

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.  
**PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 04/25/2016	<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master's of Military Studies	<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> SEP 2015 - APR 2016
--	---	--

<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Russian Military Reform, Exercises, and Current Operations: A Predication of Future Russian Military Campaigns in the Former Soviet Space and Beyond?	<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b> N/A

<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Armas, Jason C, Major, USMC	<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b> N/A

<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b> N/A
--	--

<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>	<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b> N/A
	<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b> N/A

**12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**  
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**  
This paper is a thorough analysis of the Russian military reforms from 1991 through the current force and provides an in-depth review of current combat operations starting with the 2008 Russo-Georgian War through Russia's current campaign in Syria. When viewed through the lens of the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's, Russia's current military operations coupled with its large scale exercises conducted in recent years, detail a step by step approach to the creation, execution, and validation of military reform, new doctrine and the education of military commanders through rotations in and out of conflict zones.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**  
Russia; Russian Military Reform 1991 - Today, Russian Current Military Operations, Russo-Georgian War 2008, Russian Syrian Air Campaign, Russia operations in Ukraine and Crimea.

<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>	
<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>			USMC Command and Staff College	
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	36	<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b> (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)	

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING SF 298

**1. REPORT DATE.** Full publication date, including day, month, if available. Must cite at least the year and be Year 2000 compliant, e.g. 30-06-1998; xx-06-1998; xx-xx-1998.

**2. REPORT TYPE.** State the type of report, such as final, technical, interim, memorandum, master's thesis, progress, quarterly, research, special, group study, etc.

**3. DATE COVERED.** Indicate the time during which the work was performed and the report was written, e.g., Jun 1997 - Jun 1998; 1-10 Jun 1996; May - Nov 1998; Nov 1998.

**4. TITLE.** Enter title and subtitle with volume number and part number, if applicable. On classified documents, enter the title classification in parentheses.

**5a. CONTRACT NUMBER.** Enter all contract numbers as they appear in the report, e.g. F33315-86-C-5169.

**5b. GRANT NUMBER.** Enter all grant numbers as they appear in the report. e.g. AFOSR-82-1234.

**5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER.** Enter all program element numbers as they appear in the report, e.g. 61101A.

**5e. TASK NUMBER.** Enter all task numbers as they appear in the report, e.g. 05; RF0330201; T4112.

**5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER.** Enter all work unit numbers as they appear in the report, e.g. 001; AFAPL30480105.

**6. AUTHOR(S).** Enter name(s) of person(s) responsible for writing the report, performing the research, or credited with the content of the report. The form of entry is the last name, first name, middle initial, and additional qualifiers separated by commas, e.g. Smith, Richard, J, Jr.

**7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES).** Self-explanatory.

**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER.** Enter all unique alphanumeric report numbers assigned by the performing organization, e.g. BRL-1234; AFWL-TR-85-4017-Vol-21-PT-2.

**9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES).** Enter the name and address of the organization(s) financially responsible for and monitoring the work.

**10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S).** Enter, if available, e.g. BRL, ARDEC, NADC.

**11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S).** Enter report number as assigned by the sponsoring/monitoring agency, if available, e.g. BRL-TR-829; -215.

**12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT.** Use agency-mandated availability statements to indicate the public availability or distribution limitations of the report. If additional limitations/ restrictions or special markings are indicated, follow agency authorization procedures, e.g. RD/FRD, PROPIN, ITAR, etc. Include copyright information.

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.** Enter information not included elsewhere such as: prepared in cooperation with; translation of; report supersedes; old edition number, etc.

**14. ABSTRACT.** A brief (approximately 200 words) factual summary of the most significant information.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS.** Key words or phrases identifying major concepts in the report.

**16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION.** Enter security classification in accordance with security classification regulations, e.g. U, C, S, etc. If this form contains classified information, stamp classification level on the top and bottom of this page.

**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT.** This block must be completed to assign a distribution limitation to the abstract. Enter UU (Unclassified Unlimited) or SAR (Same as Report). An entry in this block is necessary if the abstract is to be limited.

United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

---

---

**Russian Military Reform, Exercises, and Current Operations:  
A Predication of Future Russian Military Campaigns in the Former Soviet Space and Beyond?**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

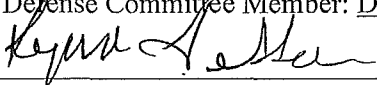
**Major Jason C Armas, USMC**

AY 15-16

---

---

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Lynn Tesser

Approved: 

Date: 4-19-16

Oral Defense Committee Member: LtCol Andrew Delgaudio, USMC

Approved:  LtCol USMC

Date: 25-IV-16

## Executive Summary

**Title:** Russian Military Reform, Exercises, and Current Operations: A Predication of Future Russian Military Campaigns in the Former Soviet Space and Beyond?

**Author:** Major Jason C Armas, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** Russian military actions, conventional and asymmetric, starting with the 2008 Georgia campaign, are not merely an act of Russian interventionism or adventurism; this military boldness is an extension of Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategic vision for a return of Russian power to the region. Ongoing methodical military reform, current operations near and abroad, and validation of Russian doctrine are precursors to future Russian operations in the former Soviet space and the Russian near abroad.

**Discussion:** Lilia Shevtosova discusses the events that have taken place in Ukraine in "The Russia Factor." She states "Putin appears to truly believe that the West poses a threat not only on the state level (the level of Russia's external interests) but also on the level of society and the Russian way of life. He has not merely critiqued Western civilization, but has gone on to suggest that Russia is becoming the anti-West, the force that will counterbalance and oppose the liberal democracies."<sup>1</sup> Shevtosova claims that the Ukraine revolution / operations are the testing grounds for this new doctrine and that Putin's Russia will focus on rejecting Western values and containing Western influence.

In "The Post-Soviet Twilight" by Bruce Pitcairn Jackson and "Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors" by Nokolos K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, the authors argue that the motives behind Putin's military strategy are tied directly into economic influence both internal and external. These authors agree that pressure from the European Union and the United States have sidelined Russia to a second tier state, relegating Russia to being a follower as opposed to a leader. They believe that Russia is attempting to regain influence as a regional hegemon while simultaneously strengthening its relationship with China and India.

This paper will conduct a thorough analysis of the Russian military reforms from 1991 through the current force and provide an in-depth review of current combat operations starting with the 2008 Russo-Georgian War through Russia's current campaign in Syria. When viewed through the lens of the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's, Russia's current military operations coupled with its large scale exercises conducted in recent years, detail a step by step approach to the creation, execution, and validation of military reform, new doctrine and the education of military commanders through rotations in and out of conflict zones.

**Conclusion:** The Russian military reforms, expanded combined and joint exercises, and current military campaigns are precursors to the strategic vision of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin's strategic end state is a return to the control of the Russian near abroad and the Russia as a global power with full control of the former Soviet space.

The EU and NATO response needs to be tempered since Putin desires chaos and destabilization to the current international security apparatus. The military approach to solving the Russian problem is exactly what Putin needs to continue mobilizing his people or his compatriots to the Russian cause. EU and NATO intervention on the side of pro-democratic groups will enable pro-Russian, or ethnic Russian forces to continue to disrupt the system. Large scale NATO exercises will position forces with the intent of deterrence, but containment and roll back will not work with Putin's Russia. Russian warfare methodology believes war does not have a specific start state along a continuum of aggression with actions commencing well before troop movements or direct fire engagements as demonstrated in both Crimea and Ukraine.

Economic pressure coupled with weaponizing the dollar will be the most effective way to cripple the Russian military. The ruble is weak in comparison to the dollar and the Euro, and Russia's current economic situation is flat-lining with the reduction of oil production in OPEC. Mainstay natural resource demand has withered in recent years especially with the influx of oil on the market. This has been a marked detractor for the Russian economy and will continue to place pressure on military funding, with approximately 10% of the Russian GDP going to the military, economic slow-down is their most significant weakness.

*Table of Contents*

DISCLAIMER ..... i

INTRODUCTION ..... 1

PART I: Military Reform.....4

PART II: Russo-Georgia War: The Catalysts for Change:.....9

PART III: The New Look Reforms: .....12

PART IV: Operational Level Exercises: Rehearsal for Future Conflict: .....15

PART V: Current Operations: Prelude to War in the Baltics? .....18

CONCLUSION.....24

CITATIONS AND ENDNOTES.....27

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....30

## **DISCLAIMER**

**THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.**

**QUOTATION FROM, ABSTRACTION FROM, OR REPRODUCTION OF ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PERMITTED PROVIDED PROPER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS MADE.**

The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, stated, “The breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century.”<sup>2</sup> This statement illuminates the grand strategy of President Putin, though, scholars continue to debate to the actual endstate of Putin’s strategy. Many scholars such as Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun from CNA believe the Russian grand strategy is the return of control of ethnic Russian territories and a return of global super power status to Russia. They have labeled Putin’s current actions as “mobilizing compatriots”<sup>3</sup> using ethnicity as the link to Putin’s grand strategy. Scholars such as Lilia Shevtosova advance this theory further by claiming that Russian actions in the former Soviet space are a continuation of the anti-Western rhetoric espoused by Putin himself, and that Putin’s KGB background is the linchpin to his ultimate goals.<sup>4</sup> Putin has been quoted as saying, “Once a KGB officer, always a KGB officer.”<sup>5</sup> Other scholars like Bruce Piticairn Jackson, Nokolas K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh disagree, interpreting Putin’s moves as less of a return to power and more an attempt to stabilize Russia’s struggling economy.<sup>6</sup> They view this as Putin’s attempt to bolster Russia’s current position, and ultimately to keep it from collapse. They agree the foreign military interventions undertaken by Putin focus on the pursuit of resources all with overarching economic goals. This debate will continue to evolve as Russia’s military increases its frequency and intensity of operations throughout the world.

To date, the Russian military is actively conducting military operations in and outside the near abroad. The Russian military conducted an active air campaign and train and assist mission in Syria, in support of the current regime of Bassar Al Asad; annexed Crimea through subversion and military action; and conducting covert destabilization operations within Ukraine through proxy forces supported by Russian Special Forces. President Putin has pushed aside the roles of

international laws and norms and he continues to conduct these military interventions despite the effects doing so may have on the legitimacy of his government and his country. From a constructivist point of view, Roy Allison claims that “When powerful states fail to comply with international law they seek to justify their actions as consistent with prevailing law, and if they fail to do this persuasively they often pay high costs to their reputation and perceived legitimacy.”<sup>7</sup> Allison advances this theory in regards to the current Russian strategy by claiming “[C]onstructivists go further, however, to claim that states may internalize international rules and norms over time, so as to reconstitute the identity of states and shape their interests. In this respect Russia has displayed a remarkable continuity in its underlying attitudes to the use of force.”<sup>8</sup> Russian military actions, conventional and asymmetric, starting with the 2008 Georgia campaign, are not merely acts of Russian interventionism or adventurism; this military boldness is an extension of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s strategic vision for a return of Russian power to the region. Ongoing methodical military reform, current operations near and abroad, and validation of their doctrine are a precursor to future Russian operations in the former Soviet space and the eventual return to Russia’s 1917 borders. As Gvosdev and Marsh describe the influence on Russian foreign policy, they clearly state the difference between current policy and Soviet policy, “While it is undeniable that the legacy bequeathed by the USSR continues to have a powerful influence on contemporary Russia, Russian foreign policy today is not a continuation of Soviet policy.”<sup>9</sup>

Post-Soviet challenges that face Russia today are similar to the many challenges that have faced the leaders of that country throughout history. As Prince Alexander M. Gorchakov discussed after the Russian defeat in the Crimean War, Russia desires to “recover from its losses, become stronger and replenish its resources to regain its position, authority, influence and

destiny.”<sup>10</sup> Russia’s military is pivotal to the discussion of Russian policy and strategy, and this political relationship is a driving factor in Russian government and is closely tied to the military. Geographically, Russia is plagued by distance; this factor plays greatly into the link between Russian policy and its military, “Given that Russia controls more territory than any other state in the world, it is therefore the world’s most ‘exposed’ country in terms of length of borders it must defend.”<sup>11</sup> The importance of the military is well known from the time of the tsars through the Soviet Union and now in modern Russia, military policy and strategy have seen reforms throughout history, but the reforms experienced since the collapse of the Soviet Union have become a driving force in Russian policies.

Russia’s military has gone through significant transitions since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This paper will review Russian military reform through three distinct transitional periods, from the post-Soviet collapse military through the Russia’s current operational force.

- The first period runs from 1991-2000: reforms that completely changed the landscape of the Russian military.
- 2000 to 2008: this period is crucial to the current Russian military, since it went through a rebalancing of leadership and policy.
- 2008 through the future: Russia, starting with its incursion into Georgia through current actions in the Crimea, Ukraine, Syria and the Arctic are a reversal of the collapse of the post-Soviet military and a return of the global military power that contests the current international security apparatus.

Current Russian military campaigns are aggressive and in most cases inciting toward the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In many cases these operations are difficult for military strategists and policy makers to

understand. Certain operations are clear and understood as a requirement for the protection of Russian borders or resource driven. However, some of these operations appear very fractured and out of synch with current operations on the borders, making the Russian president appear more like an interventionist than an internally focused leader. Identification of key military and political figures throughout each transition period will help to explain the transition in reform and strategy. The Soviet military juggernaut fell when the Soviet Union collapsed, but as recent events have demonstrated a leaner, highly trained, and technologically advanced Russian military can be just as troubling to the West as was the massive Soviet military.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation has struggled to solidify its military status not just in the region, but in the world. In order to discuss the prospective future of the Russian Federation military, it is imperative to define the current Russian military; though, before one can do that, it is critical to review the Russian military from the perspective of reform.

### **Military Reform:**

Russian military reform was the first phase of Putin's grand strategy. Before he can move to consolidate control of ethnic Russian territories, Putin must be sure the military system is effective and strong enough to project power beyond its borders in the 'near abroad'<sup>i12</sup>. Military reform in any country, let alone Russia, is controversial. This is mainly due to the fact that reform suggests a problem. Real or perceived, military reforms tend to threaten the existing hierarchy, as is the case in the post-Soviet Union military. Typically the response to a military

---

<sup>i</sup> "The Russian Term "blizhneye zarubyezhe" ("near abroad") is used to refer to those states neighboring the Russian Federation which, until its collapse, formed part of the Soviet Union – as "Union Republics." From the geopolitical point of view it corresponds to the borders of the former Soviet Union. Today it covers the area of the Commonwealth of Independent States and also those countries which, though formerly in the U.S.S.R., did not join the CIS: i.e. the Baltic States."

defeat or political change, military reform is not unknown to the Russian Federation. Poor performance by the Russian Armed Forces in the Crimean and Russo-Japanese Wars brought the Militutin and Stolypin reforms. After the Russian Civil War the Frunze and Tukhachevsky reforms brought major change to the Russian military; and again after the start of World War II, Russia had to invest in 'wholesale' military reforms in order to defeat Nazi Germany in total war.<sup>ii</sup> Technological advances, especially in nuclear technology, brought with them a need for major reforms for the Soviet military. The Zhukov reforms in the mid 1950s, Khrushchev's nuclear "Revolution in Military Affairs" in the 1960s, and the Ogarkov reforms of the 1970s and 1980s kept the Soviet military in a state of constant reform throughout much of its modern existence.<sup>13</sup> Security is the driving force behind most military reforms, this is truly the case for Russia with the increased influence of NATO and the EU in the former Soviet space.

In order to understand the current state of the Russian military it is important to review the reforms that have taken place since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The official creation date of the Russian Armed Forces is May 7, 1992. Since that day the Russian military has not been in a steady state; it has been evolving through multiple rounds of change in leadership at the Minister of Defense (MoD) level, to a complete overhaul of the training and education of the military leadership at all levels. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian military identified five major problems inherited from the Soviet Army that it needed to be address immediately. First, the mobilization system has to be examined; this system's design was to fight large-scale war against NATO or China. The intent was to mobilize five million people within a short period of time to meet the threat. Second, the Russian units were "paper tigers." Most units maintained manning at 50 percent of their full strength, relying on mobilization to reach full war

---

<sup>ii</sup> Many of the military reformists were purged from the Red Army, the purges of 1937 – 1939 and 1940 – 1942 removed many leading officers from the Red Army and eventually stopped all reform to doctrine.

time strength. As Aleksey Gayday discusses in his study of Russian military reform, “Of the 132 divisions, only 20 were kept at 70 percent of their full strength in terms of personnel and equipment. The rest were reduced or skeleton-strength formations.”<sup>14</sup> The third problem was that the system was “upside down,” as the system was extremely top heavy. The Russian military relied on mobilization; the majority of true personnel strength was at the command structure level not the troop level, leaving empty ranks led by fully staffed commands. The fourth problem was the equipment; the Soviet military had many variations in their tables of equipment, leaving the Russian Armed Forces with multiple variations of the same obsolete equipment. The fifth problem facing the Russian Armed Forces was the lack of capability to maintain the large arsenals and supplies that it had in storage. Since the Soviet model relied on mobilization the importance of stockpiling equipment and supplies created an abundance of stockpiles that required a large amount of people and money to maintain, both of which the current structure did not have.<sup>15</sup>

Knowing that they could not execute immediate reform to correct these issues, the MoD and the General Staff created the “Mobile Forces.” The Mobile Force was a motorized rifle brigade manned at 95 – 100 percent of full strength with a full table of organization of equipment. These independent motorized rifle brigades would put an end to relying on mobilization to fill the ranks of their military, and the MoD believed this would create a fully professionalized military that did not have to rely on conscription.<sup>16</sup> The tenuous political situation at that time hindered the results of the mobile forces and left then President Yeltsin with no choice but to delay military reform and focus on market reform and strengthen his own power base in the government.<sup>17</sup> The principal vectors of the Russian government as defined by Nikolas K. Gvosdev; Russia focused its foreign policy on the “accelerated integration into the Euro-

Atlantic structure... which manifested itself in a desire to join the ranks of the West as quickly as possible, even if to the detriment of Russia's real interests.”<sup>18</sup>

The first Chechen War (1994 – 1996) highlighted again the need for military reform after the display of Russian military weakness and over-all failure of the campaign. By the end of 1996, public support in Russia was so low for the Chechen War that the populace wanted an immediate withdrawal from the region.<sup>19</sup> President Yeltsin would lead the new rounds of reform, this time by making structured changes to the military. This focused on structural changes based on strengthening his own party and position of power not restructuring based on strengthening national security. This ended in failure again with the second Chechen War.<sup>20</sup>

After complete failure to reform the military, the newly elected President Putin knew that to strengthen the military through major reforms would be a priority: “Discussions of military reform have been going on in our country for quite a while – but unfortunately, there has been little headway in this respect. I hope very much that we will be able to secure positive changes.”<sup>21</sup> Putin would initially tread lightly with his reforms; it was the military establishment that had guaranteed his seat of power and he knew that incremental reforms over time would be imperative to overall change. One of the most difficult obstacles for Putin to overcome was the military establishment itself. Knowing that the upper echelon of officers had the most to lose with reform, especially with the amount of corruption nested in the military elite, Putin would build his own power base before making major changes. Putin nearly doubled the military budget from 2001 to 2007, R218.9 Billion – R573 Billion (\$3.2 Billion - \$8.6 Billion), but despite the increase there was little change or improvement to equipment and weaponry.<sup>22</sup> Using the results of an audit of the MoD to identify this outrageous corruption in the ranks of the

military elite, Putin embarked on what Russian military experts call the “greatest transformation of the Russian military since the Red Army.”<sup>23</sup>

Putin’s most crucial reform was in 2004 when he modified the Defense Law and formally established the Defense Minister and the Defense Ministry as above the General Staff.<sup>24</sup> This reform not only established civilian oversight over the General Staff, it legitimized the position of the Defense Minister and gave him operational command and control of the armed forces. As Athena Bryce-Rogers points out in her study of Russian military reform following the Russo-Georgian War, “With the General Staff subordinate to the Defense Ministry, the appointment of civilian masters – particularly that of Anatoly Serdyukov in 2007 – became incredibly important for spearheading change.”<sup>25</sup> Serdyukov was a significant shift as the selection to this position, mainly due to the fact that he was an outsider to the military as Serdyukov’s last position had been the tax ministry. As Roger McDermott highlights, “Within the first three years of Serdyukov’s appointment, he retired or fired senior officers from the top 34 positions on a total of 44 occasions; additionally, only three officers within the top 34 posts remained in their posts.”<sup>26</sup> This catalyst for change reached its pinnacle in the 2008 war with Georgia; Serdyukov had immediate influence in the Russian military, but the war in Georgia eliminated opposition to reform and highlighted the importance and urgency for change in the Russian Armed Forces.

The years leading up to the 2008 war with Georgia are not a complete failure for the Russian military; there are specific relationships and advancements that will come into importance in the Ukraine in 2014 and potentially the future. Russian military historian Gustav Gressel points out;

As Russia was too weak to act conventionally in its neighborhood in the early 1990s, it built up enormous expertise in supporting and organising proxies and

quasi-state structures. Now it is using these to supplement its conventional military might, both in terms of the non-military dimension of foreign intervention, and to bolster certain military capabilities. On strategic reconnaissance, the US has developed a powerful array of technical intelligence and surveillance instruments. Russia lagged behind in those assets, but tried to overcome this by embedding human intelligence assets and penetrating the adversary's command structures. In the "near abroad", Russia can also make use of civilian communications infrastructure and services as well as its land-based intelligence installations to intercept enemy communications.<sup>27</sup>

### **The 2008 Russo – Georgian War: The Catalysts for Change**

The calculated risk that Putin took in Georgia was that he believed the NATO forces would not commit themselves to military action. This calculation was correct: "US and Europe viewed Russia through the prism of the 1990s, when the Russian military was in shambles and the Russian government was paralyzed. The US has not seen Russia make a decisive military move beyond its borders since the Afghan war 1970 – 1980."<sup>28</sup> This observation would have been correct if not for Putin and Serdyukov's decision to intervene and counter the Georgian offensive.

On August 7, 2008, Georgian military forces, after months of exchanging artillery salvos with the breakaway region of South Ossetia, drove across the border in an attempt to seize the South Ossetia capitol of Tskhinvali.<sup>29</sup> The Georgian forces stopped short of the capitol by the defending forces from South Ossetia. By August 8, 2008, Russian military forces, using armor and motorized infantry, were on the move and crossing into Ossetia in support of the South Ossetia defense of the capitol. Russia viewed it as its responsibility to respond to Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. The Russian government, Putin, saw this as further expansion of the influence of NATO in the former Soviet space: "Russian diplomacy focused on widening its circle of friends and partners in the world... the unique geopolitical position of our country – not to mention the realities of the world politics and economics – dictate the necessity for Russia

to cultivate cooperation equally with nations to our West, East, North and South.”<sup>30</sup> Putin, rightfully so, felt this was an attempt of encirclement of Russia by NATO and the EU.

After the Orange<sup>iii</sup> Revolution in the Ukraine, the 1998 NATO expansion in Poland, Hungary, and The Czech Republic, followed by the 2004 absorption of the rest of the former Soviet states and the three Baltic states, which all had been components of the former Soviet Union, the invasion of South Ossetia by United States-backed and equipped Georgian forces was very threatening to Russia in its sphere of influence. Without hesitation the Russian military responded, as explained by George Friedman; “Within 48 hours the Russian forces had succeeded in defeating the main Georgian force and forcing a retreat. By Sunday, August 10, the Russians had consolidated their position in South Ossetia.”<sup>31</sup> With the momentum, the Russian forces continued their offensive south into Georgia attacking on two axes towards the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. The Russian forces made it within approximately 40 miles of the Georgian capital before stopping their operations. With the primary objectives of the Russian counter-offensive met, the Russians knew their military execution was adept, but the overall execution of the operation still relied heavily on outdated Soviet era tactics. The military success was very much on the surface; should the war have lasted longer than 5 days or had NATO allies decided to commit on the battlefield, the results more than likely would have been drastically different.

The political and strategic outcomes of the war were far reaching; many scholars agree that this action by Russia was its “return to great power status.”<sup>32</sup> It was not so much the actions on the battlefield but the reaction, or lack thereof from NATO and Europe that solidified this position. Military historian and strategist Dr. George Friedman stated, “The war was far from a

---

<sup>iii</sup> The Color Revolutions are a series of non-violent pro-democracy movements that have taken place throughout the 2000s in many of the former Soviet States. Rose Revolution Georgia 2003, Orange Revolution Ukraine 2004. The Russians view these revolutions as a form of Western warfare, as these revolutions use civil rest to bring about governmental change.

surprise; it has been building for months. But the geopolitical foundations of the war have been building since 1992. Russia has been an empire for centuries. The last 15 years or so were not the new reality, but simply an aberration that would be rectified. And now it's being rectified.”<sup>33</sup> The United States at this time was preoccupied with its military situation in Iraq and Afghanistan; the approximately 130 military advisors that were in Georgia in 2008 were not capable of stopping the Russian and allied forces of approximately 35,000 to 40,000. Georgian forces, estimated from 12,000 to 15,000, were not going to stop the Russian military, though it is noted that the United States trained units fought well and were difficult for the Russians initially.<sup>34</sup>

Putin's decision to commit to counter attacking the Georgian forces re-established the credibility of the Russian military. The Russians created an opportunity, and as the United States desperately dealt with its situation in the Middle East, took advantage of this opportunity to re-establish their dominance in the region and beyond its borders. This did not stop NATO and the EU from continuing to create a defensive network around Russia, further agitating the Russians and their strategic partners, with the installment of anti-ballistic missile defenses and theater ballistic missile defense systems in Europe, to include radar complex in the Czech Republic and interceptors in Poland. These systems coupled with the rejection of Putin's proposal for a joint (US-NATO-Russian) radar system in Azerbaijan to thwart Iranian threats, at the G-8 summit in Germany in 2008 by the United States continued to strengthen Putin's resolve for reform. In 2009, the Obama administration canceled the missile defense programs in Eastern Europe, and instead moved towards the use of United States Naval assets such as Aegis cruisers for missile defense in the region.<sup>35</sup>

## **The New Look Reforms**

The “New Look” reforms are the direct result of the Russian Military’s execution on the battlefield in Georgia. The outcome of these reforms are the current force conducting combat operations on Russia’s near abroad with simultaneous expeditionary operations in Syria. This is the dramatic transformation of a second tier force to a military capable of projecting power in the EU’s and NATO’s spheres of influence.

Putin achieved his strategic goals in the 2008 war with Georgia, but at the operational and tactical levels, the Russian military could not hide its deep rooted problems that needed immediate and arguably major reforms. In late 2008, the Russian military fresh off of the Georgian battlefield, conducted a full after action report focusing on the problems it faced in its latest campaign. Ineffective command and control, lack of combat readiness of military personnel, and aging technology presented the Russian military with multiple problems in Georgia. If not for their superior numbers, these issues would have played a much larger role in the outcome.<sup>36</sup>

The most notable lack of command and control was evident between the ground, naval, and air troops; not since the last World War had these units conducted coordinated operations in support of a national objective. This poor coordination led to poor and mismanaged targeting, lack of reconnaissance assets, and no prioritization of targets which led to ineffective targeting. At the tactical level the mobilized forces used Soviet era tactics for command and control, and lack of maneuver training and experience led to higher causality rates. If not for the sheer size and speed at which they moved, the Russian ground forces would have had great difficulty dealing with the smaller more highly trained Georgian forces.<sup>37</sup>

“The war highlighted three major deficiencies related to Russian military personnel: a shortage of well-trained troops, the nonexistence of sufficient first-line units, and deficiencies within the leadership structure.”<sup>38</sup> The Russians compensated for the lack of combat readiness in Georgia by the volume of the units, mainly the use of a conscripted force mobilized within months prior to the first units crossing into South Ossetia. Training and experience were minimal, with the majority of professional soldiers filling the ranks of the upper echelons. Russian policy at that time banned the use of mobilized conscripts in war outside of Russian borders; however, 30 percent of the soldiers that fought in the Russian ranks during the war in Georgia were conscripts with ineffective training that was evident during the fighting.<sup>39</sup> Many of the units were “shells,” filled with officers, but lacking the soldiers. This Soviet era technique maintains a cadre that is capable of leading a mobilized force in times of crisis. These “shells” left the non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks empty as well, leaving much of the responsibilities to the officer ranks to fill.

From high end technology to basic requirements, the Russian forces lacked both equipment and the capability to employ the existing equipment. Armor and aircraft felt the impacts the most. From identification of friend or foe technology on the aircraft and tanks to night vision and thermal technology, the Russians’ equipment was lacking the modern upgrades of the Georgians. Even with a military budget that dwarfed the Georgian budget, the Russians found themselves technologically inferior to the smaller Georgian forces.<sup>40</sup>

Russian Defense Minister Serdykov unveiled his military reforms on October 14, 2008, claiming them to be the most radical reforms seen in the military since the end of World War II.<sup>41</sup>

The primary elements of the reform included:

1. Shrink the armed forces to 1 million by 2012;
  2. Eliminate 200,000 officer positions to make the military less top-heavy;
  3. Eliminate understrength units until all are fully manned and at permanent battle-readiness;
  4. Streamline command structure by replacing the divisional structure with flexible brigades under four strategic territorial commands;
  5. Improve training and enhance the military education system; and
  6. Modernize weapons systems<sup>42</sup>
- Serdykov began his reforms with the changes he felt would take the longest to

accomplish. “First, increasing the professionalism by overhauling the education or personnel and cutting the numbers of conscripts; second, improving combat readiness with a streamlined command structure and additional training...”<sup>43</sup> Upgraded and improving military technology, or “rearmament” would be a long term goal of the MoD, but not a priority in the initial phases of the reforms facing the Russian military. Officer ranks, both at the staff officer and general staff levels, were greatly reduced, focusing on a pyramid structure making fewer decision makers at the top and more action officers at the lower echelon. The professionalism of the officer corps continued with an increase to officer pay coupled with a greater demand for management, leadership, and commitment from these officers. The goal was a combat ready professional force of elite forces, para troopers, naval infantry, and Special Forces, not a large, mobilized, conscripted force.<sup>44</sup>

Removing the empty “shells” or “paper tiger” units was the second focus. From 1991 to 2008, the Russian military still required mobilization to fill its ranks in times of crisis. As a result, divisions maintained a staff of 50 -70 percent, typically with multiple regiments not manned. This would require cobbling units together by using “patchwork” to fill enough personnel until the mobilization of the main force was complete. The current reforms required high-combat readiness of the combat brigades; these brigades have a strength of approximately

5,500 personnel focused on independent and flexible operations for a shorter deployment period and trained to face the more common asymmetric battlefield of today. The Russians converted 203 divisions to 83 fully manned and equipped brigades by 2009, drastically reducing the size of its overall force but exponentially increasing their capacity.<sup>45</sup>

The final step in the streamlining process was the creation of joint forces commands; these replaced the military district. This removed unneeded levels of hierarchy, while providing access to the air, naval, and land forces in each commander's zone. These joint force commanders created unity of command across all services and removed the coordination issue that was faced in the Russian – Georgian War in 2008.<sup>46</sup>

The long term goal of Russian rearmament has met significant challenges through the reform period. Both Medvedev and Putin attempted to increase the “Russian military-industrial complex,” and at times were successful; although, low oil prices and economic issues brought on through NATO sanctions has delayed the program multiple times. Many of the modernization programs started in the 2008 reforms will now run through 2020 or even as late as 2030 depending on the economic situation in Russia.<sup>47</sup>

### **Operational Level Exercise: Rehearsals for Future Conflict**

The Russian military tends to rehearse future operations; while in the past it would take units upwards of a year to prepare for combat operations. Exercise or a real operation, mobilization and training required significant time for preparation of the force. With the creation of the “new look” brigades and an increase on the combat readiness of the Special Forces, airborne Units (VDV), the Russian military has implemented “high-readiness” maneuvers, that in theory give these units a 24 hour alert prior to the execution of the training. Starting in 2009,

these exercises have increased throughout Russia and its partnered states.<sup>48</sup> These snap exercises force unit readiness at all times and ensure the units are mission capable, within a short period.

The popular Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin wrote, “To foresee the situation of future war is extremely difficult. For each war should be developed a special individual strategic action because each war is an individual case requiring its own special logic of actions and not an appendix to a common sample.”<sup>49</sup> With this approach in mind in the Russian general staff, military planners focused their exercises on military action against the European Union (EU) and NATO. Russia names its exercises as Zapad (West), Vostok (East), Tsentr (Center), and Kavkaz (Caucasus), using geopolitical strategy on an axis to what it believes are its central threats. The dates in which they take place follow the exercise names, in the past the aggressor nations were NATO nations, but today Russia uses a hypothetical aggressor under the guise of terrorists or illegal armed groups, but all indications are that the main aggressor from the Russian point of view is the EU and especially NATO.

In exercise Zapad 2009, the Russian military rehearsed conducting swift offensive actions against Poland and the Baltic states with the incorporated use of nuclear strikes as deterrence against NATO involvement. The exercise concluded with the capturing of the Baltics and a land bridge to Kaliningrad secured. The Caucasus 2009 exercise focused on offensive operations against Georgia, and Lagoda 2009 demonstrated a coordinated amphibious and airborne operation in the Baltics and Finland all using limited nuclear strikes as part of their deterrence to NATO and the EU. Exercise Lagoda 2012 reinforces the offensive thinking of Russian military planners; this exercise demonstrated actions against the Baltics and Finland with the seizing of the Baltic-Russian and Finish-Russian borders.<sup>50</sup>

In exercise Zapad 2013, The Russians' largest exercise to date, the Russian armed forces exercised the conduct of a rapid offensive operation in response to "terrorists / illegal armed groups" conducting operations in Belarus. The Russians through large scale offensive operations isolate the Baltics from the rest of Europe and then conduct operations to remove the terrorist threat from the area.<sup>51</sup>

Zapad 2013 was a wide-scale military exercise carried out by the Russian and Belarusian military forces in September 2013. The joint maneuvers, which were held in Belarus and western Russia, simulated an incursion by foreign backed "terrorist" groups originating from the Baltic States. This exercise involving tens of thousands of personnel and hundreds of vehicles and pieces of military equipment received a great deal of attention in the Baltic States, Poland and Finland, but passed almost unnoticed in the West.<sup>52</sup>

Zapad 2013 is unique due to its joint and combined nature. The coordinated actions of the Russian Armed Forces in the achievement of national security objectives were in line with previous exercises minus the use of nuclear weapons; which is a slight deviation from the rhetoric of "escalation dominance." Zapad 2013 exercised the relationships of the Collective Security Organization (CSO) and used a whole of government approach to achieving the national objectives. The scope of this exercise went beyond just the western front; there were simultaneous exercises held in Central Asia, Vzaimodeistviye ("Mutual Action") and an exercise held with Mongolia. Immediately upon the conclusion of Zapad 2013, the Russian Navy conducted an exercise with the Pacific Fleet in Russia's Primorye Province, sending clear signals to Asia, specifically China, of their intent and capabilities.<sup>53</sup> Russia's last set of training exercises conducted in September 2015, Union Shield and Tsentri ("Center") 2015 continue to demonstrate the increased Russian interoperability with CSO and their ability to transition from Joint Special Operations conducting operations against an irregular threat to large scale offensive operations with rapid deployment of forces and support structure.

Current Operations in the Ukraine and Syria were templated throughout the exercises conducted in 2009 to 2013. Zapad 2013 is a full rehearsal for the actions taken by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, specifically the annexation of Crimea and then the support of the pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The mobilization and rapid deployment of combat ready forces within hours of events unfolding was the exact scenario scripted in the Zapad 2013 exercise. The use of VDV and naval infantry in Crimea in conjunction with conventional forces on the Russian Ukraine border, Donbas Region, were perfectly timed and de-conflicted: “Russia had prepared for the military campaign in Ukraine proper since at least 2008 by creating or connecting pro-Russian nationalist’s circles and fifth-column organizations, and by infiltrating local intelligence, military, economic, and administrative structures.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Current Operations: A Prelude to War in the Baltics?**

#### **Crimea and Ukraine:**

The annexation of Crimea and the following military action and support to Russian separatists in the Ukraine is the beginning phase in the culmination of years of reform of the Russian Armed Forces, and the continuation of the Putin’s strategic vision, this time focusing on the Black Sea Fleet. The quick and mostly non hostile annexation of Crimea by Russia is the first example of the Russians exercising the whole of government approach to a military situation. While Americans view the use of DIME; Diplomacy-Information-Military-Economy, as an approach in stability operations, the Russians are able to focus this energy in an offensive way. Subversion and chaos are the gaps the Russians were able to exploit in Crimea, though the energy behind the annexation may have been more of a reaction to the Color Revolutions in the Ukraine.

The growth of the Black Sea Fleet and the Russian naval influence in the Mediterranean are a large part of Putin's strategic agenda; this makes an increase to the Russian fleet at Sevastopol key. As it stood the Russians were unable to increase the size of their naval forces in Sevastopol without Ukrainian approval. Throughout 1990 – 2000 Russian influence in Crimea was strong and critical government actors were sympathetic to Moscow. This influence began to wane throughout the 2000s and was reaching a critical tipping point in 2013 as the political situation in Ukraine moved towards EU inclusion. The EU and the US characterized the Color Revolutions as peaceful pro-democratic protests, though the Russians contend that these revolutions / protests are a subversive move by the West to isolate and weaken Russia on her borders. This continued pressure by the West worked in Putin's favor as an enabler to his strategic goal of increasing Russian influence throughout the near abroad. Many credit 'non-linear' warfare for the success in the Crimea, though the uprising of Russian separatists in the area and the quick and efficient deployment of naval infantry onto the peninsula to reinforce Sevastopol is not a mere coincidence, it is a pre-planned and rehearsed action.

Crimea's importance is directly tied to the Russian Black Sea Fleet and an increase in the Russian influence on the near abroad and beyond through the use of naval forces. Prominent Russian strategist Dmitry Gornburg states, "In March 2013, Vladimir Putin announced plans to establish a Mediterranean naval task force, with up to 10 combat ships permanently operating in the region. The core of this force, including the command element, is expected to come from the Black Sea Fleet once that fleet has been modernized."<sup>55</sup> Less than one year later in February 2014, Russia annexed Crimea through a smartly executed plan that started with the disruption of the current Crimean government, followed quickly by Russian separatists uprising, and finally, concluding with Russian Naval infantry and special forces seizing control of key infrastructure.

The start of military action in Ukraine continues this thread of opposing Western influence on Russia's borders with an asymmetric or hybrid counter action. The Russian military campaign in Ukraine uses well placed pro-Russian government actors, pro-Russian separatists' forces, Special Forces, and conventional forces, all synchronized with the end state of removing the current pro-Western government in the Ukraine. This type of campaign is similar to the military exercises recently conducted by the Russians. Pro-Russian separatists supported by Russian Special Forces reinforced by conventional operations on the borders has sustained the disruption of the Ukrainian government and continues to place pressure on the EU and NATO and its lack of response to the Russian action .

The Russian actions in the Ukraine and Crimea advances Putin's agenda of increasing the Russian influence throughout the Baltic States while countering Western influence. Putin has stated that Russia will protect ethnic Russians living outside of the Russian borders and the military actions undertaken by Russia confirm their resolve.

Russia's actions in Ukraine have had a direct impact on the security perceptions of the Baltic States. Baltic leaders see Russia's intervention in Ukraine as a potentially serious precedent for future Russian actions against the Baltic States. Russia's statements declaring that it will protect ethnic Russians living outside the Russian Federation are of particular concern, given the large ethnic Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. Russian naval maneuvers in the Baltic Sea that took place at the time of Russia's military intervention in Crimea were seen by regional leaders as an attempt to put pressure on the Baltic States.<sup>56</sup>

This resolve to protect ethnic Russians does not stop on the borders, it continues well beyond to its client states to Syria. The outcome of the military campaign in Syria is very different from that in Ukraine and Crimea, but they all align with Russia's long term strategic goals. The Syria campaign is the final vetting process for the Russian military's reforms, demonstrating increased capability and capacity to conduct operations from its borders.

## **Syria:**

Russian intervention on behalf of the government of Bassar Al Asad goes well beyond the protection of a client state. This campaign is the vetting of years of reform, re-armament and change in the military doctrine for the Russian Armed Forces. The Syrian campaign, though small in scale, displays an incredible increase in the Russian military's capability and capacity to conduct complicated military operations far from its borders. The campaign has a well-intended secondary effect, the disruption of the current US lead international security system; as described by S. R. Covington in his research of the Russian military campaign in Syria, "Russia's actions in Syria are designed to destabilize existing security systems and networks, reconnect them with a different orientation, and re-stabilize them on different values, principles, and rules that serve Russian interests."<sup>57</sup>

The last major deployment of Russian forces in support of a client state was the 2008 military campaign in Georgia, ultimately a Russian victory. The poor military execution throughout that campaign was the catalyst for change. Seven years later the Russian military shocked the international security apparatus with effective and efficient military actions in Syria. Improved command and control and coordination with coalition forces, use of advanced precision guided munitions and sea based cruise missiles, and the ability to deploy and sustain military operations in high operational tempo out of area are the results of Putin's drive toward military reform.

The creation of the regional command structure has enabled the Russian military to conduct well planned and coordinated actions with coalition partners. The Russians have displayed exceptional capability and capacity to conduct a high operational tempo air campaign in support of Syrian and Iranian forces operating on the ground. This de-confliction and

coordination of indirect fires to include, surface and sub surface launched land attack cruise missiles (LACMs) from the Caspian Sea, demonstrates the advanced capabilities of the Russian military command and control system. The creation and implementation of the National Defense Control Center (NDCC) which enables information flow from operational theaters to leaders in Moscow, has greatly increased the rapid flow of critical information and targeting, enhancing the speed of decision making throughout the Syrian conflict.<sup>58</sup>

As targeting and targeting de-confliction between coalition partners continues to improve the Russian use of advanced weaponry in conjunction with conventional munitions has made great strides forward. The use of aircraft launched precision guided munitions (PGMs) and surface and sub surface LACMs demonstrate an incredible advance in Russian weaponry. Along with targeting through coalition forces the use of Russian unmanned aerial vehicles for targeting and intelligence has greatly enhanced their overall capability. Su-34 and Su-37s provided daily day and night attack sorties, at their peak conducting up to 180 sorties on December 24, 2015. Also in December Russia demonstrated a new strike capability when it launched Kalibr LACMs from diesel submarines in the Mediterranean Sea coordinated with Tu-160, Tu-95MS, and Tu-22M3s, long range bombers dropping both Kh-555 and Kh-101 cruise missiles and gravity bombs on targets in Syria.<sup>59</sup> This coordinated action was as much a vetting of capabilities and technology as it was a warning to the EU and NATO of new Russian power. Like the Germans in the Spanish Revolution in 1930, the Russians' utilized this area of operations as an opportunity to test and evaluate the past decade of reform. Reformed leadership, doctrine, and technology were the focus of military operations in Syria, this was a Capstone event for the Russians.

Expeditionary operations are not synonymous with Russian military doctrine, until now. Not since the Russian military campaign in Afghanistan has Russian embarked on such a dynamic operation this far beyond its borders. Their improvement in troop movement is very creative and a major shift from relying on rail to move personnel and equipment. The Russians utilized the majority of their large transport aircraft and naval vessels for the operation, but also turned Turkish commercial vessels into Russian navy ships by pressing them into service and reflagging them.<sup>60</sup> The Russians have retained their naval base at Tartus, an air base at Latakia and have opened two more bases to support their efforts in Syria this expansion requires artillery, air defense, and logistical units to support such dispersed operations.

The vetting of capabilities and technologies in Syria has demonstrated to the international security system that Russia has both the capability and capacity to project its influence beyond the near abroad. Their operations also illustrate the effectiveness of the reforms that the Russians have undertaken since the 2008 war with Georgia. Increased capability and credibility showcase Russian resolve to demonstrate military might. As discussed above, the disruption of the standing security system was an intentional second order effect of the operations in Syria; this disruption directly challenges the credibility of the United States and NATO. Detailed planning and coordination between Russia, Syria, and Iran prior to the start of the Russian operations display the importance of the coalition and the depth of the overall execution. Major General Qassim Suleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quds Force, was in Moscow coordinating the Russian support to Syria in late July. This demonstrates the level of detail the Russian general staff incorporated into these operations.<sup>61</sup> Retired three-star Air Force General David Deptula summed up the Russian operations in Syria very well: “Essentially,” he said, “Russia is using their incursion into Syria as an operational proving ground.”<sup>62</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

Many like to view Russian President Vladimir Putin as a savvy tactician who is quick to act in defense of ethnic Russians wherever they may be. Effective but dysfunctional on a grand scale, it has been said that Putin does not have a grand strategy for Russia. When viewing the current Russian military picture piece by piece this may seem accurate, but when viewing the military starting with the reforms in 2008, and then following each change, exercise, and operation step by step, similar to waypoints on a map the path begins to appear. Every change, every reform pushed through by Putin has been carefully thought out and crafted toward accomplishing a greater Russian vision, a vision of a return to great power status.

Vladimir Putin was a 36 year old KGB case officer stationed with the East German Stasi in Dresden on October 1989, personally witnessing the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Soviet Empire from the front lines.<sup>63</sup> Every decision he has made since that fateful day was made with that experience in mind. From the selection of Colonel General Andrey Kartapdov as the Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff<sup>64</sup>, to the continuous drive for military reform, Putin has clearly positioned his country towards expanding its borders past the near abroad and returning territories, specifically the Baltic States where large percentage of ethnic Russians live, to Russian control.<sup>65</sup>

The success and failure of the Russian campaign in Georgia was the catalyst for the majority of military reform within Russia. Though successful, the operation was a failure and weakened the credibility of the Russian military. Putin's push to modernize, professionalize, and streamline the Russian military was the most significant transformation made to any Russian entity since the collapse of the Soviet Union. A smaller leaner force with highly trained units ready for deployment within twenty four hours, Russia's military has demonstrated its increased

capability and capacity to conduct complex operations that span the range of military operations. From expeditionary operations in Syria to covert operations in Crimea and Ukraine, Russia has displayed an incredible leap forward with its military, making it a near peer to the United States in many military functional areas.

As a near peer, the Russians have found a way to disrupt the international security apparatus without any recourse from the EU or NATO. By conducting operations that are diametrically opposed to the goals of pro-Western forces, Russia has destabilized the system and forced many in the West into a reactive mode.

The Russians have been telegraphing their desires to intensify their military operations beyond their borders since 2013; even though the West has been preoccupied with its own current military situation. All of the large scale operations conducted in Russia post-Zapad 2013 have focused on war in the post-Soviet space or what is currently called the near abroad. The design of these exercises provided an operational proving grounds for updated Russian doctrine, technology, logistics and sustainment, and command and control structure. Operations in Syria are the final phase in the culmination of vetting of Russian military reform; these expeditionary operations not only codify the improvements that have taken place over the last seven years, they display to the world the current capability of the Russian military and its trajectory towards outpacing most European militaries and in some areas the United States.

The EU and NATO response needs to be tempered, Putin desires chaos and destabilization to the current international security apparatus. The military approach to solving the Russian problem is exactly what Putin needs to continue mobilizing his people or his compatriots to the Russian cause. EU and NATO intervention on the side of pro-democratic groups will enable pro-Russian or Ethnic Russian forces to continue to disrupt the system. Large

scale NATO exercises will position forces with the intent of deterrence, but containment and roll back will not work with Putin's Russia. Russian doctrine believes war does not have a specific start state along a continuum of aggression, actions start for them well before troop movements or direct fire engagements, as demonstrated in both Crimea and the Ukraine.

Economic pressure coupled with weaponizing the dollar will be the most effective way to cripple the Russian military. The ruble is weak in comparison to the dollar and the Euro, and Russia's current economic situation is flat-lining with the reduction of oil production in OPEC. Mainstay natural resource demand has withered in recent years especially with the influx of oil on the market. This has been a marked detractor for the Russian economy and will continue to place pressure on military funding with approximately 10% of the Russian GDP going to the military. Economic slow-down is the most significant threat.

Putin's desire for the expansion of Russian control to ethnic Russian territories has been his agenda since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This paper focused on military reform, recent exercises, and current combat operations as the precursor for future Russian military intervention in the Russian near abroad. To continue and advance this research it is recommended to focus on the current leadership in the MoD, the Regional Commands and the General Staff; many of these officials have served with and share similar ethnicity to Vladimir Putin. He has personally selected many of these officers and continues to prepare his military and his country for future conflict.

## Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Lila Shevtsova, “The Russia Factor.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 25, No 3 (July 2014), 76.
- <sup>2</sup> Vladimir Putin, Russian Annual State of the Nation Address to Parliament. (April 2005)  
[http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml)
- <sup>3</sup> Vera Zaken, Paul Sanders, and Daniel Antoun” Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia’s Strategy, tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union” (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies, 2015), 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Lila Shevtsova, “The Russia Factor.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 25, No 3 (July 2014), 76 – 84.
- <sup>5</sup> Vladimir Putin
- <sup>6</sup> Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Roy Allison. *Russia, The West, & Military Intervention* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Roy Allison. *Russia, The West, & Military Intervention* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), ii.
- <sup>10</sup> Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Bohuslav Litera, *The Kozyrev Doctrine - a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine*. (Perspectives 4, 1994): 45–52
- <sup>13</sup> David M. Glantz, *Reform of the Russian Army*. (Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2008), i.
- <sup>14</sup> Aleksey Gayday, *Reform of the Russian Army*. (Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2008), 11
- <sup>15</sup> Aleksey Gayday, *Reform of the Russian Army*. (Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2008), 11
- <sup>16</sup> David M. Glantz. “The Continuing Influence if Non-Linear Warfare on Russian Force Structuring,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol9 No 2 (June 1996), 334-375.
- <sup>17</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 341.
- <sup>18</sup> Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 55.
- <sup>19</sup> Mike Bowker. *Conflict in Chechnya, Russian Politics Under Putin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 255.
- <sup>20</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War*, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 342
- <sup>21</sup> Zoltan Barney. *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 127.
- <sup>22</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War*, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 343
- <sup>23</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War*, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 345
- <sup>24</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War*, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 345
- <sup>25</sup> Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War*, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 345
- <sup>26</sup> Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren and Caolina Vendil Pallin, eds. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition; Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 142-145.
- <sup>27</sup> Gustav Gressel. “Russia’s Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe,” European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012): 6  
[http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)

- 
- <sup>28</sup>George Friedman. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," STRATFOR (2008): [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)
- <sup>29</sup>George Friedman. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," STRATFOR (2008): [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)
- <sup>30</sup>Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 55.
- <sup>31</sup>George Friedman. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," STRATFOR (2008): [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)
- <sup>32</sup>George Friedman. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," STRATFOR (2008): [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)
- <sup>33</sup>George Friedman. "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," STRATFOR (2008): [https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo\\_georgian\\_war\\_and\\_balance\\_power](https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)
- <sup>34</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012): 2, [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>35</sup>Nikolas k. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 97.
- <sup>36</sup>Gregory P. Lannon. "Russia's New Look: Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*: 39
- <sup>37</sup>Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 352
- <sup>38</sup>Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 352
- <sup>39</sup>Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 352
- <sup>40</sup>Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 353-355.
- <sup>41</sup>Athena Bryce-Rogers. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 (2013), 355
- <sup>42</sup>Reuben F. Johnson. 2009. "Russia's Military Reform Plans Face Resistance," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 27 March, available at <http://www.janes.com/products/janes/defence-security-report.aspx?ID=1065927857> (accessed Feb 8,2016).
- <sup>43</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 3. [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>44</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 3. [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>45</sup>Gregory P. Lannon. "Russia's New Look: Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*: 39-40.
- <sup>46</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 4. [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>47</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 5. [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>48</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quit Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 4-11. [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>49</sup>General of Army Valeri Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. See: <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632> for original article. Translated and edited by LtCol A. M. Del Gaudio, USMC.

- 
- <sup>50</sup> Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 11.  
[http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>51</sup> Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj. "Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security," (Washington D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2015)
- <sup>52</sup> Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 11.  
[http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>53</sup> Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj. "Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security," (Washington D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2015)
- <sup>54</sup> Gustav Gressel. "Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe," European Council on Foreign Affairs (2012), 6.  
[http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias\\_quiet\\_military\\_revolution\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_europe4045](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/russias_quiet_military_revolution_and_what_it_means_for_europe4045)
- <sup>55</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Military Reform: The Impact of the Crimea Annexation on Russian Naval Interests, Russian Military Reform," September 2014. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/syria/>
- <sup>56</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Military Reform: Reassuring the Baltic States, Russian Military Reform," October 2014, <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/ukraine/>
- <sup>57</sup> S.R. Covington, "The Meaning of Russia's Campaign in Syria," (Massachusetts: Harvard Kennedy School, 2015), 2-3.
- <sup>58</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Military Reform: What Russia's Military Operations in Syria Can Tell us about Advances in its Capabilities, Russian Military Reform," March 2016. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/syria/>
- <sup>59</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Military Reform: What Russia's Military Operations in Syria Can Tell us about Advances in its Capabilities, Russian Military Reform," March 2016. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/syria/>
- <sup>60</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Military Reform: What Russia's Military Operations in Syria Can Tell us about Advances in its Capabilities, Russian Military Reform," March 2016. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/syria/>
- <sup>61</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice," New York Times.com, October 14, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html?_r=1)
- <sup>62</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice," New York Times.com, October 14, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html?_r=1)
- <sup>63</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, "Putin's View of Power Was Formed Watching East Germany Collapse," The Guardian.com, October 1, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/01/putin-power-east-germany-russia-kgb-dresden>
- <sup>64</sup> Victor Barnets, Translated by Carpatho-Russian, "Interview with Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov: Russia May Have a Military Base in Syria. It Will be Sea, Ari, and Ground, The Saker (blog), October 21, 2015, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26446/3316981/>
- <sup>65</sup> Vera Zaken, Paul Sanders, and Daniel Antoun Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies, 2015), 1.

---

## Bibliography

- Allison, Roy. *Russia, The West, & Military Intervention*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Baev, Pavel, Ukraine: “A Test for Russian Military Reforms.” *Focus Strategique*, Russie.Nei.Reports No. 19, (May 2015)
- Bellows, Michael D. *Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Evolving Strategic Priorities*. Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1994.
- Belopsky, Helen. *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Brown, James D.J. “A Sterotype, Wrapped in a Cliché, Inside a Caricature: Russian Foreign Policy and Orientalism.” *Politics*, Vol. 30, No 3 (2010), 149 – 159.
- Carden, James. “Welcome to Cold War 2.0: Russia’s New and Improved Military Doctrine.” *The National Interest*, <http://nationalinterest.org>.
- Covington, S. R., *The Meaning of Russia’s Campaign in Syria*, Massachusetts: Harvard Kennedy School, 2015.
- Gayday Aleksey, *Reform of the Russian Army*. Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2008
- Glantz, David M. *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*. Oregon: Frank Cass & CO LTD., 1992.
- Gressel, Gustav. *Russia’s Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe*. European Council on Foreign Affairs, 2012
- Gvosdev, Nikolas K., and Christopher Marsh. *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*. California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014.
- Jackson, Bruce Pitcairn. “The Post-Soviet Twilight.” *Policy Review*, Vol. 177 (Feb/March 2013), 17 – 32.
- Kanet, Roger E. “Projections About a Post-Soviet World – Twenty-Five Years Later.” *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. XXVII, No 3 (September 2010), 31 – 42.
- Lannon, Gregory P. *Russia’s New Look: Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy*. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*

---

Leon, Aron. “Everything You Think You Know About The Collapse Of The Soviet Union Is Wrong.” *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 187 Jul/Aug 2011.

Litera, Bohuslav. “The Kozyrev Doctrine - a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine”. *Perspectives* 4 (1994): 45–52

McDermott, Roger N. *The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past*. United Kingdom: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2015.

McDermott, Roger N., Bertil Nygren and Caolina Vendil Pallin, eds. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition; Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*. New York: Routledge, 2012

Nation, R. Craig, and Michael McFaul. *The United States and Russia Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 1997

Pouliot, Vincent. “Pacification Without Collective Identification: Russia and the Transatlantic Security Community in the Post-Cold War Era.” *Journal of Peace and Research*, Vol. 44, No 5 (September 2007): 605 – 622.

Roger, Athena Bryce. *Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russ-Georgia War, Demokratizatsiya*, Vol 21, Issue 3 2013.

Shevtsova, Lilia. “The Russia Factor.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 25, No 3 (July 2014) 74 – 82.

Zaken, Vera, Paul Sanders, and Daniel Antoun. *Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia’s Strategy, tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic Studies, 2015.

Zdanavičius, Liudas and Matthew Czekaj. *Russia’s Zapad 2013 Military Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security*. Washington D.C: Jamestown Foundation, 2015

Zoltan, Barany. “The Politics of Russia’s Elusive Defense Reform.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 121, No 4 (2006/2007): 597 – 607.