with limited means. Figure 2 represents the methods and ways of conducting this new type of war, as well as the intensity of the non-linear effort during these actions.

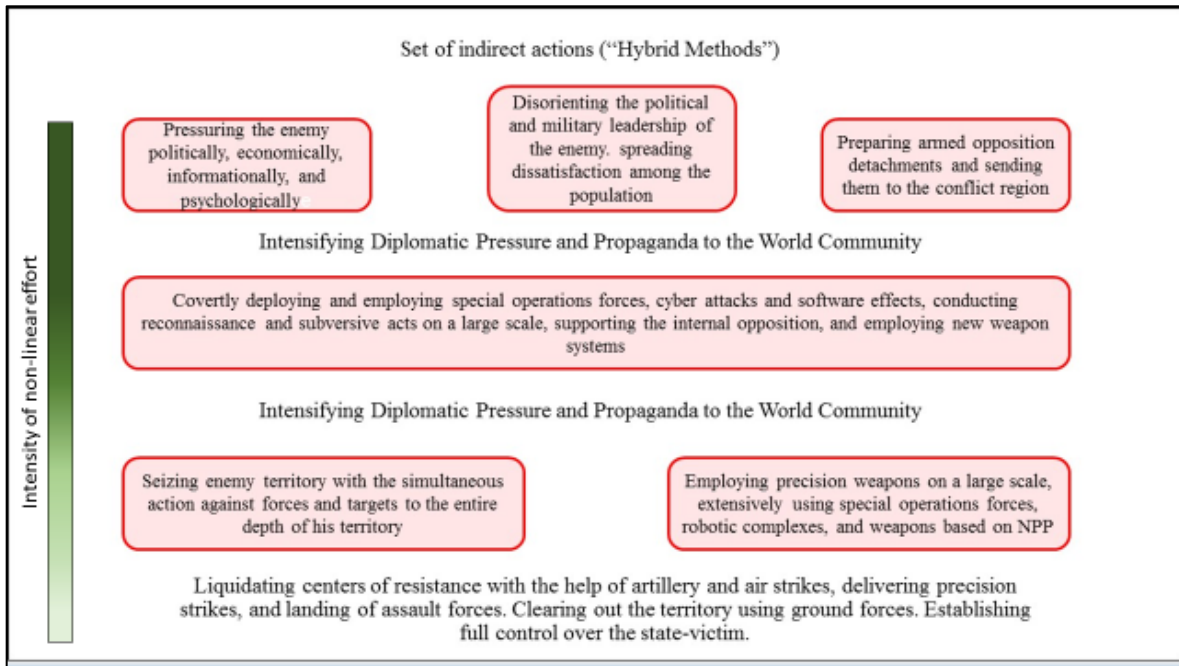


Figure 2. Russian methods and ways of conducting a new type of war. Timothy L. Thomas, *Russia: Military Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2015), 106. Modified by author.

Main Similarities and Differences

From the collapse of the Soviet Union there were consistent standpoints in Russian doctrine. The main similarities were the fear of being surrounded by enemies and the protection of Russians abroad.²⁵ These consistencies are still present as are most, but not all, of the means allocated to achieve policy aims. Some other similarities were: Western countries and NATO as the

²⁵ Haas, “An Analysis of Soviet, CIS and Russian Military Doctrines 1990-2000,” 19.

main external danger, nuclear deterrence as the primary means to deter aggression, forceful maneuvers with large conventional forces, increased use of artillery, and reliance on higher moral and spiritual qualities of the Russian soldier.

However, the fundamental approach that underlines Russian operations has significantly changed. In other words, the operational concept is different. Table 1 shows the main changes between the operational concepts inherited from the Soviet Union and the current Russian operational concept.

Table 1. Differences between the Soviet inherited and current Russian operational concepts.

#	Main differences	Russian operational concept inherited form the USSR	Current Russian operational concept
1	Type of war Russia <i>primarily</i> prepares for	Absolute war	Limited war
2	Expected endstate/aim	Total victory Total destruction of enemy forces	Limited aims
3	Type of warfare	Combined arms Air-Land Battle	“Reflexive Control”/non-linear
4	<i>Primary</i> Operational Approaches	Nuclear strike option Large conventional units/mass Deep battle Firepower focused	“Reflexive control” Nuclear deterrence Unified effort Special Operations Forces Cyber
5	Ideology	Communism	Nationalism/patriotism/orthodox religion
6	<i>Primary</i> means	Large combat formations Primarily conscript based	Units that are professional and well-trained Russian nationals in the targeted state Local population sympathetic to Russia
7	Unified Action	Less emphasis on non-military action	Significant emphasis on non-military action during initial phases

Source: Created by author.

As the following case studies show, changing the Russian operational concept was a long and emergent process. This change aligns more with adaptations rather than with a paradigm shift.

There were many “anomalies” and not a real Kuhnean “crisis.” Although the Russian military had previously participated in regional wars in the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and other countries, the first time the Russian military faced an anomaly was during the Chechen wars.

Case Study 1: The Chechen Wars

This chapter represents a case study of the Russia-Chechen wars. The purpose of this study is to identify which of the seven major differences in the Russian operational concept (described in Chapter 2) occurred during or immediately after the Chechen wars. As the case study reveals, the operational concept that Russian forces used in the First Chechen War was almost identical to the concept inherited from the Soviet Union. However, Russia has adapted their operational concept in several ways during and after the Chechen wars. Overall, three of the seven major differences occurred during and immediately after the First and Second Chechen wars.

Context

The history of Chechnya suggests a secular enmity between Chechens and Russians. The Russian Empire incorporated Chechnya in 1860. However, Russians succeeded in conquering Chechnya only after a fierce resistance that lasted approximately thirty years.²⁶ Some call that war “one of the longest guerilla campaigns in the nineteenth century.”²⁷ Later, as part of the Soviet Union, Chechens suffered extensively from deportations and mass-killings. At the fall of the Soviet Union, Chechens, like other parts of the Soviet Union, decided to gain their independence.

On October 27, 1991, Chechens elected their president, Djohar Dudayev. Several days later, Chechnya declared its independence.²⁸ Dudayev’s preferences were to gain Chechnya’s

²⁶ Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 20), 162.

²⁷ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), x.

²⁸ Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 161.

independence while remaining in power. However, having no functional government and no other crucial institutions, the situation in Chechnya quickly deteriorated, Dudayev's internal coalition weakened, and the opposition grew.²⁹ The Russians would later try to use these opposition elements as "proxies" to defeat Dudayev's forces.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin did not focus on solving the Chechen problem immediately because his preferences were to maintain control of other, apparently more urgent problems within the ex-Soviet region.³⁰ Other than a limited and unsuccessful effort by the KGB (the Russian Intelligence Service) and Ministry of Interior, Russia made no significant attempt to resolve the Chechen issue until 1994.

The First Chechen War

After settling other issues in the ex-Soviet area in favor of its own national interests, Russia focused on Chechnya. Russia opposed allowing Chechens to become independent. By potentially granting independence to Chechnya, Russia would have had to assume high risks. The first was a geostrategic risk. An independent Chechnya would have probably aligned itself with Turkey, threatening Russia's southern frontiers.³¹ Another risk was internal—the possibility of a "domino effect." Russian leaders feared that if Chechnya became independent, other regions could have followed.³² An additional, very important risk was the loss of control over Chechen natural resources, specifically oil. Russians discovered oil resources in Chechnya in the late nineteenth

²⁹ James A. Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military* (Fort Leavenworth, KS : US Army Command and General Staff College, 2002), 16.

³⁰ Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 161.

³¹ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 84-85.

³² "Pavel Grachiov i Pervaia Chechenskaia Voina," (YouTube video, *Voennaia Taina*, July 29, 2016), trans. by author, accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hSrrGJcprY>.

century and as Gammer notes, “it has affected its [Chechnya’s] fate ever since.”³³ In other words, Russia knew it had to intervene, but the dilemma was “how?”

In August 1994, after a meeting of the Russian National Security Council, the Presidential Commission on Security, and the cabinet under Chernomyrdin, Russia decided to intervene indirectly by supporting the “Provisional Council,” the Chechen opposition to Dudayev, as proxies.³⁴ On 26 November, Chechen opposition forces, backed by Russia, attacked to seize the Chechen capital city, Grozny, in order to overthrow Dudayev.³⁵ However, the offensive culminated relatively soon, short of its objectives because of the lack of training and organization of the attacking forces. The failure of this offensive should have been an indicator for the Russians that Chechen forces were mission-capable and any future Russian direct intervention would require a significant effort.

After failure of the “proxy” operation in November 1994, Russian leadership could not design a clear strategy for a direct intervention. This was partly because of divisions in the Russian central government.³⁶ The lack of consensus in Yeltsin’s internal coalition resulted in a flawed strategy with unclear aims. Moreover, the primary means to accomplish the mission, the Russian Armed Forces, were not ready to conduct the operation. The discourse between Yeltsin, his advisors, and the intended operational artist, General Vorobyev, deputy chief of the ground forces, was ineffective. As a result, General Vorobyev refused to lead the operation because there was no plan and no preparation.³⁷ Given the situation of the Russian army at that time, Vorobyev’s actions

³³ Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2006), 105.

³⁴ Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 89.

³⁵ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 19.

³⁶ Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 94.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

do not appear to be mere shirking. As subsequent operations would show, Vorobyev was correct in his refusal.

Following numerous internal negotiations, Yeltsin issued on November 30, 1994 presidential decree No. 2137c (secret), authorizing the invasion of Chechnya.³⁸ Since the majority of the generals refused to lead the operation, General Pavel Grachiov, the Minister of Defense, decided to take overall command of the operation. Yeltsin gave Grachiov only two weeks to put up a campaign plan, and therefore the product of that effort was an incomplete and flawed operational plan. As Vladimir Semionov, the ex-commander of Land Forces, described it: “The plan was just a map with three arrows and did not represent anything else....and was, nevertheless, signed by the Chief of General Staff and approved by the Minister of Defense.”³⁹ Finally, Russia’s strategy, although still flawed, focused on two things—a strike on Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev, and the capture of Grozny.⁴⁰ The overall aim was to reinstitute constitutional control in Chechnya. Consequently, Russia decided to conduct a limited war for limited objectives.

On December 11, 1994, Russian forces commenced offensive operations against Chechnya.⁴¹ The movement directly towards the capital city resembled Soviet Deep Battle on a smaller scale. Russians moved towards Grozny from three separate directions, leaving the southern direction unblocked due to personnel shortages. By December 17, Russia had occupied positions around Grozny. The Russian attack on Grozny did surprise the Chechens, but only in terms of the recklessness of the Russian plan and its implementation.⁴² On December 31, the main attack against the city commenced and with it the onslaught of the conscript Russian forces.

³⁸ Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 163.

³⁹ “Pavel Grachiov i Pervaia Chechenskaia Voina.”

⁴⁰ John Arquilla and Theodore Karasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22, (1999): 208.

⁴¹ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 22.

⁴² “Pavel Grachiov i Pervaia Chechenskaia Voina.”

The Russian offensive was poorly coordinated and conducted. Not only did Russian commanders lack operational art (partly for objective reasons), but the shortfall of equipment and training further exacerbated the problem. As Antulio J. Echevarria puts it, “Operational art is nothing without operational capability.”⁴³ Moreover, the Russian Armed Forces had poorly prepared for limited-type wars prior to the First Chechen war.⁴⁴ In order to compensate for their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, the military used World War II era doctrine—massing forces, fires, and aerial carpet-bombing.⁴⁵ Russians relied on mass, not in terms of effects, but in terms of number of personnel and firepower. For comparison, there were more detonations per hour in Grozny than there were detonations per day in Sarajevo.⁴⁶ Consequently, the primary operational approach resembled Soviet Deep Battle and firepower; in other words, it resembled a pure “first grammar” approach.⁴⁷

Russia finally seized Grozny with a conventional, massed armored force with infantry and close air support.⁴⁸ However, the fight for Chechnya continued for the next eighteen months. During this time, Chechen insurgents conducted guerilla warfare in the mountains, waging essentially a war of attrition. This forced Russians to focus on counter guerilla operations, in other

⁴³ Antulio J. Echevarria II, “American Operational Art, 1917-2008,” in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin Van Creveld (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 146.

⁴⁴ V. N. Maganov, “Formy i Sposoby Primeneniya Prupporovok Vojsk (Sil) v Voorujennih Konfliktah i Lokalnih Voinah,” *Voennaya Mysl*, no. 2 (1996), trans. by author, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8839-formy-i-sposoby-primeniya-gruppirovok-vojsk-sil>.

⁴⁵ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?,” 208.

⁴⁶ Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 163-164.

⁴⁷ Antullio J. Echevarria II provides the metaphors “first grammar war” and “second grammar war” in an attempt to differentiate between the principles, methods, and concepts of different types of warfare. The “first grammar war” is a war where a country tries to overthrow its opponent through conventionally focused operations, using superior firepower to annihilate or attrite the opposing force. The “second grammar war” is a war where one or both belligerent sides primarily use insurgency, guerilla warfare, or irregular warfare to achieve its aims. Echevarria II, *American Operational Art, 1997-2008*, 137.

⁴⁸ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?,” 212.

words on the “second grammar.” However, this relative focus on counter guerilla operations was insignificant and for the most part unsuccessful for the demoralized Russians because they did not possess the combat power and skills to address Chechen guerilla attacks.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, President Yeltsin, and the newly appointed Chief of the National Security Council, General Aleksandr Lebed (also one of the rivals for the presidency), considered peace in Chechnya imperative for their political success.⁵⁰ As a result, Yeltsin sent General Lebed to negotiate a cease-fire with Chechen leaders. The decreasing support from Yeltsin’s internal coalition as well as the increasing popular resentment for the war narrowed Yeltsin’s options and with them his “win-sets.”⁵¹ Consequently, General Lebed and the Chechen General Maskhadov signed the peace-agreement in Kasavyurt, Dagestan on August 31, 1996. One of the most important points of the peace agreement was that both sides would postpone a final decision on Chechnya’s status for five years.⁵²

Consequently, the Russian military did not deviate significantly from the Soviet operational concept. The biggest difference was the type of war (limited) and the objectives they fought for (also limited). Theoretically, the Russian operational concept in Chechnya almost exactly resembled the operational concept inherited from the Soviet Union—air-land battle conducted by combined arms and three-dimensional combat operations, conventionally focused, firepower centric, aimed at paralyzing enemy formations in depth, with the aim of total victory. The

⁴⁹ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 37.

⁵⁰ “Pavel Grachiov i Pervaia Chechenskaia Voina.”

⁵¹ “Win-Sets” are the set of possible agreements between domestic groups that pressure the government to adopt favorable for domestic group policies (Level 2) and the government’s desire to support national interests when negotiating with other governments (Level 1). Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 434-437, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785>.

⁵² Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 164.

difference was in its practical application due to the limited size of the operational environment and that the operational environment was in Russia and not abroad.

Another aspect was the lack of ideology. During that period, Soviet ideology was in the process of being replaced by developing Russian nationalism, but the process was relatively slow. For example, BG V. I. Reaboshapko argued that Russia should be proud of itself and should not feel humiliated.⁵³ However, the majority of the other publications of that time did not emphasize nationalism, patriotism, or other types of ideology. Some publications even recognized that Russia did not invest in patriotic education of its citizens and, as a result, there were recruitment problems and problems of recruits' quality.⁵⁴ Consequently, the ideological aspect of the operational concept was missing.

Another aspect of the operational concept worth mentioning is the lack of unity of effort throughout the First Chechen war. As Anatol Lieven describes, there was "sheer disorganization and internal divisions at all levels."⁵⁵ This is not surprising in light of the relatively weak leadership, unclear aims, and ineffective civil-military discourses. As one of the Russian battalion chiefs of staffs, Major Iurii Chirev, describes, "commanders at higher echelons and leaders at all levels were confused, while their soldiers were totally disoriented."⁵⁶

Even if writers disagree about the competence of the Russian military in general, they agree on the fact that the Russian military's poor performance was due to the difficulties in trying to

⁵³ V. I. Reaboshapko, "Uslovija Perehoda k Vozmozhnomu Primeneniju Iadernogo Oruzjia," *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (1996), accessed December 21, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8838-uslovija-perehoda-k-vozhnoznomu-primeneniju>.

⁵⁴ Iu. D. Bukreev, "O Povyshenii Jefferktivnosti Raboty Shtabov," *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (1996): 33-38, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8794-o-povyshenii-jefferktivnosti-raboty-shtabov>.

⁵⁵ Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 286.

⁵⁶ M. Polunin, O. Zaitsev, "Voina v Chechne: 60 Chasov Maikopskoy Brigadi" (YouTube video, *Armija Rossii*, 1995), trans. by author, accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RWXXjO17bQ>.

reshape its Cold War-era military to confront a postmodern approach to war.⁵⁷ Russians were still fighting using a Soviet paradigm, but they recognized that there was a problem and tried to adapt. From the seven main differences between the Soviet inherited operational concept and the current Russian Operational Concept identified in Table 1, two of them—the type of war, and the expected end states/aims—occurred during the First Chechen war.

The Second Chechen War

Chechens de facto won the First Chechen war and in 1997 elected Aslan Maskhadov as their president. Although Maskhadov's preferences were to have Chechnya under his control and continue negotiations for independence with Russia, he faced a very complex problem set and did not have the necessary power to address it. Maskhadov had to rule an unrecognized and devastated "country," with almost no internal coalitions and consensus, penetrated by extremist elements, with very limited resources, and with Russia not providing any substantial assistance. Therefore, Maskhadov's relative control decreased as the extremist and Islamic elements increased their influence in Chechnya.⁵⁸ Poverty set further conditions for the development of radical Islam in Chechnya.⁵⁹ As the extremist elements gained power, they became more aggressive and consequently, raised concerns among the Russian leadership.

President Yeltsin had substantial difficulties not only with the deteriorating situation in Chechnya, but also with his internal coalition and his popularity.⁶⁰ Having barely escaped impeachment, Yeltsin focused on upcoming political events. Duma elections would take place in

⁵⁷ Arquilla and Karasik, "Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?," 212.

⁵⁸ Jennifer Cayias, *A Strategic Analysis of the Chechen Wars: The Keystone of Good Leadership* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2012), 57-58.

⁵⁹ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 43.

⁶⁰ Emil Pain, "The Second Chechen War: The Information Component," *Military Review*, July-August, 2000, trans. Mr. Robert R. Love (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2015).

December 1999 and the presidential elections would take place in June 2000.⁶¹ By that time, Yeltsin's preferences were not as much to stay in power as to escape potential prosecution after the elections. Therefore, Yeltsin needed a change. First, in August 1999, Yeltsin replaced the Prime-Minister Sergey Stepashin with the charismatic Vladimir Putin.⁶² Second, in concert with Putin, he re-focused public attention on nationalistic pride and subsequently on Chechnya.⁶³ Finally, Chechen terrorist acts provided further positive feedback to Russian's refocus on Chechnya.

Russian politicians changed their narrative concerning Chechnya from reestablishing constitutional control to defeating terrorism. The emphasis on "terrorism" provided legitimacy for the upcoming operation. As a result, in contrast with the first war in Chechnya, there was more popular and political support for the second war. At the same time, the Russian media fueled nationalistic sentiments, even xenophobia and racism.⁶⁴ In order to maintain this apparent legitimacy, Russians created the Russian Information Center in December 1999, which filtered the information that the media would disseminate to the public.⁶⁵ The other means to ensure support for the operation was to keep casualties low. Russian commanders focused on minimizing casualties during the operations.⁶⁶ Consequently, in contrast to the First Chechen War, Russian leadership made a bigger effort to appeal to nationalism, secure their popular support and their internal coalitions while maintaining legitimacy through a counter-terrorist narrative. The terrorist bombing of apartment buildings in the autumn of 1999 further increased the counter-terrorist rhetoric.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 46.

⁶² Pain, "The Second Chechen War: the Information Component."

⁶³ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 46-47.

⁶⁴ Francois Jean, "Chechnya: Moscow's Revenge," *Harvard International Review* (Fall 2000): 18.

⁶⁵ Pain, "The Second Chechen War: the Information Component."

⁶⁶ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 55.

⁶⁷ "Krutije Nulevije – Chechnya. Voina i Mir," (YouTube video, February 9, 2013), trans. by author, accessed December 22, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVe8OIwLe0o>.

Just as politicians prepared themselves better for the upcoming operation, so did the armed forces, but only to a certain degree. In contrast to the First Chechen Campaign, the Russians, according to Copp, “*had* a plan to destroy illegal Chechen armed formations and their bases in Chechnya.”⁶⁸ Russia intended to dislocate the Chechens from Dagestan and then destroy the rebels in Chechnya. Prior to the Second Chechen war, there were indicators that Russia had transitioned from a “first grammar” focused operational approach to a more of a “second grammar.” An instance of that was the decision to operate in Dagestan first rather than directly in Chechnya. This appeared to be in concert with some of the counterinsurgency/counterrevolutionary theorists, like John McCuen, in that the government should “prevent establishment of revolutionary bases in underpopulated areas” and in areas bordering the zone under rebel control.⁶⁹ However, Russia’s subsequent actions would contradict this apparent “second grammar” focus. The atrocities that Russian forces committed in Chechnya, coupled with the extensive reliance on firepower, were clearly in contradiction with counterinsurgency theories of “winning hearts and minds.” Nevertheless, after defeating the rebels in Dagestan, Russian forces were postured for what would be called the Second Chechen war.

Putin declared that the military objective was to “re-conquer Chechnya.” This represented a policy shift in light of Russia’s promises in 1996 not to decide the Chechen status until December 2001.⁷⁰ The Second Chechen war started on September 22, 1999 with an aerial campaign over Chechnya.⁷¹ The next phase of the operation was a ground invasion at the beginning of October. In the second war, the Russian approach, inspired by the NATO approach in Kosovo, was to “bomb

⁶⁸ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 52.

⁶⁹ John. J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 167.

⁷⁰ Jean, “Chechnya: Moscow’s Revenge.” 18.

⁷¹ Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 187.

until victory and conduct a war at a distance without heavy casualties.”⁷² This further supports the observation that Russia became relatively casualty averse.

There are indicators, although weak, that Russians tried to achieve unity of effort during the Second Chechen war. For instance, throughout the campaign, gas and electricity were cut off. This was not done in the first campaign.⁷³ A more important indicator is the unified action of the armed forces, which coordinated their actions better than they did during the previous campaign. This was partly because of better training and preparations, but also because the role that the armed forces were to play was much clearer.⁷⁴

The firepower focused approach proved effective and, as a result, Grozny fell on February 8.⁷⁵ It is worth mentioning that the firepower had positive effects for the Russians because it was massed and indiscriminate. Collateral damage was not a constraint. Had there been more restrictive rules of engagements, it is doubtful that Russian forces would have been able to mass fires in urban areas the way they did throughout the Second Chechen war.

After the seizure of Grozny, the situation was not under full Russian control yet. A number of rebels were still active, mostly in mountainous areas. The solution that Russian leaders envisioned was Chechenization. The process of Chechenization resembled a subsequent phase of the war. It started on October 5, 2003 when the Russian government installed Akhmad Kadyrov as the president of Chechnya.⁷⁶ Chechenization was a change in Russian policy of “re-conquest;” it also was another difference with the First Chechen war.

⁷² Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 188.

⁷³ Jean, “Chechnya: Moscow's Revenge,” 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁵ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 69.

⁷⁶ Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 195.

Akhmad Kadyrov was effective in seizing control over Chechnya. Backed by the Russians, Kadyrov conducted operations that were violent, but lacked “the clear *racist* undertones that characterized the Russian offensive of the first two years.”⁷⁷ This represents another attempt to transition from “first grammar” warfare to the “second grammar.”

Opposition fighters killed Akhmad Kadyrov in 2004, but the Chechenization did not stop, as his son, Ramzan Kadyrov, took charge of Chechnya with the same efficiency and positive results for the Russians as his father.⁷⁸ Consequently, even if the long-term effects of the Chechenization are dubious, the Russians succeeded at solving, at least short term, the Chechnya problem.

The type of warfare that the Russians fought initially did not differ from the Soviet “Combined Arms Air-Land Battle.” It just was on a much smaller scale, yet perhaps more brutal. However, the type of warfare did shift towards non-linear warfare when Chechenization started. Moreover, the attempts for unified actions and interoperability represent limited adjustments in the primary operational approaches. As far as means, there was no significant change. Large armored and conscript-based infantry formations, supported by massive artillery fires and aviation remained the primary means. An emerging change was the ideology. While during the First Chechen war, Soviet ideology was already obsolete and there was no other ideology to replace it; during the Second Chechen war, Russian cultural relativism started to emerge.⁷⁹ However, this new ideology was still weak and could not influence the operational concept. Table 2 represents the main changes in the Russian operational concept during and after the Chechen wars in comparison to the operational concept inherited from the Soviet Union.

⁷⁷ Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 195.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁹ Cultural Relativism asserts that “morality is grounded in the approval of one's society - and not simply in the preferences of individual people.” In other word, people should understand one's actions through the lens of his/her culture. James Fieser, “Ethics,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, University of Tennessee at Martin, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics>.

Table 2. Differences between the Soviet inherited operational concept and the Russian operational concept during and after the Chechen wars.

#	Main differences	Russian operational concept inherited from the USSR	Changes in Russian operational concept during the Chechen wars
1	Type of war Russia <i>primarily</i> prepares for	Absolute war	Limited war
2	Expected endstate/aim	Total victory Total destruction of enemy forces	Initially – absolute aims; shifted with the Chechenization towards limited aims
3	Type of warfare	Combined arms Air-Land Battle	Initially no change “Non-linear” aspects implemented with the Chechenization
4	<i>Primary</i> Operational Approaches	Nuclear strike option Large conventional units/mass Deep battle Firepower focused	No significant change; limited tactical and interoperability adjustments Nuclear deterrence
5	Ideology	Communism	No significant change Raise of Nationalism
6	<i>Primary</i> means	Large combat formations Primarily conscript based	No change
7	Unified Action	Less emphasis on non-military action	No change

Source: Created by author.

There is solid ground to infer that solving the Chechnya problem freed Russia from its major domestic problem, and thus provided flexibility for a more assertive foreign policy.

Case Study 2: The 2008 Russo-Georgian War

This chapter represents the second case study, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Similar to the previous chapter, the purpose is to identify which of the seven major differences in the Russian operational concept (analyzed in chapter 2) occurred during or immediately after the war in Georgia and in what context. Unlike the campaigns in Chechnya, the 2008 war was a short, high tempo war with better strategic and operational planning from the Russian side. It also involved a better-suited operational approach. This supported Russia achieving its strategic aims in Georgia.

Context

In contrast to the wars in Chechnya, the 2008 invasion of Georgia is an instance of Russia using its military instrument of national power outside Russian borders, in a blunt violation of a foreign country's sovereignty. The roots of the conflict go back to 1991, when Georgia, one of the fifteen Soviet Republics, aligned itself with the West.⁸⁰ Since then, Russia has tried to coerce Georgia to re-orient its foreign policy towards Russia. Nevertheless, after the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia became even more pro-Western.⁸¹ From a "two-level game" perspective, Saakashvili's "political indifference curves" could not intersect with those of Russia because Saakashvili had a very homogenous country and popular support which shaped his preferences towards the West and opposite from the East.⁸²

Saakashvili tried several times to draw the West's attention to Russia's coercive measures against Georgia.⁸³ However, because of the prevailing liberalist worldviews in the West or because of pure negligence, or perhaps a combination of the two, the West did not react to Saakashvili's warnings. Saakashvili's perceived threat from Russia explains why he ultimately felt that there was no other option than the military. According to Phil Haun, coercion may increase the likelihood of concessions and could "threaten the survival of the weak state and its regime," which in turn "is

⁸⁰ "Piatednevnyaya Voyna, Gruziya – Osetija – Rossija," (Youtube video, August 8, 2015), trans. by author, accessed December 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmdRH4Fp8JI>.

⁸¹ Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests," *CRS Report for Congress* (updated August 29, 2008), 2.

⁸² "Political indifference curves" is a graphical representation of two countries' trade-offs for respective win-sets (described on page 19). If the lines representing the win-sets of the two countries intersect, there are some common interests and therefore the two sides can reach agreement. If the two lines do not intersect, the countries cannot reach agreement. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," 447.

⁸³ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 81.

likely to resist.”⁸⁴ Consequently, the perception that Russia intended to annex Georgian territory could have set the stage for a military confrontation between the two countries.

Moreover, it appears that Georgian civilian and military leadership focused on solving different problems. On the one hand, Saakashvili’s narratives when addressing Western countries and institutions emphasized potential Russian aggression.⁸⁵ On the other hand, military strategy focused on separatist forces rather than on Russian offensive operations. A clear indicator of this was the fact that there was no noteworthy effort to secure or block the Roki Tunnel, which was a decisive point of the operation and ultimately significantly contributed to Russian operational tempo. According to Donovan, the Roki Tunnel could have been “the single point of failure for Russian operation in South Ossetia.”⁸⁶ Although Georgian forces considered potential reinforcements from Russia, they assessed that those reinforcements would be volunteers only.

Subsequently, Georgia identified two main objectives: the first was to quickly destroy South Ossetia separatist forces and seize their “capital” Tskhinvali. The second objective was to block the Roki Tunnel, in order to prevent Russian *volunteers* from reinforcing the separatists.⁸⁷ One of the biggest flaws in Georgia’s emergent strategy was the assumption that the Russian Federation would not violate Georgia’s sovereignty and would not use brute force to achieve Russian aims.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Phil Haun, *Coercion, Survival, and War: Why Weak States Resist the United States* (Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 4, accessed December 7, 2016, ProQuest ebrary.

⁸⁵ Jim Nichol, “Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implications,” *CRS Report for Congress* (updated March 6, 2009), 3.

⁸⁶ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 13.

⁸⁷ Eastman Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015), 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

At the same time, Russia made its decisions based on the perceived threat of NATO expansion, which Russia considered to be to the detriment of its national interest.⁸⁹ Being historically concerned about hostile intentions of Western countries and having fought wars against some of those countries increased the complexity of the situation. Although Russians appeared to have embraced a neo-liberal institutional worldview after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as Luzianin's 1992 article "*Strategic Stability and Multipolar Deterrence Model*" suggested, this started changing several years later. Russians started to concern themselves with NATO "expansion" and NATO's "use of brute force to solve international disputes" as early as 1996.⁹⁰ Another 1996 publication, "Geostrategic Aspects of the Concept of Russia's National Security" by V. N. Tigichko, argued that it was an illusion to consider Russia-NATO conflict of interests over after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Instead, Russia had to find ways to deal with NATO, one of them was through preventing (using the diplomatic instrument of national power) ex-Soviet republics from joining NATO.⁹¹ This traditional perception of external threat was exacerbated in the twenty-first century. The situation became increasingly tense after the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when, according to Jim Nicol, the alliance "pledged that Georgia would eventually become a member of NATO."⁹²

When coercion and coercive diplomacy failed, Russia identified several strategic objectives:⁹³

⁸⁹ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 79.

⁹⁰ Reaboshapko, "Uslovija perehoda k vozmozhnomu primeneniju iadernogo oruzhija."

⁹¹ V. N. Tsigichko, "Geostrategicheskie Aspekty Konceptii Nacionalnoj Bezopasnosti Rossii," *Voennaia Misli*, no. 5 (9-10) (1996): 21-26, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8770-geostrategicheskie-aspekty-konceptii-nacionalnoj>.

⁹² Nichol, "Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implications," 3.

⁹³ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 6.

1. Signal to the West and to Russia's "near abroad" countries that NATO expansion in Russia's periphery entailed a high risk for NATO.
2. Gain control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, demonstrate Georgian military and economic vulnerability to Russia's coercive power, as well as demonstrate the West's limitations.
3. Destroy Georgian Armed Forces so that Georgia would not be able to threaten South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In order to achieve these objectives the Russians employed a strategy that was essentially a combined political-military campaign.⁹⁴ From the military perspective, the Russian strategic plan intended to make their actions appear like a mere reaction to Georgian aggression.⁹⁵ This, in contrast to Russian actions in the Chechen wars and as defined in chapter 2, is an instance of Reflexive Control—shaping the adversary's perceptions and decisions and latently forcing him to act voluntarily in a way that would be favorable to Russia's strategic interests. Russian commanders discussed many options, to include the option of a preemptive strike. However, this last option would have forsaken the advantage of perceived legitimacy and therefore did not meet the screening criteria.⁹⁶

Russia conducted detailed planning for the operation.⁹⁷ This was certainly something different from the Chechen campaigns (especially the First Chechen war). As a result, Russian forces were tailored for "a quick campaign with limited aims in Georgia."⁹⁸ Russia also conducted effective shaping activities, like rebuilding railroads in Abkhazia, or massing forces at the border

⁹⁴ "Piatednevnyaya Voyna, Gruziya – Osetija – Rossija."

⁹⁵ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 83.

⁹⁶ "Piatednevnyaya Voyna, Gruziya – Osetija – Rossija."

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 22.

under the cover of the “Caucasus 2008” military exercise.⁹⁹ Information operations were also part of the Russian strategy. This was a lesson that Russia learned during the First Chechen war, internalized it, and then applied this lesson during the Second Chechen war. Overall, Moscow’s narrative was about Georgian aggression.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, there were indicators that Russia tried to achieve unified action. For instance, it built a good network and procedures to work with the separatist forces.¹⁰¹ Russia tried to coordinate and synchronize not only the effort of the armed forces, but also the effort of the armed forces with that of the irregular forces and cyber-attacks.¹⁰² Although they made such attempts during the Chechen wars too, this time the efforts were more thorough.

The Russo-Georgian War

Prior to initiation of hostilities, there was a series of small-scale engagements between the Georgians and separatist forces.¹⁰³ It is still debatable who fired the first shots, but it is nevertheless clear that on August 7, 2008, “the situation was so tense that only a spark was needed to set Georgia afire.”¹⁰⁴ Believing there were no other options besides the military, the Georgians attacked South Ossetia to seize its “capital,” Tskhinvali. It appears that Georgians fell into the Russian Reflexive Control trap because a perceived Georgian aggression was exactly what Russia needed to create its narrative and delay a potential Western response.

⁹⁹ Nichol, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests,” 1.

¹⁰⁰ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 85-87.

¹⁰¹ “Piatenednaya Voyna, Gruziya – Osetija – Rossija.”

¹⁰² Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 18-20.

¹⁰³ Nichol, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests,” 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 214.

Almost immediately after the Georgian attack, Russians massed in South Ossetia, crossing the Roki Tunnel.¹⁰⁵ Once it had the necessary forces, Russia proceeded to the next phase of the operation—counterattack into Georgia. The Russians achieved strategic and operational surprise.¹⁰⁶

On August 8, the Russian 58th Army counter-attacked Georgian forces to seize the South Ossetia “capital,” Tskhinvali.¹⁰⁷ Russia used techniques similar to those they used during the Second Chechen war, mostly based on overwhelming firepower. Despite the fact that some techniques were effective and suitable to the new terrain and the new opponent, some were not. For instance, the 58th Army command element suffered significant casualties because they used movement formations and techniques similar to the ones used during the Second Chechen war.¹⁰⁸

Russian air forces gained and maintained air superiority, but they were nevertheless not very effective. The targets that the air forces engaged, the aircraft they lost due to Georgian air-defense, as well as their lack of intelligence demonstrate that there were significant problems in the Russian air forces. Despite the fact that the Russian air forces caused the majority of Georgian casualties, the air forces performed poorly for a country that pretended to be an important military power.¹⁰⁹

After seizing Tskhinvali, Russian forces continued their offensive operations south towards Tbilisi while the Georgians were retrograding.¹¹⁰ After seizing the whole of South Ossetia, Russia attacked along two axes into Georgia in order to threaten Tbilisi, the Georgian capital city, and cut

¹⁰⁵ “Piatednevnyaya Voyna, Gruziya – Osetija – Rossija.”

¹⁰⁶ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Nichol, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests,” 1.

¹⁰⁸ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 94.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 96-99.

¹¹⁰ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 33.

the east-west lines of communications and thus prevent Georgian forces from mutually supporting each other.¹¹¹

On August 9, Russia opened a second front in Abkhazia, seized the port of Poti, and essentially, got inside the decision cycle of Georgian decision-makers.¹¹² The operation in Abkhazia resembled Soviet “Deep Battle,” with Russians positioning themselves in the vicinity of the key city of Samtredia and thus showed the West that Russia “can control Caspian Sea basin energy routes.”¹¹³

Nevertheless, on August 12, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev accepted Nicolas Sarkozy’s peace plan and ordered Russian forces to cease their offensive.¹¹⁴ After achieving its strategic aim, the Russian Federation went further and recognized the independence of the two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on August 26, 2008.¹¹⁵

Overall, on the Russian side, there were both similarities and dissimilarities between the war in Georgia and the wars in Chechnya. Like in Chechnya, the brunt of the fighting was born by the Airborne and Special Forces units.¹¹⁶ The missions these forces executed were for the most part the same as in Chechnya, conventionally focused. As described above, the army was mostly conscript based and the reliance on firepower was significant, partly to compensate for low training and poor coordination, just as it was during the Chechen campaigns.

¹¹¹ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 16.

¹¹² Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 95-96.

¹¹³ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 12-17.

¹¹⁴ “Georgia-Russia War 2008,” (YouTube video, August 25, 2011), trans. by author, accessed December 23, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp4r1v6-__E.

¹¹⁵ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 36.

As in the Chechen wars, the Russians employed inadequate equipment. There were reports of Russians having empty reactive armor canisters on their tanks while Russian soldiers were taking the body armor from killed Georgian soldiers in order to protect themselves.¹¹⁷ At some point, more than half of Russian armored vehicles broke down while some units were destroyed because the ammunition resupply was not adequate.¹¹⁸ Despite the limited size of the operational environment, Russian equipment was on the verge of collapse and their logistics close to culmination.

The fact that Russia did not use vertical envelopments despite the large number of airborne units involved indicates that Russia lacked coordination.¹¹⁹ Other significant problem areas were communication, night vision, “friend or foe” systems, satellite navigation systems, and aerial reconnaissance.¹²⁰ However, these problem areas were not a novelty for the Russian Armed Forces. The Russian military had addressed them ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. For example, General-Colonel Bukreev mentioned most of these issues in his 1996 article “On Increasing the Efficiency of Staff Operations.”¹²¹ In another comprehensive report published in 2000, the service chiefs explained the main problems they encountered in Chechnya and potential ways to overcome them. They pointed out problems like intelligence, training, communications, unity of command, and interoperability.¹²² Although identified, these issues persisted for almost ten more years

¹¹⁷ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 95.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹²⁰ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 37.

¹²¹ Bukreev, “O Povyshenii Jefferktivnosti Raboty Shtabov,” 33-38.

¹²² A. M. Kornugov, G. I. Shpak, V. V. Tihomirov, N. I. Serdtsev, “Kontrterroristicheskaja Operacija na Severnom Kavkaze, Osnovnije Uroki i Vivodi (3),” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (2000), trans. by author, accessed December 23, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2000-vm/9777-kontrterroristicheskaja-operacija-na-severnom>.

because there was no serious political effort to overcome them until the 2008 war in Georgia. The war in Georgia changed that pattern. As a result, a few months after the Russo-Georgia war, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the Russian military would go through a thorough process of transformation in order to remove, as Klepper mentions, “all vestiges of its former Soviet structure.”¹²³

The way Russia conducted the war in Georgia was, in some respects, different from the way it conducted the wars in Chechnya. A big difference was the high tempo of operations.¹²⁴ Russia were able to maintain a high tempo of their operations because they planned it to be such and because the Georgians fought on Russia’s terms. Georgia fought a conventional, kinetic war. Had the Georgians assumed that Russia would invade into Georgia, they could have fought a more “second grammar” type war. Given their tactical advantage, Georgians could have prolonged the war and finished the war on different terms. Even prior to the 2008 Russian invasion, Georgian officers proposed an unconventional war approach against a potential Russian invasion of Georgia, believing that it may be the only feasible operational approach to counter Russia.¹²⁵

Overall, it appears that there was a new, emerging thought process among Russian political and military leaders prior to the initiations of hostilities. As Donovan notes, the operations in Georgia “reflect some new aspects of Russian thinking.”¹²⁶ It was obvious in their “reflexive control” approach, in their avoidance of a protracted warfare, and the new level of unity of effort, although all of them were still weak.

¹²³ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 40.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁵ Vladimer Chachibaia, *Strategic Defense Against a Larger Power* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2008), 1-20.

¹²⁶ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 21.

Table 3 shows that only one out of the seven major differences between the post-Soviet and the current Russian operational concepts clearly emerged before or during the 2008 Russian invasion in Georgia: the ideology, patriotism, and cultural relativism. The other three differences between the post-Soviet and today’s Russian operational concept—the primary operational approaches, the primary means, and unified action—had insignificant changes during the 2008 Russo-Georgia war.

Table 3. Differences between the Russian operational concept used during the Chechen wars and the Russian operational concept during the 2008 war in Georgia.

#	Main differences	Russian operational concept during the Chechen wars	Changes in Russian operational concept during the 2008 war in Georgia
1	Type of war Russia primarily prepares for	Limited war	Limited war
2	Expected endstate/aim	Total victory Shifted with the Chechenization towards limited aims	Limited aims
3	Type of warfare	Combined arms Air-Land Battle “Non-linear” aspects implemented with the Chechenization	Combined arms Air-Land Battle Emerging “Reflexive control”
4	Primary Operational Approaches	WMD strike option Large conventional units/mass Deep battle Firepower focused	No significant change Emerging CYBER
5	Ideology	Raise of Nationalism	Nationalism/cultural relativism
6	Primary means	Large combat formations Primarily conscript based	No change
7	Unified Action	Less emphasis on non-military action	No significant change

Source: Created by author.

In 2008, Russia had many of the same problems it had in the Chechen wars. Russia would finally improve the means, the operational approach, and the unity of effort only after the 2008

Russo-Georgian war. Table 4 represents the major changes in the Russian operational concept that occurred because of the reforms initiated *after* the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

Table 4. Differences between the Russian operational concept during the Russo-Georgian war and the current Russian operational concept.

#	Main differences	Russian operational concept prior and during the 2008 war in Georgia	Current Russian operational concept
1	Type of war Russia <i>primarily</i> prepares for	Limited war	Limited war
2	Expected endstate/aim	Limited aims	Limited aims
3	Type of warfare	Combined arms Air-Land Battle Emerging “Reflexive control”	“Reflexive Control”/non-linear
4	<i>Primary</i> Operational Approaches	Combined arms Air-Land Battle Emerging CYBER	“Reflexive control” Nuclear deterrence Unified effort Special Operations Forces Cyber
5	Ideology	Nationalism/cultural relativism	Nationalism/patriotism/orthodox religion
6	<i>Primary</i> means	Large combat formations Primarily conscript based	Units that are professional and well-trained Russian nationals in the targeted state Local population sympathetic to Russia
7	Unified Action	Less emphasis on non-military action	Significant emphasis on non-military action during initial phases

Source: Created by author.

Analysis

The previous chapters revealed that of the seven major differences depicted in Table 1, three—the type of war, type of warfare, and change in aim/end state—emerged during the wars in Chechnya. These differences had distinct causes. In Grozny, the Russians learned from their costly

experience.¹²⁷ The question is what made the Russians adapt and what made their experience “costly?”

The first and most important factor during the Chechen wars was Russian casualties. Although the number of casualties during the operation could not make Russians rethink their operational concept in Grozny, they nevertheless made them rethink some tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). Russia was traditionally less averse to casualties compared to other nations and, therefore, casualties should not have influenced the operational concept as much. Nevertheless, in the case of Chechnya, the relationship between the belligerents was asymmetric because Chechens fought a total war for survival while Russia fought a limited war for limited aims. This asymmetry, in theory, brings constraints in terms of military resources for the side fighting a limited war.¹²⁸ Casualties were among those constraints. Moreover, the relatively uncontrolled media displayed images from the Grozny onslaught, which led Russia to lose the information war.¹²⁹ This exacerbated the problem and led to decreased popular support for the war. The untenable casualties caused cracks in popular support for president Yeltsin, and in the support of his internal coalition too, almost culminating in impeachment, influencing Russian political and military decision-makers to rethink their operational concepts.

The second factor that influenced the way Russians were fighting was lessons learned. Russia, like most armies, had a culture of analyzing lessons after each conflict.¹³⁰ Although slowly, these lessons helped the Russian military adapt to the new operational environment. As early as

¹²⁷ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?,” 215.

¹²⁸ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175-200, accessed November 24, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2009880>.

¹²⁹ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?,” 217.

¹³⁰ V. G. Reznichenko, “O Voennoj Doktrine Rossijskoj Federacii,” *Voennaja Misli*, no. 2 (1996), trans. by author, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8791-o-voennoj-doktrine-rossijskoj-federacii>.

1996, Russians had publications about the value of lessons learned. For instance, General (retired) S. A. Tiushkevich, in his 1996 publication “Current Problems of Military Science Development,” states the necessity to draw lessons learned not only from positive, but also from negative experiences.¹³¹ Russians constantly drew lessons learned, especially at the tactical level. Initially, Russia adapted to urban warfare in Grozny and then it adapted to counterinsurgency warfare. The problem that made these changes slow was the lack of political and financial support. Consequently, the main causes that influenced adaptation of the Russian operational concept during the Chechen wars were the untenable casualties and the lessons learned during and after each war.

In contrast to the relatively small adaptations in the Russian operational concept during the Chechen wars, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war had a greater impact on the operational concept. However, what is distinct about these changes is that almost all of them occurred after the Russo-Georgian war and not prior or during the war. Although the lessons learned from Afghanistan and both Chechen wars were not yet fully implemented, lessons from the 2008 war significantly influenced immediate reform.¹³²

There were many similarities in the means employed in Georgia and Chechnya. First, as during the Chechen wars, the Russians relied on mass. The Kavkaz exercise alone massed approximately 8,000 soldiers on the Russia-Georgia border.¹³³ Second, Russia did not have enough professional soldiers and therefore, just as during the Chechen wars, it relied extensively on conscript soldiers.¹³⁴ Next, as the war showed, the Russians not only employed badly maintained

¹³¹ S. A. Tiushkevich, “Aktualnye Problemy Razvitija Voennoj Nauki,” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 4 (1996): 64-70, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/1996-vm/8759-aktualnye-problemy-razvitija-voennoj-nauki>.

¹³² Roger McDermott, *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges, and Policy Implications* (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2011), 34.

¹³³ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 29.

¹³⁴ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 100.

equipment, but they also had many vital capability gaps for confronting a Western-type military. According to Klepper, Russian forces “appeared highly reminiscent of the Red army...and were technically and tactically inferior to their Georgian counterparts.”¹³⁵ In Georgia, Russia achieved its strategic aims, but it was at the limit of its operational capabilities.

The next factor that influenced the Russian operational approach was the asymmetries in conventional capabilities between Russia and Western countries. The 2008 war indicated that Russia would be at a disadvantage in a conventional war with a Western army. The question that probably arose in the minds of Russian strategists after this war was how could Russia conventionally confront a Western military of a much bigger size and equally or better trained than Georgia? In a potential confrontation with NATO, Russia would not have such a numerical advantage to overcome capabilities asymmetries. Nuclear weapons served well as a deterrent. However, for accomplishing foreign policy aims by using the military instrument of national power, nuclear weapons were not an option. Having these asymmetries in conventional capabilities forced Russians to consider ways to overcome their disadvantages.

The Russians were thinking about asymmetries with the West since the mid-nineties, but they were thinking in a linear way in terms of numbers. For example, Lieutenant General V. G. Reznichenko, in his 1996 article “About Russian Military Doctrine,” emphasizes NATO’s overmatch in *numbers*, and not capabilities.¹³⁶ Other publications from that period made similar arguments. This implies that numbers and mass was still the predominant factor in Russian thinking.

¹³⁵ Klepper, *The Influence of Regional Conflicts and Military Reform on the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines of the Russian Federation: An Analysis of the Development and Current Force Posture of the Russian Conventional Ground Forces*, 28-38.

¹³⁶ Reznichenko, “O Voennoj Doktrine Rossijskoj Federacii.”

In contrast to the prevailing thinking of the mid-nineties, Russian officers viewed asymmetry in a different way after the Russo-Georgia war. For instance, the candidate of “military scientist” degree, Colonel I. V. Krinitskii, provides in his article “Asymmetric Means and Ways of Warfare” a modified concept of asymmetry.¹³⁷ Krinitskii emphasizes that sheer numbers are not the only means to achieve asymmetry; conceptual planning and unified action also play an important role in achieving asymmetry.¹³⁸ In another article, Marks Vakkaus, an instructor at the Russian General Staff Military Academy, also emphasizes quality over quantity in order to achieve parity with potential adversaries. Vakkaus, in order to optimize capabilities, proposes a force structure process similar to what force management provides for the US armed forces.¹³⁹ Other articles also demonstrate that after the 2008 invasion of Georgia, there was an emergent concept for “asymmetrical warfare,” for capabilities-based assessment, and for force structure. Although the idea of asymmetry was not new, it was different from the ideas before the 2008 invasion in Georgia. It appeared that Russians understood the nature of future wars.¹⁴⁰ The operational concept that emerged after these changes showed its relative efficiency during the invasion of Ukraine.

The factors that influenced the operational concept change were not limited to military and political aspects only. They closely related to Russian society and culture as well. There are indicators that suggest a generational change in Russian society and, consequently, a generational change in the armed forces too. These causes emerged before and during the Second Chechen war,

¹³⁷ Iu. V. Krinitskii, “Asimmetrichnye Sredstva i Sposoby Vedenija Vojny,” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 11 (2010): 25-30, trans. by author, accessed December 27, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2010-vm/10292-asimmetrichnye-sredstva-i-sposoby-vedenija-vojny>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-30.

¹³⁹ M. F. Vakkaus, “K Voprosu o Probleme Osnashhenija Vooruzhennykh Sil Sovremennim Vooruzheniem i Raspredelenija Rashodov na ih Zakupku i Proedaniye,” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 2 (2009): 65-69, trans. by author, accessed December 27, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2009-vm/10234-k-voprosu-o-probleme-osnashhenija-vooruzhennykh-sil>.

¹⁴⁰ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 27.

but they influenced the operational concept much later—before and during the invasion of Georgia. Partly because of effective information operations and control of the media, partly because of the period elapsed from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian society and the Russian Armed Forces started to embrace cultural relativism, becoming more nationalistic and more proud of themselves. This helped recruit soldiers and, most importantly, it provided the popular passion for war. Moreover, a much more effective civilian-military discourse emerged after the 2008 war. A good comparison of that is the resignation of General Vorobyev in 1994 versus the influence that General Gerasimov has had since 2012.

These changes influenced society and the armed forces alike. For example, several readings emphasized the importance of raising patriotism. One of those articles, “Cadet Education in Fostering the Moral-Physiologic Training of Troops,” explains the need for patriotic and moral education and provides potential ways to do that.¹⁴¹ An increased patriotism and cultural relativism had emerged. Consequently, in November 2015, eighty-five percent of Russians, according to Gudrun, “were proud of the Russian Armed Forces,” while fifty-three percent agreed that money should be devoted to defense even at the expense of economic development.¹⁴²

The Russian Federation became more assertive in its foreign policy ambitions. Russian leadership wanted to reestablish Russia as a regional power. Moreover, Russian leadership perceived the West, and more specifically NATO, as an imminent threat. In their view, NATO expansion endangered the balance of power and interests in Russia’s periphery. Strategic documents, to include Russia’s 2014 military doctrine, list the US and NATO buildup as emergent

¹⁴¹ G. A. Lisitsin, “Podgotovka Obuchajushhihsja v Voennyh Vuzah k Organizatsii Moralino-Psihologicheskogo Obespechenya Voysk,” *Voennaia Misli*, no. 2 (2009): 52-57, trans. by author, accessed December 27, 2016, <http://militaryarticle.ru/voennaya-mysl/2009-vm/10266-podgotovka-obuchajushhihsja-v-voennyh-vuzah-k>.

¹⁴² Gudrun Person, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016* (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency, 2016), 104-105.

threats for Russia's national security.¹⁴³ This narrative calls for strong popular support, to the point where people justify Russian invasions in other countries and consider them preemptive and necessary to avoid a greater war.¹⁴⁴

Some experts consider that the strategic cost of the 2008 war was greater than the gains Russia achieved during the war.¹⁴⁵ However, this is not necessarily true. Russian forces withdrew from Georgia, but only after achieving their strategic objective. Moreover, the war demonstrated that structures like NATO, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were not successful in preventing conflicts.¹⁴⁶ This potentially was an indicator for Putin that he would have relative freedom of action on his periphery and provided additional positive feedback to his aggressive foreign policy, allowing Russia to transition from strategic defense to strategic offense. This, in turn, influenced changes in the operational concept.

There is no doubt that if there will ever be an existential threat to the Russian Federation from outside, the factors that this monograph argues for will have a different (for the most part lesser) impact. For instance, it is highly likely that casualties will not have as big of an impact during an absolute war as during a limited war. However, Russia is currently less likely to engage in absolute wars, nor does it perceive other countries as intending to engage in absolute wars with Russia. In its 2014 military doctrine, Russia states that the probability of someone launching a full-fledged war against Russia is low.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the factors that the monograph argues for remain true.

¹⁴³ "So What is New about Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine?," *OE Watch: Foreign News of the Operational Environment*, vol. 5, no.02 (February 2015): 47.

¹⁴⁴ Person, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016*, 102.

¹⁴⁵ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 31.

¹⁴⁶ Copp, *The Russian Way of War: Post Soviet Adaptations in the Russian Military*, 101.

¹⁴⁷ "So What is New about Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine?," 47.

Implications for the Countries within Russia's "Near Abroad"

The factors that this monograph identified provide insights about Russian armed forces' vulnerabilities and potential ways to exploit those vulnerabilities. First and most important, Russia is still slow in changing its paradigms and even in adapting to new realities of warfare. A single crisis is less likely to trigger significant changes in the way Russia fights. This means that staying "one step ahead" of Russian decision-makers will provide an important advantage to the aggressed state. Proactivity versus reactivity in relation to Russia is imperative.

Second, in a limited war scenario, Russia is sensitive to its own casualties. Successful information operations could show the Russian population the real cost that Russia is paying while conducting military operations. This could weaken the popular support for such campaigns. Even if Russia were resilient to its own casualties from a popular support standpoint, it would not be as resilient from a financial standpoint. Currently Russian Armed Forces employ professional soldiers to execute operations. Replacing well-trained soldiers is expensive and requires time.

Third, Russia uses "reflexive control" to make the opponent fight on their terms, as the Georgia case study demonstrated. Instead, while exploiting Russian inflexibility and other vulnerabilities, it is important to fight on terms that are less favorable to Russia (i.e., night operations). Although advantages in hardware are good, for small countries it may be difficult to keep up with the quantity required to fight Russia. In this case, determination, mobility, flexibility, unity of effort, and mission command would be necessary for countries opposing Russia. In other words, NATO and the countries threatened by Russia should develop and maintain asymmetries in relation to Russian military capabilities.

Lastly, some countries may not have the capabilities to confront Russia conventionally. In such cases, making the aggressed country "indigestible," as Georgian officers had proposed prior to the 2008 invasion, by fighting an unconventional war against Russia, may be the only feasible solution, but nevertheless a solution.

Conclusion

The purpose of this monograph was to identify what caused changes in the Russian operational concept. The initial hypothesis of this monograph was that Russia underwent a paradigm shift in its way of fighting and that the shift occurred after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. Rather than the paradigm shift, research showed that there were a series of adaptations in the Russian way of fighting. This means that the Russian military, although it adapts slowly, does not need a crisis to evolve. Subsequently, the analysis of the ex-Soviet operational concept and the current Russian operational concept demonstrated that there are seven major differences between how Russians fight today and how they fought at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Further, the case studies of both Chechen wars and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war identified that an aggressive Russian foreign policy, the perceived threat to Russia's national security, the asymmetries with Western military technology and quality, a generational change in Russian society, untenable casualties, and the lessons Russians learn from wars influence the Russian military's change of operational concept.

Although Russia has always adapted to new realities, what makes this change more significant this time is the change in their thinking process. The Russian military, as Donovan mentions, "is observing other militaries and trying to blend its operational thought and capability into an emerging *Russian* way of waging war that is effective in achieving tasks proportionate with its geostrategic aims."¹⁴⁸

Moreover, the intent behind these adaptations is not defensive; it is offensive. As aggression in Ukraine showed, Russia transitioned from massing troops to massing effects, something that was the opposite in the past. Russian thinking, influenced by the causes listed above, shifted from focusing on large-scale conventional war to preparing and waging quick campaigns,

¹⁴⁸ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 31.

mostly on Russia's periphery.¹⁴⁹ Obviously, this is not going to be the case for all future conflicts. Russia has never neglected the possibility of waging an absolute war. Quick campaigns are what Russia *primarily* prepares for now.

Changes in the Russian operational concept occurred over a period of more than twenty years. Change involved adaptation and not a sudden paradigm shift, continuity rather than contingency, an evolution rather than a revolution. Russia's changing tempo has been historically slow and it remains relatively slow. The factors that made Russia change its operational concept represent vulnerabilities that, if properly exploited, may help counter the operational concept that they themselves created.

¹⁴⁹ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 28-29.

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