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THESIS

**PUTIN'S PLAN: UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIAN
NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 2021
WITH CLAUSEWITZ'S THEORY**

by

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December 2023

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STRATEGY 2021 WITH CLAUSEWITZ'S THEORY**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis extracts the main directions of the Russian National Security Strategy 2021 and assesses how the key features influence the escalation risk of the relations between Russia and the West. The thesis uses Carl von Clausewitz's theory in a two-step analytic approach. The first step uses the basic structure that, Clausewitz suggests, characterizes strategies. The basic structure of strategies consists of the political standpoint in the strategic environment, the political purpose or end state, the strategic objective or aim, the ways, and the means. The arguments in the Russian NSS 2021 are analyzed and put into the hierarchical relation with Clausewitz's causal chain of strategies. The research finds four key features guiding Russian strategic action: 1) perception of an existential threat from the West, 2) great power ambitions, 3) establishment of total control of the state over society, and 4) disruptive transformation of the Russian economy. The second step uses the three tendencies of Clausewitz's trinity of war, verified by Max Weber's theory of social action, and evaluates how emotionality, rationality, and identity influence the risk that the relations between Russia and the West escalate. The results suggest that the Russian NSS 2021 prepares Russian society and economy for war. The NSS 2021 also creates a strategic context that increases the risk of escalation and does not limit the level of intensity of a possible conflict.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In February 2022, Russian armed forces invaded Ukraine despite intense political attempts of Western politicians to prevent a military escalation. The Russian leadership willfully accepted extensive negative political and economic consequences for Russia and started an international armed conflict. According to public statements, the Russian leadership even considers escalating the situation by using nuclear options to achieve their strategic objectives.¹

This thesis examines the Russian National Security Strategy 2021 (NSS 2021) and answers a twofold question: What are the key features of the Russian National Security Strategy 2021, and how do they affect the risk of escalation? The thesis uses Carl von Clausewitz's theory to understand the architecture as well as the content of the arguments of the NSS2021.

The analysis of the Russian NSS 2021 and of the relevant secondary sources shows how the Russian leadership's perception of the strategic environment and of Russia permeate all parts of the strategy. The research finds four key features guiding Russian strategic action:

- Perception of an existential threat from the West.
- Great power ambitions.
- Establishment of total control of the state over society.
- Disruptive transformation of the Russian economy.

The assessment of the risk that the relations between the Russia and the West escalate suggests that the Russian NSS 2021 creates a strategic context which increases the risk of escalation, and which does not limit the level of intensity of a possible conflict.

¹ Mariana Budjeryn, "Distressing a System in Distress: Global Nuclear Order and Russia's War against Ukraine," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 78, no. 6 (November 2, 2022): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2022.2132742>.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The thesis uses strategy theory to extract key features from a strategic document of an opponent's political leadership in order to assess how far an armed conflict is likely to escalate. Lennart Souchon argues that modern national strategies connect the political will of governments with the instruments of a country (e.g., military, diplomatic, economic, legal).² Hence, strategy transforms the will of the political leadership into certain actions that are to be conducted by elements of the state, of the society, and/or of the economy. The superior political will determines the objectives, ways, means in strategies.³ On the other hand, the sort and availability of means have repercussions on the purpose. The available means must be appropriate to serve the purpose. The thesis uses this interdependent relationship between purpose and means. Therefore, each part of the strategy as well as their composition is the main object of this thesis. Campbell shows in his research that scholars struggle about whether motives like “theories, conceptual models, norms, world views, frames, principled beliefs” or other motives like self-interests influence policy making.⁴ This thesis is not taking the one or the other side. The thesis adopts the positions developed by Clausewitz that political will is not influenced by just one tendency/type. He proposes that the political will is a result of blended or alloyed motives of different types. Clausewitz calls the combination of the three tendencies a *trinity*.⁵ Max Weber supports Clausewitz's theory with his theory of social action.⁶ He points out that the types of social action (purposive rationality, value rationality, emotion, and tradition) are “combined in reality.”⁷ Therefore, the thesis also shows how Clausewitz's theory can be used to understand strategies.

² Lennart Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century: The Continuing Relevance of Carl von Clausewitz* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 162–64.

³ Souchon, 88.

⁴ John L. Campbell, “Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1 (August 2002): 21–22, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141111>.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard et al. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 89.

⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 77–138.

⁷ Weber, 103.

The thesis primarily examines the Russian NSS 2021, because it contains the political motive and the strategic plan of the Russian leadership.⁸ The understanding of Russian motives and of Putin's plan is fundamental for Western leaders to develop strategic options to secure their own political interests and to assess the scale and intensity of a potential armed conflict between NATO and Russia. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the reaction of western countries have increased the risk that the confrontation between NATO and Russia escalates into an open armed conflict. Therefore, it is not only necessary to decide how far NATO countries are willing and able to escalate in a potential armed conflict but moreover, it must be assessed how far both the Russian leadership as well as the Russian society, economy, and the Russian military are able and willing to escalate. The assessment of the Russian behavior is necessary to develop ideas for Western strategic approaches.

B. CONTEXT OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES

The thesis uses parts of Clausewitz's theory and filters the key features from the Russian NSS 2021 and assesses what degree of risk arise from the NSS 2021. The primary sources for the research are Clausewitz's book *On War* and the Russian NSS 2021.⁹ Since the thesis explores the relevant details of Clausewitz's theory and of the NSS 2021 in the following chapters, this section provides the political and historic context for the literature. On the one hand, the context of Clausewitz's experiences shows that his theory remains valid in the 21st century and can be used to understand contemporary problems. On the other hand, the political and legal context of the Russian NSS 2021 proves that the document contains President Putin's ideas and his plan to implement them.

⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2021), https://paulofilho.net.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Russia.pdf.

⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*; Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*.

1. The Context of Clausewitz's Theory

The thesis uses two versions of Clausewitz's *On War*. It uses the English version of the translation by Michael Howard and Peter Paret as the primary source for the writing.¹⁰ However, the thesis also uses the German 19th edition of *Vom Kriege*, edited by Werner Hahlweg in 1980, especially to verify and compare the meaning of English and German terms.¹¹

On War contains Clausewitz's theoretical knowledge and thoughts about the term war. According to Antulio Echevarria II, Clausewitz sought to develop "objective knowledge, observations that were universally valid and thus applicable to all wars."¹² Raymond Aron suggests that Clausewitz aspired to elaborate a theory that provides strategists with an understanding of his profession, but which is separate from a doctrine and does not contain the "secret of success."¹³ The thesis follows their arguments and claims that Clausewitz remains valid and helpful to understand contemporary political and strategic problems. Nevertheless, Clausewitz does not provide a solution for real political and military problems; it provides more a kind of a handrail to develop an understanding of a specific problem.

Clausewitz's theory relies on his personal experiences from the Napoleonic Wars and from his living environment on both European battlefields and the court of the Prussian king. Carl Philip Gottfried von Clausewitz (1780–1831) started his military career at the age of 12 and "distinguished himself at a young age through his diligence and keen intellect."¹⁴ During the Napoleonic Wars, he participated—predominantly in staff functions—in several major battles. During his time at the *Kriegsakademie* [War Academy], he befriended his mentor, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, who was 25 years his

¹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* [On war], ed. Werner Hahlweg, 19th ed. (Bonn: Dümmlers Verlag, 1980).

¹² Antulio J. Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

¹³ Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz, Philosopher of War* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985), VIII.

¹⁴ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 53.

senior.¹⁵ Clausewitz was involved in the development of Prussian reforms after 1807 as Scharnhorst's assistant.¹⁶ The personal experience of disruptive changes in Prussian politics certainly determined his thinking.

Clausewitz quit Prussian service and made experiences in Russian military and political affairs, after the Prussian king had joined Napoleon and the Grand Armée was about to invade Russia in 1812.¹⁷ As military counselor for the Russian side, he participated in the battle of Borodino and later mediated the Convention of Tauroggen between Russia and Prussia with which the Prussian army switched sides, fought against Napoleon and started the German liberation wars.¹⁸ Vasily Belozеров claims that Clausewitz's observations and experiences on the Russian side of the campaign influenced his theory.¹⁹ Clausewitz used insides from Prussian and Russian politics as well as military to develop his idea. Therefore, the connection between his Russian experiences and the problem statement of the thesis is indeed remarkable, but still rather coincidental.

After Napoleon's defeat, Clausewitz was appointed the administrative director of the *Kriegsakademie*.²⁰ During this period, he wrote the main portions of his manuscripts about the theory of war.²¹ Clausewitz always had a very close emotional and intellectual relationship with his wife Marie.²² Upon his death, she managed to bring the bulk of his manuscripts into a structured order and published her husband's works under the title *On War*.²³ Therefore, relevant parts of the text for Clausewitz's theory are dispersed over

¹⁵ Peter Paret, "Chapter 7. Clausewitz," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 189.

¹⁶ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 54.

¹⁷ Paret, "Chapter 7. Clausewitz," 194.

¹⁸ Paret, 195.

¹⁹ Vasily K Belozеров, "Politische Theorie des Krieges bei Carl von Clausewitz und Carl Schmitt aus russischer Sicht" [Political theory of war by Carl von Clausewitz and Carl Schmitt from the Russian perspective], *Österreichische Militärzeitung*, no. 2/2018 (2018): 154.

²⁰ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 56.

²¹ Paret, "Chapter 7. Clausewitz," 196.

²² Aron, Clausewitz, *Philosopher of War*, 17.

²³ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 57.

different parts of the book. Consequently, the thesis collects several text parts and develops the instrument for the analysis.

2. Context of the Russian National Security Strategy 2021

The Russian government does not provide an official English translation of the NSS 2021 on its website. Therefore, the present thesis primarily uses a translation of the Russian text provided by a Brazilian blog about “leadership and geopolitics.”²⁴ Moreover the thesis uses an electronic google translation of the original Russian text provided by Rainer Böhme to verify the paragraphs of the translation from the Brazilian blog.²⁵ Finally, Böhme’s German translation serves as an additional tool to verify the content of the English translation.²⁶

The Russian NSS 2021 supersedes the previous version of Russian strategy and is the primary capstone document for subordinate planning.²⁷ The Russian constitution is the only document that is superior to the NSS 2021.²⁸ Since the end of the Cold War, Russian governments have regularly published strategic documents, seeking, in the words of Victor Fidalgo a more “international perspective” on and for Russian strategy making after the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁹ The Russian government has issued five National Security Strategies (1997, 2000, 2009, 2015, 2021), six subordinate Foreign Policy Concepts (1993,

²⁴ Paulo Filho, “Paulo Filho: Liderança e geopolítica” [Leadership and geopolitics], October 27, 2023, <https://paulofilho.net.br>.

²⁵ Rainer Böhme, “Zur nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie Russlands (2021), Kommentar und Dokumentation” [On the Russian National Security Strategy 2021, commentary and documentation] (Dresdener gesammelte Kommentare zur Sicherheitspolitik, Dresden, August 19, 2021), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-757567>.

²⁶ Böhme, 15–58.

²⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 2.

²⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 1.

²⁹ Victor Fidalgo, “The Evolution of Military and Non-Military Means in Russian Strategic Thinking (1991–2022),” *Slovo* 35, no. 1 (June 7, 2022): 4, <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.0954-6839.1295>. Fidalgo also states that contemporary Russian security policy is predominantly manifested in three strategic documents: (1) National Security Strategy (from 1997 to 2000: *Concept of National Security*), (2) Foreign Policy Concept, (3) Military Doctrine).

2000, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2023), and four Military Doctrines (1993, 2000, 2010, 2014).³⁰ Among this triad of strategic documents, the National Security Strategies are the only documents that are released by a presidential decree.³¹ Therefore, the presidential signature seals that the NSS 2021 is the highest strategic planning document providing the fundamentals for the subordinated documents.

Russian strategic documents reveal the changing Russian perception of the global strategic environment and of Russia's current political standpoint in the world (i.e., Russian state, society, economy, and its political influence on international politics). According to Fidalgo, the Russian leadership perceived the years between 1991 and 2000 as politically and militarily humiliating because of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and insurrections in the Caucasus.³² The period between 2000 and 2010 was regarded as a phase in which Russia regained international acknowledgement in the strategic environment.³³ During the third phase, Russia has regained an active recognized role in international relations.³⁴ Dimitri Trenin agrees with Fidalgo that the NSS 2021 reflects the perception of the Russian government on the current strategic environment and Russia's role in it.³⁵

The Russian government enforces the implementation of its strategic documents by law.³⁶ It was not always the case. In the first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the central government in Moscow recognized that subordinate administrations implemented the strategic directions only inconsistently or not at all, although documents

³⁰ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, "Russia Matters: Russian Strategic Documents," 2018, 1–6, <https://www.russiamatters.org/russian-strategic-documents?page=4>.

³¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021.

³² Fidalgo, "The Evolution of Military and Non-Military Means in Russian Strategic Thinking (1991–2022)," 4.

³³ Fidalgo, 8.

³⁴ Fidalgo, 12.

³⁵ Dimitry Trenin, "Russia's National Strategy: A Manifesto for a New Era," *Modern Diplomacy*, July 11, 2021, para 1, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/07/11/russias-national-security-strategy-a-manifesto-for-a-new-era/>; Fidalgo, "The Evolution of Military and Non-Military Means in Russian Strategic Thinking (1991–2022)."

³⁶ Russian Federal Law FL No.172, "On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation," June 28, 2014, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=68617>.

were regularly issued, according to Tamara Uskova and Aleksandr Chekavinskii.³⁷ They claim that the state authorities in “the regions and municipalities of Russia” made different efforts to implement the strategic documents until 2014.³⁸ Other Russian experts agree that the regional and lower-level administrations considered subsequent strategic planning and implementation as voluntary tasks.³⁹ President Putin passed the Federal Law “On strategic planning in the Russian Federation” No. 172-FZ in 2014 to finish the thought.⁴⁰ Under this law, Russian courts can charge the lack of implementation as illicit infringement.⁴¹ Therefore, the NSS 2021 has the assertive power because it has been codified in Russian law.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The thesis adopts Clausewitz’s theory that all actions in state, society, and economy during war and peacetime are determined by the tendencies of the trinity. Henceforth, the thesis assumes that all perceptions, interests, and priorities in the Russian strategic documents are determined by those tendencies.

It would be too speculative to predict which tendency had what kind of impact on the NSS 2021 at this early stage of the research. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is that the Russian leaders’ perception of the strategic environment and by their point of view on Russia’s position and role in this environment permeates the stated interests, priorities, and tasks. Therefore, the thesis is expected to capture how the perception of the environment and the political motives influence both the whole architecture and the elements of the strategy to assess opportunities and risks for Western approaches in relation to Russia.

³⁷ Tamara Uskova and Aleksandr Chekavinskii, “Law on Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation: Advantages and Unresolved Issues (Expert Evaluation),” *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast / Экономические и Социальные Перемены: Факты, Тенденции, Прогноз*, no. 4 (34) (August 29, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.15838/esc/2014.4.34.6>.

³⁸ Uskova and Chekavinskii, 64.

³⁹ Lubov Belyaevskaya-Plotnik and Natalia Sorokina, “Synchronization of Priorities of Social and Economic Development of the Russian Federation and Regions in Strategic Planning Documents,” *Regionalnaya Ekonomika. Yug Rossii*, no. 1 (April 2022): 16–17, <https://doi.org/10.15688/re.volsu.2022.1.2>.

⁴⁰ Uskova and Chekavinskii, “Law on Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation,” 64.

⁴¹ Russian Federal Law FL No.172, “On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation,” art. 3.

While the theory presumes that motives determine the interests and actions, the thesis uses the recursive approach to examine interests, purposes, and priorities given in the strategic documents to get a more detailed understanding of the motives. Therefore, the thesis premises that the structure of the strategic documents, the wording, the content including the narrative of the arguments are deliberately developed by the authors. Hence, the thesis also assumes that the examination of structure and wording will indicate answers about motives.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is to be conducted in three major steps. The first step consists of crafting the analysis instrument: the strategic causal chain and the trinity of war. The second step extracts the key features from the strategic architecture of the NSS 2021 (i.e., standpoint in the strategic environment, interests and priorities, objectives, and tasks). The third step identifies how the tendencies influence the key features of the Russian strategy, and it assesses their effect on the risk of escalation of the strategic situation between Russia and the West.

The analysis instrument predominantly consists of Clausewitz's theory. However, to clarify the terms of the strategic causal chain and the relations between its terms, the thesis uses the expertise of contemporary experts of strategy theory. The thesis uses Max Weber's theory of social action to filter Clausewitz's wording of his trinity into three distinct terms: emotionality, rationality, and identity.

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II. HOW TO USE CLAUSEWITZ'S THEORY TO ANALYZE STRATEGIES

Any scholar who engages with the theory of strategy inevitably encounters the ideas of Carl von Clausewitz. Colin Gray even claims that Clausewitz's book *On War* contains almost everything that one needs to know about strategy.⁴² The scholarly debate about Clausewitz's works mostly parses his theory to understand wars in general or to analyze specific wars.⁴³ Gray, more broadly, uses Clausewitz's theory to explain how strategies are to be developed. This chapter in turn explores *On War* to identify how Clausewitz's theory can be utilized to understand contemporary strategic documents.⁴⁴ To this end, the chapter develops a two-step method.

First, this chapter focuses on *On War* and related literature to examine in detail three aspects of Carl von Clausewitz's theory: the basic structure of strategies, the trinity of tendencies that determine human actions in war, and the specific influence of the trinity's three tendencies on the course of wars.⁴⁵ This section explores Clausewitz's writings about the basic structure of strategy to provide the necessary knowledge of how strategies are structured.⁴⁶ How the elements in a specific strategic document are arranged and related to each other matters, both to distinguish a strategic document from other sorts of official and political communications, and to help assess how the planned strategic actions and assigned instruments of the state implement the political will. The assessment of the action of the opponent influences our own decisions.

The second step of the analysis relies on Clausewitz's trinity of war, particularly the three tendencies.⁴⁷ The distinction is necessary because each of the tendencies has a

⁴² Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*, Paperback edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24.

⁴³ Paret, "Chapter 7. Clausewitz," 186.

⁴⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*.

⁴⁵ Clausewitz.

⁴⁶ Clausewitz, 177, 606.

⁴⁷ Clausewitz, 89.

different effect on human actions. Clausewitz named the three tendencies: “primordial violence, hatred, and enmity,” “chance and probability,” and “reason.”⁴⁸ These words are not useful as categories to analyze the content of strategies. Therefore, this chapter filters Clausewitz’s trinity through Max Weber’s theory of social action along with relevant interpretations of other authors. Ultimately, the chapter arrives at three more accurate terms—emotionality, rationality, and identity—to redefine Clausewitz’s three tendencies. These three categories serve as lenses to examine how strategies affect the risk of escalation or the intensity of hostilities.

A. THE STRUCTURE OF STRATEGIES

Modern scholars agree that the relationship between the superior political will and the subordinate means of the state is a fundamental premise for theory of strategy. Colin Gray developed the metaphor of strategy as a bridge that connects policy with the “instruments of power and influence.”⁴⁹ Lennart Souchon claims that strategy links theory to practice because “it connects the abstract political will with the material reality.”⁵⁰ To Clausewitz, the structure of strategies relies on the hierarchical relation between the political will and the instrument. Therefore, the knowledge of the details of the subordinate means provides a thorough understanding of the broad ideas of the political will and reduces misunderstandings.

Clausewitz clearly connects the political domain with the domain of violence: “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”⁵¹ The importance of the political will determines how long and how intense the available means in wars are used. Consequently, Clausewitz understands war as a “broad spectrum of conflicts” ranging from “a war of extermination down to simple armed observation.”⁵² He claims that the political will—representing the interests of society—is the “guiding intelligence and war only the

⁴⁸ Clausewitz, 89.

⁴⁹ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 29.

⁵⁰ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 161.

⁵¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

⁵² Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 135; Clausewitz, *On War*, 81.

instrument, not vice versa.”⁵³ In other words, Clausewitz clearly recognizes the hierarchy between the superior political will and war as the subordinate instrument.

In Book Three, *On Strategy in General*, Clausewitz established a logical causal chain between purpose-aim-campaigns-engagements that connects the political will with the instruments:

Strategy is the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war. The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it: he will, in fact, shape the individual campaigns and, within these, decide on the individual engagements.⁵⁴

Although, modern authors of strategy theory use different terms to establish the causal chain, they are coherent in the hierarchical character of the strategic elements. Representing many Anglo-American experts, Colin Gray emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between ends-ways-means and describes them as a “sequential cascade from purposes, by chosen methods, with tools.”⁵⁵ Lennart Souchon relates the terms purpose-objective-means to Clausewitz ideas and states that the causal chain can be used “as a classification method and planning instrument for structuring human actions.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, strategic documents in practice also use their individual terms to develop the hierarchical steps. Table 1 brings the different terms into a hierarchical relation and reveals the military character of Clausewitz’s causal chain, while Colin Gray’s and Lennart Souchon’s terms are more general, which make them suitable to develop political strategies encompassing military as well as non-military instruments of the state.

⁵³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

⁵⁴ Clausewitz, 177.

⁵⁵ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 279.

⁵⁶ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 88.

Table 1. Elements of Strategic Causal Chain in Different Strategy Theories.
Square Brackets Contain Words from the German Sources.

Level	Clausewitz	Colin Gray	Lennart Souchon
1	Purpose [Zweck]	Ends	Purpose [Zweck]
2	Aim [Ziel]		Objective [Ziel]
3	Campaign [Feldzug]	Ways	
4	Engagement [Gefecht]	Means	Means [Mittel]

The details of the meaning of the strategic terms in the causal chain, and especially of the relation to each other, reveal that the elements in strategic documents have an interdependent relationship to each other. The interdependent character of the relationship makes, on the one hand, the superior political purpose to determine the use of the subordinate means, and on the other hand, makes the available means determine whether and how the political will can be implements.

1. The Standpoint within the Strategic Environment

In Book Eight, in his section on *War Plans*, Clausewitz introduces the term “standpoint,” which describes, how the political will permeates the strategic causal chain, the entire strategic plan:⁵⁷

Nothing is more important in life than finding the right standpoint for seeing and judging events, and then adhering to it. One point and one only yields an integrated view of all phenomena; and only by holding to that point of view can one avoid inconsistency.⁵⁸

In this paragraph, Clausewitz points out two matters which strategists necessarily need to consider. On the one hand, strategists must identify and lay out their subjective perception of the phenomena—the situation and developments—of the strategic environment. On the

⁵⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 606.

⁵⁸ Clausewitz, 606.

other hand, strategists must thoroughly consider and then precisely describe their subjective perception of the character and role of their own country—the standpoint—inside the surrounding strategic environment. According to Clausewitz, the political perception of the strategic environment and the standpoint is “indispensable” during the development phase of the strategic plan.⁵⁹ The analysis of the standpoint and the subjective perception of the strategic environment shows the strategic causes for the leaders to develop a plan for action. To be specific, if political actors are dissatisfied with their strategic environment and with their position in it, they want to change this situation. Hence, understanding the opponent’s standpoint means understanding their political will to act, which are the nerve lines of the entire strategic plan.

2. The Political Will—Purpose, End State

The political will constitutes the ends or the purpose for the strategy.⁶⁰ The political purpose is the reason why action is to be taken. Raymond Aron explains that the knowledge of the superior purpose answers the questions why actions must be taken at all levels of war.⁶¹ Many strategies the term “interest” that constitutes a desired political “end-state” is used (e.g., the national security strategies of the United States or Germany).⁶² By any other name, the political purpose provides the scale to assess the value of the cause which must then be related to the costs of the instruments. Therefore, the strategy remains a call to action until the specified purpose or end-state is fulfilled.

3. The Strategic Objective—Aim

The strategic objectives or aims are derived from the superior political purpose. The objective transfers the rather non-physical political will into practice.⁶³ The objectives

⁵⁹ Clausewitz, 606.

⁶⁰ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 89–90.

⁶¹ Aron, Clausewitz, *Philosopher of War*, 91.

⁶² The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>; Federal Government, *Integrated Security for Germany: National Security Strategy* (Federal Foreign Office of Germany, 2023).

⁶³ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 90.

or aims are the terminal points that the particular actions must achieve to accomplish the mission. While the objective tries to fulfill the political will, it also reflects the opportunities, limits, and specifications of the instruments.⁶⁴ The objectives are the answers for the question: What can be achieved with the available means to serve the purpose?

4. The Ways—Actions

The ways are strings of action that logically and sequentially connect multiple tasks to achieve the objective or aim. Milan Vego describes a line of operation as an “imaginary line along which a force moves from its base of operations toward a given physical objective.”⁶⁵ Milan Vego’s idea of a line of operation can thoroughly be used to understand the term *ways* for political strategies too. Hence, a way is a sequence of single steps, tasks, or missions that are to be carried out to finally meet the objective. The ways connect the single elements to a meaningful context. Clausewitz mentions that wars “consist of a large number of engagements, great and small, simultaneous or consecutive.”⁶⁶ Therefore, wars and even more state politics are not only to be considered as a chain of engagements, but more as a ship’s rope consisting of many parallel strings. Vego refers to the base of operations from which the ways must start toward the objective.⁶⁷ The political standpoint provides this base of operations. Therefore, the ways are the result of the creative process that develops actions to get from the current situation to the aspired status.

5. The Means—Tasks, Engagements

The term “means” represents the instruments of a state that are available and appropriate to implement the strategy.⁶⁸ On the one hand, the term *means* represents personnel or things of physical nature like forces, infrastructure, or equipment. On the other

⁶⁴ Echevarria, Clausewitz and Contemporary War, 167.

⁶⁵ Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), GL-9.

⁶⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 227.

⁶⁷ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, GL-9.

⁶⁸ Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 92.

hand, organizations like ministries and corporations can also be means.⁶⁹ Moreover, Clausewitz’s term “engagement” widens the perspective so that specific actions, tasks, or methods can also be considered as means.⁷⁰ The U.S. and German strategies identify tasks and work strands that need to be done in the pursuit on the way to the designated objectives.

6. Summary

The analysis of specific strategies evaluates the context of the elements and the elements themselves to find out how the actions fulfill the political will. Figure 1 shows that the relationship between the standpoint and the desired political end state constitutes the “meaningful context” or the motive for strategic action.⁷¹ Strategic objectives (or aims) derive from a political purpose (or end state). The objectives are to be accomplished by using available means (or engagements) which are connected, sequenced, and structured in several logical ways (or campaigns).

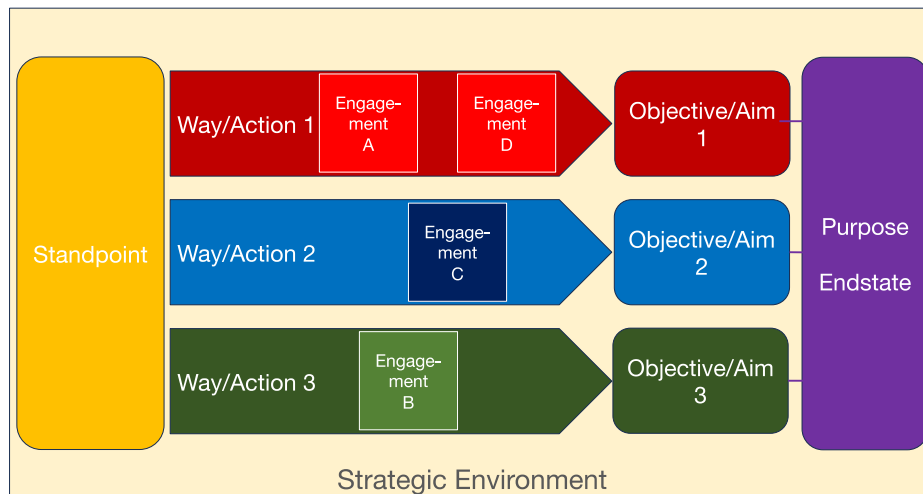


Figure 1. The Strategic Causal Chain

⁶⁹ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 279; Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*, 92.

⁷⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 177.

⁷¹ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 87.

B. THE TRINITY OF WAR

Lawrence Freedman believes that the trinity is the core of Clausewitz's theory of war.⁷² Specifically, Clausewitz postulates that a trinity of three fundamental tendencies (i.e., primordial violence, hatred, and enmity; chance and probability; reason) determine human actions in wars:

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.⁷³

Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay point out that the trinity covers the determinants of human decisions and actions in wars.⁷⁴ They also emphasize that the three tendencies are to be regarded in a combination and that no single tendency should be arbitrarily overemphasized.⁷⁵ Colin Gray states that Clausewitz condensed the complexity of war to “an inherently highly unstable compound comprising the combined interdependent effects” of the tendencies of the trinity.⁷⁶ Similarly, James Wirtz states that Clausewitz boils down the complex actions in war to a simple duel and that the trinity of the will of all opponents henceforth shapes the dialectic character of war.⁷⁷ Hence, the tendencies determine the will of individuals, of groups, and of entire populations of all participants in wars.

Clausewitz did not develop his theory to explain human behavior in peace in general or in the spheres of economy and society in particular. Clausewitz developed his

⁷² Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 87.

⁷³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

⁷⁴ Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, *Soldiers, War, Knowledge, and Citizenship: German-American Essays on Civil-Military Relations* (Berlin: Carola Hartmann Miles-Verlag, 2017), 211–13.

⁷⁵ Abenheim and Halladay, 212.

⁷⁶ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 100–101.

⁷⁷ James J. Wirtz, “The Reluctant Theorist: Colin Gray and the Theory of Strategy,” *Infinity Journal Special Edition, The Strategy Bridge*, March 2014, 13.

trinity to describe human behavior in wars.⁷⁸ National strategies or grand strategies contain all elements of modern nations: state, society, and economy in war and peace, however.⁷⁹ While Clausewitz has only limited expertise in those domains, Max Weber's theory of social action adds to the missing domains. Weber's theory of social action comprises human behavior in general. He specifically develops four types of social action to explain human behavior in state, society, and economy.⁸⁰ Thus, the terms emotionality, rationality, and identity transform Clausewitz's description of the trinity of war into three categories to analyze the content of strategies. This section takes up each term in its turn.

1. Emotionality

The first tendency—primordial violence, hatred, and enmity—is inherent in human nature. Antulio Echevarria points out that hostile feelings are “one of war's fundamental forces” and the “level of hostility could fluctuate in intensity from one conflict to the next or even multiple times within the same war.”⁸¹ Abenheim and Halladay point out that passions remain an important driver for decisions in conflicts in the information age.⁸² They claim that Western political and strategic minds often “negate and neutralize forces of primordial violence, anger, and hatred by an overemphasis on elite control.”⁸³ Martin Wight suggests that fear is one of the predominant motives for wars.⁸⁴ Hew Strachan summarizes Clausewitz's phrase, blind natural forces, as passions.⁸⁵ Clausewitz himself uses the German term *Leidenschaften* [English: passions or emotions] in the same context more than 20 times in *On War*.⁸⁶ The multiple examples show that scholars consider

⁷⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

⁷⁹ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 28.

⁸⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*.

⁸¹ Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 73.

⁸² Abenheim and Halladay, *Soldiers, War, Knowledge, and Citizenship*, 213.

⁸³ Abenheim and Halladay, 222.

⁸⁴ Martin Wight, *International Relations and Political Philosophy*, ed. David S. Yost (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 161–66.

⁸⁵ Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography*, 1st American ed (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), 177.

⁸⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 83, 86, 88, 105.

Clausewitz's words of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity rather as a list of examples for human emotions which dominate in wars.

Max Weber developed a theory that four types determine social action.⁸⁷ Emotions are one of Weber's four influencing factors.⁸⁸ The category emotionality includes negative as well as positive emotions like pride, insecurity, wrath, envy, love, fear, rage, loyalty, weakness, strength, or anxiety.

2. Rationality

The tendency, the subordination of wars under reasonable policy, is related to logic and human reason. According to Echevarria, "the primacy of policy became the core of Clausewitz's thinking."⁸⁹ Policy constitutes the purpose of the war and is henceforth responsible for the creation as well as for the termination of the war. Moreover, policy pervades the military conduct of war. In Clausewitz's understanding, "if policy reads the course of military events correctly, it is wholly and exclusively entitled to decide which events and trends are best for the objectives of the war."⁹⁰ Rupert Smith emphasizes that the primacy of the political purpose over the means in armed conflicts are relevant for all kind of wars in the past and now, between states as well as between parties in civil wars.⁹¹

Max Weber uses the term purposive rationality in the same meaning as Clausewitz.⁹² He explains that purposive rational action always considers the consequences of the act and the relation between purpose and means.⁹³ Purposive rational action evaluates whether the means are appropriate to achieve the intended end as well as whether the ends are achievable with the available means.⁹⁴ This type of social action is

⁸⁷ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 101.

⁸⁸ Weber, 102.

⁸⁹ Echevarria, Clausewitz and Contemporary War, 85.

⁹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

⁹¹ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2006), 58.

⁹² Weber, *Economy and Society*, 102.

⁹³ Weber, 102.

⁹⁴ Weber, 103.

considered to purely rely on logic and reason. Therefore, Weber's purposive rational action is congruent to Clausewitz's tendency of reason and the category of *rationality*. The thesis continues to use the term rationality because it expresses the logic of the hierarchy between the superior purpose and the subordinate means. The analysis of strategies evaluates the rational logic of the arguments and the assesses the rational cost benefit relation between the political will and the assigned instruments.

3. Identity

The tendency of chance and probability is related to factors of the human character and identity, which have individually developed based on experiences, education, and training.⁹⁵ Hew Strachan suggests that multiple moral factors like courage, creativity, values, or personal character are responsible for this second tendency of the trinity.⁹⁶ Katherine Herbig claims that the tendency of chance and uncertainty “challenge [s] the commander's creativity” and inspires boldness and courage.⁹⁷ Although Clausewitz's phrase, play of chance and probability, characterizes the uncertain tendency of war in practice, it cannot be used to analyze strategies. No strategic plan leaves open matters hoping that unforeseeable chances and probabilities will provide the solution.

Max Weber claims that value rationality as well as traditions and habits are two of four types which determine social action.⁹⁸ On the one hand, Weber states that value rational action disregards “the foreseeable consequences of actions in the service of convictions.”⁹⁹ The behavior relies on imperatives or demands, which the actor believes to be obliged to fulfill. Weber provides a list of examples for imperatives and demands from which value rational action can be derived: “duty, honor, beauty, religious pronouncement, piety, or the importance of a cause of whatever kind.”¹⁰⁰ Different from

⁹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 78–80.

⁹⁶ Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War*, 178.

⁹⁷ Katherine L. Herbig, “Chance and Uncertainty in On War,” in *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, ed. Michael I. Handel (London: Cass, 1986), 98.

⁹⁸ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 101.

⁹⁹ Weber, 102.

¹⁰⁰ Weber, 102.

purposive rationality, the judgement for value rational action rests with a higher authority. According to Parson, “[T]he matter of the results of his action is left to God, it is no responsibility of the actor’s.”¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Weber claims that traditional action follows an “ingrained pattern.”¹⁰² Parsons states that traditional action is determined “though the habituation of long practice.”¹⁰³ This habitual or traditional type of social action is regarded to be fundamental for many actions which repeat internalized procedures and techniques such as in sports activities, military combat, car driving, and many other human actions.

For the research, Weber’s value rational as well as traditional types of action are regarded to be related to Clausewitz’s second tendency of *chance and probability* because the uncertainty in wars results from human values, morale, faith, character, routines, and other characteristics of identity which are developed by training, education, or experience. Therefore, the analysis of strategies uses the category of identity to evaluate the intended bonding between the author and the recipients of the strategy.

4. Summary

The comparison of the tendencies of Clausewitz trinity with Weber’s types of social action shows that while Clausewitz’s theory can be used for political strategies, Weber helps to condense Clausewitz’s complicated descriptions into the terms: emotionality, rationality, and identity (Table 2).

¹⁰¹ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), 644.

¹⁰² Weber, *Economy and Society*, 102.

¹⁰³ Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, 646.

Table 2. Correlation of the Categories to Analyze Strategies

Clausewitz's Trinity	Weber's Social Action	Analysis of Strategies
Passion, Emotion	Affection, Emotion	Emotionality
Reason	Purposive Rationality	Rationality
Chance and Probability	Value Rationality, Tradition	Identity

Clausewitz and Weber agree that human behavior is a blend of emotionality, rationality, and identity. They also agree that the share of the tendencies in the trinity changes depending on the situation. In theory, none of the four types is to be regarded as predominant. In practice, the influencing share of each of the types varies from case to case. Hence, Clausewitz' trinity and Weber's theory not only show similarities in their elements; the manner of how the elements of both theories blend into each other to determine human behavior is congruent, as well.

C. EMOTIONALITY, RATIONALITY, AND IDENTITY IN PRACTICE

In Book One *On the Nature of War*, Clausewitz explains that the three tendencies of his trinity have different effects on human behavior in wars.¹⁰⁴ The understanding of the different effects of the emotionality, rationality, and identity on human behavior is fundamental to assess if and how the arguments in the strategic document influence the possible level of violence and the risk of escalation.

Emotionality theoretically escalates the violence in wars. Clausewitz claims that all adversaries in war feel passions like hate, enmity, and fear.¹⁰⁵ Hostile feelings like hate between the belligerents drive both sides to reciprocally increase their efforts to overwhelm the opponent. This emotionally driven interaction theoretically escalates and both sides

¹⁰⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75–88.

¹⁰⁵ Clausewitz, 76.

invest all available means until one belligerent is completely defeated. The second interaction relies on fear. Both sides fear being overpowered by the enemy. Hence, both sides again increase their efforts to prevent defeat up to the theoretical maximum of force.¹⁰⁶ Clausewitz does not consider rather positive emotions (e.g., love, loyalty, friendship, etc.). However, contemporary research on the effect of emotions on behavior affirms that people generally respond to the emotions of others with similar emotions.¹⁰⁷ Van Kleef developed a model based on multiple empiric studies and concludes that humans “respond similarly to emotional expressions [of other people] regardless of whether they perceive them accurately.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the thesis assumes that the escalating effects of emotions on the course of events (Figure 2) is valid not only for war but also for all human interaction.

Clausewitz clarifies that the abstract singular view on emotions only does not reflect the course of wars in the real world.¹⁰⁹ In real life, courses of events only rarely escalate up to an ultimate end. The effects of the other two influences regularly prevent total escalation. However, the escalating effect of emotions must be considered during the evaluation of the Russian arguments in the thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Clausewitz, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Katrin Döveling and Elly A. Konijn, *Routledge International Handbook of Emotions and Media*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429465758>; Fritz Strack, Paul Pauli, and Peter Weyers, eds., *Emotion and Behavior*, Frontiers Research Topics (Frontiers Media SA, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3389/978-2-88919-965-5>; Gerben A. Van Kleef, “How Emotions Regulate Social Life: The Emotions as Social Information (EASI) Model,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18, no. 3 (June 2009): 184–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01633.x>.

¹⁰⁸ Van Kleef, “How Emotions Regulate Social Life,” 187.

¹⁰⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 78.

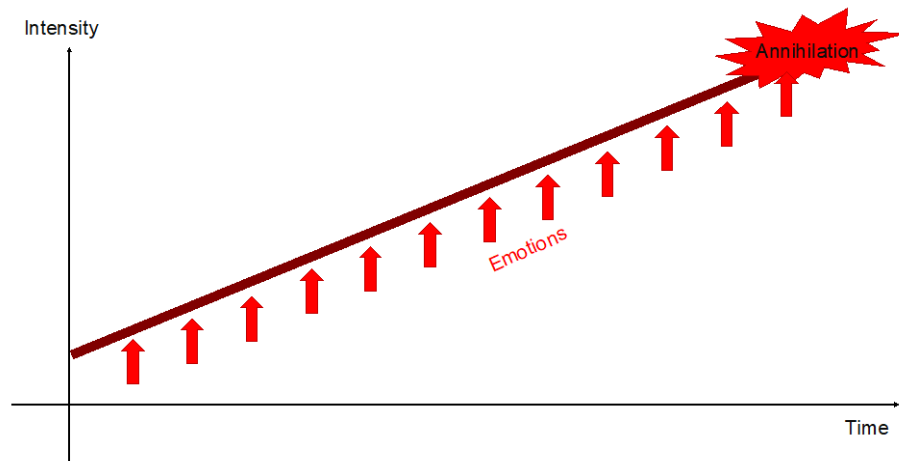


Figure 2. The Escalating Effect of Interacting Emotions of the Course of Wars

Rationality limits the level of violence and contains within it a reasonable framework. The political purpose is the original motive that is responsible for the war.¹¹⁰ War is the subordinate means to the political purpose. Clausewitz claims “the smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try and deny it to you.”¹¹¹ Thus, the political purpose determines the effort of force. Most wars in history did not lead to wars of annihilation because the political purpose limited the escalation. On the one hand, political motives can have purposive rational character like the gain for territory or economic advantages. On the other hand, religious or ideological motives were often responsible for wars and determined their course. Therefore, Weber’s purposive rational motives as well as value rational motives comprise Clausewitz’s political purpose. Values as well as reason are fundamental motives for rational political decisions. This assumption includes political actions in economic, health care, education, or other political affairs. The rational purpose frames the political action and provides actors in politics with a sphere of activity Figure 3 shows how the political purpose sets a boundary to the escalation of the war caused by emotions.

¹¹⁰ Clausewitz, 80.

¹¹¹ Clausewitz, 81.

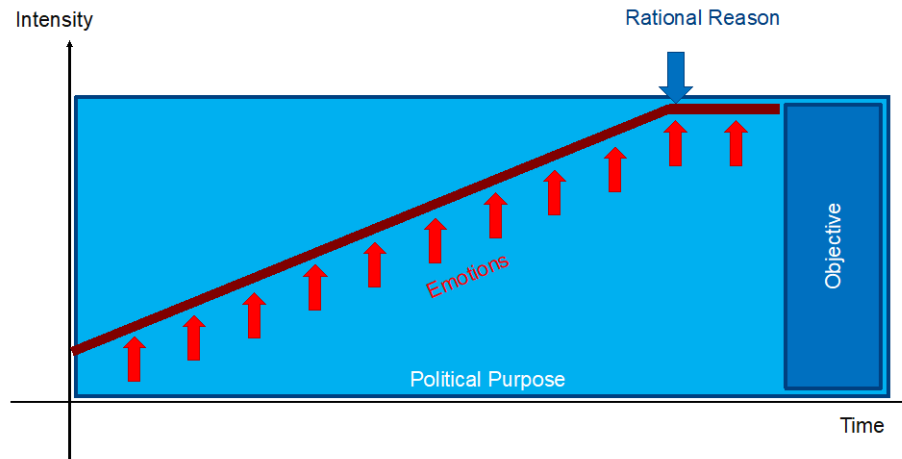


Figure 3. The Influence of Rationality and Emotions on the Course of Events

The influence of *identity* changes the course of political events in an unpredictable way. Clausewitz assumes that factors like personal courage, talent, health, training, experience or structure, and frictions like weather changes, technical failures, exhaustion, and the miscalculations during planning change the course of wars in an unforeseeable way.¹¹² There are logical reasons for all changes; the sheer overwhelming number of individual influences cannot be calculated in advance. Nevertheless, they can be assessed. This uncertainty appears even more in the entire area of politics where the influence of the identity of diverse societies must be regarded.

Fusing all three influences, the course of events becomes an unpredictable trend. Emotions tend to escalate wars, political reason/rationalities provide the guiding framework that contains escalation to a reasonable level, and factors of *identity* as well as non-controllable frictions change the course of political events in an unpredictable but not illogical way (Figure 4).

¹¹² Clausewitz, 78–80.

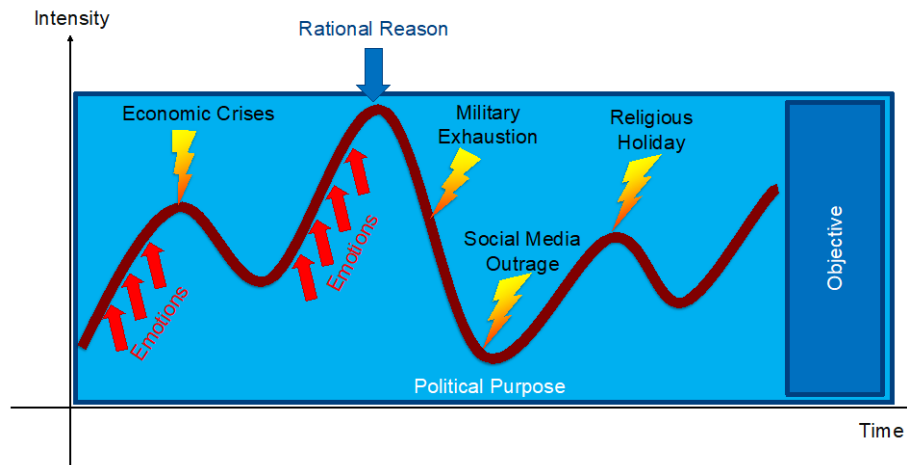


Figure 4. The Exemplary Influence of Emotions, Reason, and Traditions/
Routines/Habits/Rituals/Frictions

In summary, emotionality, rationality, and identity have different effects on the course of human behavior. Emotionality tends to escalate political events, rationality set reasonable boundaries for the intensity of actions, and identity can have either escalating or de-escalating effects on human behavior. The strategy analysis uses this knowledge to estimate the likelihood as well as the level of escalation.

D. CONCLUSION

The two-step strategy analysis adds a new field to the scholarly debate about the value of Clausewitz's theory for practical strategic problems. The literature research has shown that the current debate focusses on the use of Clausewitz's theory to understand wars and to develop strategies. This chapter has shown how Clausewitz's theory can be used to understand the strategies of other actors. This additional perspective has more than a scholarly value.

The two-step strategy is a new analytical method for strategic intelligence. Comparing the structure of real strategies with Clausewitz's strategic causal chain (i.e., political standpoint in the strategic environment, political purpose or ends, objectives or aims, ways, and means) in the first step reveals both the correlation between the elements of the specific strategy as well as the function of the elements themselves. Furthermore, the analysis of the elements of the strategy with Clausewitz's trinity in the second step

allows first an assessment to what degree each of the strategic arguments is driven by emotionality, rationality, and identity, and second how the arguments affect the risk of escalation and the intensity of warfighting.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE RUSSIAN NSS 2021

After President Vladimir Putin signed the Russian National Security Strategy 2021 (NSS 2021), the political debate on this strategic document was rather limited and Western scholars appeared not to be concerned by the content of the strategy.¹¹³ Exemplarily, Julian Cooper compares the NSS 2021 with a “defiant manifesto from the occupants of a besieged fortress.”¹¹⁴ Dimitri Trenin believes that the Russian leaders focus on domestic issues to solve internal problems.¹¹⁵ Hence, the dominant scholarly position is that the NSS 2021 translates the Russian political will into protective political actions.

This chapter explores the structure of the NSS 2021 to identify the Russian political will and the instruments that are supposed to fulfill the will. It will also evaluate how the ways and interests are arranged in the document to connect the Russian political instruments with the political will. In contrast to the dominant scholarly assessment in the political debate, this chapter identifies multiple concerning arguments for Russian hostile offensive intentions against the West and respective plans of the Russian leadership to follow those intentions.

The NSS 2021 is divided into five parts. Parts I and V describe the necessary administrative framework to implement the strategy in the Russian state, society, and economy.¹¹⁶ Parts II, III, and IV provide a detailed strategic architecture. The architecture of the NSS 2021 consists of the Russian standpoint in the strategic environment, eight national interests, nine strategic national priorities, 33 objectives, and 193 tasks (Figure 5).¹¹⁷ This structure is similar to the structure of NSS 2015, which helps the analyst to

¹¹³ Böhme, “Zur nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie Russlands 2021 [On the Russian National Security Strategy 2021],” 4.

¹¹⁴ Julian Cooper, “Russia’s Updated National Security Strategy,” *NATO Defence College Research*, Russian Studies Series 2/21, July 19, 2021, 5.

¹¹⁵ Trenin, “Russia’s National Strategy: A Manifesto for a New Era,” para. 4.

¹¹⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021.

¹¹⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 27–101.

recognize changes to former strategies, and it ensures that the audience can easily understand the NSS 2021 to implement its dictates.¹¹⁸



Figure 5. Strategic Architecture of NSS 2021¹¹⁹

The structure of this chapter follows Parts II–IV of the NSS 2021 and uses the meaning of the basic elements of the strategic causal chain according to Clausewitz’s theory to emphasize the Russian argument within the strategic hierarchy (Table 3).¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2015* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2015), <https://www.russiamatters.org/node/21421>.

¹¹⁹ Adapted from Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2021), paras. 27–110,

¹²⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 177, 606.

Table 3. Comparison between the Terminology of the Strategic Causal Chain and the Russian NSS 2021

Chapter III Section	Strategic Causal Chain	Parts of NSS 2021	Terminology of NSS 2021
A	Strategic Environment Standpoint	II	Trends and Opportunities Russia in a Modern World
B	Purpose/End State Ways	III	National Interests National Priorities
C	Objectives/Aims Means	IV	Objectives Tasks

A. THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT AND THE RUSSIAN STANDPOINT

This section examines the foundations of the Russian political will. It investigates how the Russian leadership perceives the strategic environment and how they describe the Russian standpoint. The analysis primarily uses the texts from the NSS 2021 Part II.¹²¹ However, official statements of President Putin and positions from the Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023 (FPC 2023) provide additional material.¹²² Furthermore, the section explores how the perception of both the environment and the standpoint permeate the strategic plan. Therefore, the section seeks for evidence that refers to the Russian political will in Parts III and IV of the NSS 2021.¹²³

¹²¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 6–24.

¹²² Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023), https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

¹²³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 25–101.

1. The Trends, Threats, and Opportunities of the Strategic Environment

The rise of new great powers, the decline of Western hegemony, Western attacks against Russia, and the opportunity to shape a new world order characterize the strategic environment according to the Russian leadership.¹²⁴ The NSS 2021 sees the trend that rising great powers, so-called “centers of world economic and political development” transform Western hegemony into a new multipolar political system.¹²⁵ The Russian leadership also claims that Western countries tend to react with political and economic violence to “preserve their hegemony.”¹²⁶ This trend creates a dangerous environment with “growing interstate contradictions through the search for internal and external enemies, the destruction of the economy, traditional values, and disregard for human rights and freedoms.”¹²⁷ If the West tries to prevent its decline by using economic, political, and societal force, as the Russian leadership claims, the risk of regional and global wars increases.¹²⁸ In this way, the Russian leadership supposes that a violent escalation of the political situation is out of its hands. Therefore, the dangerous environment creates incentives to protect Russia for the case the situation escalates.

The rise of new centers of “world economic and political development” is a central premise of the Russian perception of the strategic environment.¹²⁹ While the NSS 2021 does not clearly state which countries are the new great powers, the Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023 clarifies that Russia, China, India, and the United States are independent centers of world development.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the “Islamic civilization” is assessed to have potential to become an independent center of global development from a Russian

¹²⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 6–24.

¹²⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 6.

¹²⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 7.

¹²⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 8.

¹²⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 17.

¹²⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 6.

¹³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, paras. 51, 62.

perspective.¹³¹ The Russian leadership believes that the rise of new great powers is advantageous for Russia because the trend goes along with economic and political changes and with a higher number of potential partners. The Russian leadership does not consider the increasing political complexity in a multipolar world as risky. The trend helps the Russian leadership to increase its political and economic independence from the West and provides political and economic freedom of maneuver as in a multipolar world. Therefore, the Russian leadership is interested in accelerating the change toward a global multipolar system.

The NSS 2021 describes a decline of Western hegemony in terms of degrading political power, economic downturn, and failing of liberal values.¹³² For Russian leaders, the increasing social inequality, “disparities in the development of states,” the advent of transnational corporations as political actors reducing the role of states, and “double standards in international politics” indicate the political decline of the West.¹³³ The NSS 2021 also describes a Western economic downturn resulting from stagnation and recession of economies, declining stability of global financial and monetary systems, and increased fights for markets and resources.¹³⁴ The NSS 2021 also claims that the “Western liberal model” is in crisis because Western states “deliberately erode traditional values,” falsify history—especially the Russian role in it, and stir conflicts between religions and ethnic populations.¹³⁵ A Western decline is also a positive trend for the Russian leadership because it makes the Russian political, societal, and economic model more attractive for other countries. Therefore, it is in the Russian interest to further the Western decline.

The statements in the NSS 2021 show that the Russian leadership believes that the advent of new great powers automatically lead to a decline of a Western hegemony and

¹³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, para. 56.

¹³² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 7, 19.

¹³³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 7, 18.

¹³⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 16.

¹³⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 19.

henceforth of the liberal rules-based order.¹³⁶ It is assessed that both developments are parts of a zero-sum-game in the Russian opinion. It extends the scope of this chapter to discuss whether the Russian leaders have the right opinion. Nevertheless, it is assured that the Russian leadership is willing to take extraordinary political measures to further Russia's rise and the Western decline.

The NSS 2021 extensively describes how the Russian society is under constant attack by the West.¹³⁷ The attacks include hostile information campaigns, bans of the Russian language, sanctions on Russian athletes and discrimination against "Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad."¹³⁸ Furthermore, the NSS 2021 refers to subversive Western activities in Russia try to "destroy its internal unity, instigate and radicalize a protest movement, support marginal groups and divide Russian society."¹³⁹ From the Russian perspective, the Western attacks "erode traditional values, distort world history, revise views on the role and place of Russia in it, rehabilitate fascism, and incite interethnic and inter-confessional conflicts."¹⁴⁰ Overall, the Russian leadership generates an environment of an omnidirectional threat to the Russian society. This Russian threat perception directly creates the need to protect the Russian society from Western attacks.

The Russian leaders accuse Western countries of using the liberal order for executing economic attacks against Russia.¹⁴¹ They claim, that the West employs unfair protectionist measures, sanctions, limiting the access of Russian firms to markets and trade routes, and "hindering the Russia's development of the Arctic."¹⁴² However, the Russian leadership also points out that the Russian economy has proven its resilience against Western sanctions, because the economy has increased its independence from imports.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 6, 19, 23.

¹³⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

¹³⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 19.

¹³⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 19.

¹⁴¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 16.

¹⁴² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 16.

¹⁴³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 13.

The emphasis on resilience and independence indicates that the Russian leaders want to continue the approach of economic decoupling.

Overall, the Russian leadership conveys the perception that both the Russian society and the economy are already under constant Western attacks. The omnidirectional threat perception for the society is suitable to justify omnidirectional protective measures. Furthermore, the successful economic measures which have increased the resilience of the Russian economy promote arguments to continue with the approach. Moreover, the Russian leadership wants to shape a new world.¹⁴⁴ The NSS 2021 claims that the future world order must address societal, economic, and political changes.¹⁴⁵ The document does not provide explicit details of how the alternative global architecture and the new world order are supposed to look like. However, the Russian leadership wants to create a global political system which promotes Russian interests. Therefore, the current liberal order must be replaced by a new one that prevents the Russian society from Western influences and the Russian economy from Western pressures.

In summary, the Russian leadership on the one hand generates a distinct enemy image of the West and on the other hand projects a favorable political development. The strategic environment is loaded with Western threats and attacks, Russian leaders perceive the trends in the strategic environment as basically favorable. The analysis of the arguments in the Russian NSS 2021 proves that the Russian leadership believes that Western values, lifestyle, and media constantly attack Russian society. The current liberal rules-based order supports Western economic attacks against Russia. Hence, the Russian view on the strategic environment expresses a deep dissatisfaction with the liberal world order and with the current Russian position in it. This dissatisfaction is the stimulus for the Russian leadership to take strategic measures to accelerate the dissolution of the liberal order. However, the global system is already changing, in Moscow's view, because the West loses control of the global political and economic order.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Russian leaders observe

¹⁴⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 6, 9, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 22–24.

¹⁴⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 6.

opportunities to improve the situation in Russia’s favor for a better strategic future with new rules.¹⁴⁷ The Russian government sees the chance to enhance the trend of a Western decline.

2. The Great Power Ambitions of the Russian Standpoint

The Russian standpoint consists of geopolitical, societal, and economic components, which describes the character of Russia and its unique role within the global community from the view of the Russian leadership. The NSS 2021 explains the Russian standpoint in terms of the current condition of the Russian state, society, and economy and claims that Russia deserves a “role as one of the influential centers of the modern world.”¹⁴⁸ The Russian state has proven itself of capable of defending against external interference, guaranteeing the “territorial integrity and sovereignty,” and protecting Russia from “dangers and military threats.”¹⁴⁹ The Russian society shows progress in its cohesion, its awareness of the Russian spiritual and cultural identity, and its threat perception.¹⁵⁰ The Russian economy has resisted to Western sanctions and is capable of supplying the Russian population with food and energy.¹⁵¹ Overall, the Russian leadership sees the Russian state, society, and economy in a healthy condition and able to counter challenges in the strategic environment.

While the NSS 2021 does not explicitly explain why Russia is destined to be a global great power, the FPC 2023 characterizes the societal and geopolitical characteristics of the Russian status.¹⁵² The NSS 2021 is the overarching capstone document for the FPC 2023. Therefore, the standpoint from the FPC 2023 cannot be different to the one of the NSS 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 10–14.

¹⁴⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 11.

¹⁵¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 13.

¹⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, paras. 4, 5.

The FPC 2023 emphasizes that the Russian standpoint is dominated by the Russian geopolitical aspiration for a great power status because of three historic and two contemporary geopolitical reasons as well as the characteristics of the Russian society and economy. Russian leaders expand the NSS 2021 statement and claim in the FPC 2023 that Russia “is one of the sovereign centers of global development performing a historically unique mission.”¹⁵³ The historical arguments are that Russia is the heir of the Soviet Union, made a “decisive contribution to the victory in World War II,” and obtains a leading role in “eliminating the global system of colonialism.”¹⁵⁴ The contemporary geopolitical reasons are the Russian permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and its large arsenal of nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁵ Taking the perspective of the Russian leadership, it appears that Russia does not really have a choice, it is rather destined to be a great power because of its historic status and because of its current political and military power. From this point of view, Russia needs to take measures to remain independent especially from Western influence and to restore its historic influence on the peoples in its periphery.

The societal characteristics of Russia’s great power status rely on the dominant role of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union over neighboring populations. From the perspective of the society, Russia’s great power status is a result of a “thousand years of independent statehood” as a “Eurasian and Euro-Pacific” civilization, its cultural heritage, its historic ties to other cultures, its ability to ensure coexistence between religions and ethnic groups, and its moral as well as spiritual values.¹⁵⁶ Vladimir Putin postulates a common Russian civilization within “the greater Russian nation, which united the Velikorussians, the Malorussians and the Belorussians” incorporating Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, in Putin’s notion, large parts of Central and Eastern Europe belong

¹⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, para. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, para. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 17; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, para. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, para. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” para. 25.

to the Russian sphere: “After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire regained the western Old Russian lands, with the exception of Galicia and Transcarpathia.”¹⁵⁸ From this standpoint, the Russian occupations during the Polish partitions in the 18th century were “not merely the result of political and diplomatic decisions. It was underlain by the common faith, shared cultural traditions.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the Russian leadership perceives its policies in territories of the former Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Warsaw Pact as domestic affairs.

In the Russian leadership’s standpoint, the Russian economy has on the one hand the potential to be both self-reliant without depending on imports from other states and also has the potential to expedite international economic and technological development.¹⁶⁰ Both eventualities rely on the scientific, technological, and economic potential of the Russian population, the large territory and enormous natural resources of Russia, and recent experiences of resisting Western sanctions.¹⁶¹ However, the NSS 2021 aims to “accelerate structural reorganization of the Russian economy.”¹⁶² Obviously, the NSS 2021 assumes that Russia was so far unable to exploit its potential because of internal drawbacks.

The Russian leadership advocates the standpoint that Russia needs to be a powerful center of global geopolitics resting on a strong authoritarian state which directs and controls (1) the spiritual, moral, historic, and political identity of the Russian society, and (2) the development of self-sustained and decoupled economy. Considering the proposed existential relevance for Russia to become an independent center of global development in geopolitical terms, the Russian society and the Russian economy play only a subordinated role in the standpoint. Considering the statements of the NSS 2021 and of the FPC 2023 to

¹⁵⁸ Putin, para. 21.

¹⁵⁹ Putin, para. 22.

¹⁶⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 13, 22, 61.

¹⁶¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 13, 61.

¹⁶² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 14.

the Russian standpoint, society and economy are to be formed to ensure Russia receives the prestigious status of a recognized independent center of global development.

3. Influence of the Russian Political Will on the Strategic Plan

The Russian perception of the threats, trends, and opportunities in the strategic environment have a guiding influence on the planning parts of the NSS 2021. The movement toward a multipolar world would reinforce “the importance of military force as an instrument of achieving geopolitical goals” for Russia.¹⁶³ Emerging powers change markets and the distribution of “goods, capital, technology, and labor,” and the Russian economy must adapt to this trend.¹⁶⁴ The Russian leadership assigned tasks for national defense because the United States deployed weapons in Russia’s neighborhood and threatens the “strategic stability and international security.”¹⁶⁵ Russian measures for information security are supposed to counter external interferences in domestic affairs.¹⁶⁶ The NSS 2021 plans to change the Russian economy to meet Western attacks with a higher degree of resilience.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the NSS 2021 designates measures to prevent “Westernization” and to counter threats against Russian “spiritual and moral reference points and stable moral principles.”¹⁶⁸ In the domain of foreign policy, Russia will take “symmetric and asymmetric measures” against “unfriendly actions.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Russian foreign policy aims at “strengthening the position of the Russian Federation as one of the influential centers of the modern world.”¹⁷⁰ Additionally, the Russian leadership also assigns tasks for the military, economic, and societal instruments of the state to strengthen the Russian standpoint of being a great power. These examples show that the

¹⁶³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 34.

¹⁶⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 60, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 36.

¹⁶⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 49.

¹⁶⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 66.

¹⁶⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 84, 88.

¹⁶⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 99.

¹⁷⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 100.

Russian political will determines and guides the Russian plans. Although many measures have a rather defensive or protective character, the restoration or strengthening of the Russian great power status require offensive measures including the use of military violence.

B. THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL INTERESTS AND PRIORITIES

The NSS 2021 defines Russia's national interests as "objectively significant needs of individuals, society, and the state"¹⁷¹ and the national priorities are the most important strategic ways to ensure "national security and sustainable development."¹⁷² The Russian definitions match with Clausewitz's theory, because the ways connect the superior political purpose with the detailed tasks.¹⁷³ Therefore, this section examines how the Russian national interests and strategic national priorities connect the Russian political will with the assigned elements of the Russian state.

The analysis of the interests and priorities primarily uses Part III of the NSS 2021, but it also investigates Part IV, because it contains detailed descriptions how the Russian leadership understands the strategic priorities.¹⁷⁴ The details are relevant to identify how the national interests and strategic priorities connect the tasks and objectives to the superior political standpoint and the perception of the trends, threats, and opportunities of the environment.

Nine strategic priorities directly address eight national interests to guarantee the national security in the domains of the Russian state, society, economy, and foreign policy (Table 4).¹⁷⁵ Two priorities address the need to protect all aspects of the political spectrum and the environment of the Russian state (i.e., constitutional system, sovereignty,

¹⁷¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 5.2.

¹⁷² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 5.3.

¹⁷³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 177.

¹⁷⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 6–24, 25–26.

¹⁷⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 25–26.

independence, territorial integrity).¹⁷⁶ Four priorities preserve and protect the needs of the Russian society. These priorities influence the societal needs including matters of education and private affairs, public behavior, media consumption, and ethic mindset (e.g., religion, history, culture, moral).¹⁷⁷ Two priorities are supposed to develop the Russian economy and technology.¹⁷⁸ The priority for foreign policy addresses the needs for stability, peace, security, and international law.¹⁷⁹ The detailed descriptions of the interests reveal that the NSS 2021 not only encompasses all Russian domains, but also very deeply intervenes especially into matters of the Russian society. The number and intensity of the influence on society suggest that the Russian leadership perceives the internal and external threats to society at an existential scale.

Table 4. Russian Priorities and Interests in the Political Domains¹⁸⁰

Domain	Strategic Priority (Way)	National Interest (End State)
State	National defense	Protection of the constitutional system, sovereignty, independence, state, and territorial integrity of Russia, strengthening the defense of the country
	Environmental safety and environmental management	Environmental protection, natural resource conservation and environmental management, and adaptation to climate change
Society	Preservation of the people of Russia and the development of human potential	Saving the people of Russia, developing human potential, and improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens
	State and public safety	Maintaining civil peace and harmony in the country, strengthening the rule of law, eradicating corruption, protecting citizens and all forms of property from unlawful infringements, developing mechanisms of interaction between state and civil society

¹⁷⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 25.2, 25.6.

¹⁷⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 25.1, 25.3-5.

¹⁷⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 25.5.

¹⁷⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 25.8.

¹⁸⁰ Adapted from Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2021), paras. 25–26.

Domain	Strategic Priority (Way)	National Interest (End State)
	Information security	Development of a safe information space, protection of Russian society from destructive information and psychological impact
	Protection of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, culture, and historic memory	Strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the Russian people
Economy	Economic security	Sustainable development of the Russian economy on a new technological basis
	Scientific and technological development	
Foreign Policy	Strategic stability and mutually beneficial international cooperation	Maintaining strategic stability, strengthening peace and security, and strengthening the legal foundations of international relations

1. The Protection of the Russian Society

The choice of words describing the interests, which address the Russian society, emphasize a protective character of the respective priorities.¹⁸¹ The phrase preservation of the people suggests that the Russian leaders view the Russian population as rather immature objects which need to be taken care of rather than as independently thinking and acting subjects. Orlando Figes argues that Russians conclude from their history that they need a strong leader because “the state collapse was brought about by liberals” in 1917 and in 1991, tearing apart the Russian peoples.¹⁸² Karl Schlögel also emphasizes the dominating role of the Russian state and points out that: “the ruling apparatus establishes itself as the only site of central, meaningful power, while society remains impotent.”¹⁸³ The shielding character of the society-related interests and priorities reflect the threat perception that the Russian society is under enduring attack from Western harmful liberal information. In conclusion, the Russian state must increase the protective efforts for its society.

¹⁸¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 25.1, 25.3-5.

¹⁸² Orlando Figes, *Story of Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Henry Holt, 2023), 280.

¹⁸³ Karl Schlögel, “The Story of Russia by Orlando Figes: The Past That Shapes Putin’s Rule,” *The Financial Times Limited*, September 29, 2022, 2.

2. The Transformation of the Russian Economy

The economic priorities also have a protective character. Considering the Russian standpoint in the strategic environment, the aspired economic development appears also to be protective to increase the resilience against Western threats. The detailed descriptions of the economic priorities confirm a transformation of the Russian economy for protective purposes.¹⁸⁴ The Russian leadership does not pursue economic growth anymore as intended in former NSS 2015.¹⁸⁵ The Russian leadership projects a general degeneration of the global economy and postulates that “the processes of forming new international production and supply chains are slowing down, investment flows are decreasing.”¹⁸⁶ Consequently, the economic priorities must implement a “structural transformation” to protect the Russian economy from negative effects of the downturn.¹⁸⁷ The transformation also should establish “an independent financial and banking system”¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the Russian leaders intend a disruptive strategic shift with “the transition from the export of primary raw materials and agricultural products to their deep processing” aiming at “saturation of the domestic market with Russian-made goods.”¹⁸⁹ The change of the economic policy cannot be explained with the study of the NSS 2021 only. An assessment requires further research and additional sources.

This 180-degree-transition is remarkable because Vladimir Putin published an article propagating that the export of raw materials needs to be Russia’s main effort including “the premise that sustainable economic growth will have to be based on mineral

¹⁸⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 58–67, 68–76.

¹⁸⁵ Böhme, “Zur nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie Russlands 2021” [On the Russian National Security Strategy 2021], 5; Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2021), para. 31, https://paulofilho.net.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Russia.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 58.

¹⁸⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 64.

¹⁸⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 64, 65.

¹⁸⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 62, 63.

resources.”¹⁹⁰ Putin furthermore claims that the extraction and export of raw materials would be the only way for Russia to boost the annual economic growth to 4 to 6 percent.¹⁹¹ In Putin’s opinion of 1997, “the state must regulate the extractive complex, but should use purely market methods.”¹⁹² The strategic economic shift in the NSS 2021 obviously contradicts everything of what Putin economically believed before. The annual GDP growth rates before 2008 were always higher than 5 percent.¹⁹³ The negative growth rates of 2009, 2015, and 2020 are likely related to the global financial crisis, the wars in Georgia, sanctions after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and COVID-19.¹⁹⁴ Considering the importance of resource exports for the Russian budget, it is hard to recognize any economic reasons for the fundamental change of Putin’s intention for the general direction of the Russian economy. It is more likely that the Russian leadership has geopolitical reasons for their new economic strategy. One suitable reason is that the Russian leaders want to prepare the Russian economy for a potential violent escalation of the geopolitical situation.

3. The Offensive Character of the Russian Foreign Policy

The character of the Russian foreign policy is also offensive and designed to achieve or ensure the Russian great power status. Detailed explanations show that Russia wants to keep a freedom of action including the military escalation dominance in the domain of foreign policy.¹⁹⁵ The neutral words disguise the rather offensive direction of this priority. This offensive direction indicates that Russia’s neighbors must calculate with aggressive Russian behavior. This assessment differs from the general view in the scholarly

¹⁹⁰ Harley Balzer, “The Putin Thesis and Russian Energy Policy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 3 (January 2005): 216, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.21.3.210>.

¹⁹¹ Balzer, 216–17.

¹⁹² Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin’s Academic Writings and Russian Natural Resource Policy Mineral Natural Resources in the Strategy for Development of the Russian Economy,” trans. Harley Balzer, *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 1 (February 2006): 217, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216530105>.

¹⁹³ Macrotrends LLC, “Russia GDP Growth Rate 1990–2023,” September 27, 2023, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/RUS/russia/gdp-growth-rate>.

¹⁹⁴ Macrotrends LLC.

¹⁹⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 99.

debate. Furthermore, an offensive Russian foreign policy serving the great power status also suggest that the protective measures in the domains of the Russian state, society, and economy are developed to prepare the country for a military escalation.

C. THE RUSSIAN OBJECTIVES AND TASKS

The NSS 2021 includes many details to implement the political will into practice using the states instruments (i.e., society, economy, state, foreign policy). This section explores how the NSS 2021 assigns the Russian instruments to implement the political will. Based on the more significant findings from the analysis of the Russian national interests and priorities, the section limits the scope to the tasks and objectives which address the society, the economy, and the foreign policy. The NSS 2021 provides evidence that the Russian government seeks to achieve full control over both the society and the economy. The control measures are suitable to prepare the Russian society and economy for an escalation. Moreover, many arguments indicate that the Russian leadership is already expecting an escalation of the strategic environment.

1. Total Government Control over the Russian Society

Extensive state protective measures intervene in all areas of society. The member of the society is supposed to be a “harmoniously developed and socially responsible citizen.”¹⁹⁶ According to the Russian leadership, the state is to generate this kind of citizen with a “system of education, training and upbringing . . . striving for spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical perfection.”¹⁹⁷ This system contains measures for physical development (health, lifestyle, hygiene) including the identification and monitoring of “abilities and talents in children and youth.”¹⁹⁸ For the appropriate mental development, the Russian state is to direct the “education and upbringing of children and youth on the basis of traditional Russian spiritual, moral, cultural, and historical values.”¹⁹⁹ A contained

¹⁹⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 32.

¹⁹⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 93.5.

¹⁹⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 33.7, 33.9.

¹⁹⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 33.14.

Russian cyber- and information space using Russian-only technology is supposed to ensure Russian adults behave along with “traditional Russian spiritual, moral, and cultural-historical values” and to reject “destructive ideas, stereotypes, and behavior models imposed from the outside.”²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the Russian leadership plans to increase the financial control over its citizens by implementing tasks for “ensuring balanced growth of lending to individuals, limiting the risks associated with an increased debt burden on them.”²⁰¹ Overall, the Russian government enacts a Big Brother state.²⁰² The high degree of government control turns the Russian society into a compliant henchman for the geopolitical aspirations.

The Russian leaders intend to extend the comprehensive and far-reaching tasks of state control to neighboring societies. The Russian leadership tries to generate “the unity of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the basis of all-Russian civil identity.”²⁰³ The term *all-Russian unity* means an “inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony, and the preservation of the identity of the multinational people of the Russian Federation.” Putin clarifies in his historic statements that he also considers peoples from Ukraine and Belarus belonging to the all-Russian community.²⁰⁴ Hence, the Russian leadership claims that Russia provides the framework for a unified and harmonious society of all Slavic peoples in one state. In the Russian leaders’ view, the term *harmonious* means that the society exists in a state of civil peace, political and social stability, as well as being protected from external ideology, values, and psychological impact.²⁰⁵ Thus, the Russian leadership obviously desires to claim political as well as moral, cultural, and spiritual authority over the people living in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European countries. The NSS 2021 also refers to inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony.²⁰⁶ The term *all-Russian*

²⁰⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 93.4.

²⁰¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.3.

²⁰² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 93.11.

²⁰³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 92.

²⁰⁴ Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

²⁰⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 46, 93.13.

²⁰⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 93.1.

suggests that the different peoples and religions are supposed to live in a harmony of Russian dominance because the NSS 2021 claims that Russian morale and values are “primordial universal principles and socially significant guidelines.”²⁰⁷ Consequently, an all-Russian harmony means suppression for all peoples who do not consider themselves to be Russians.

The cited passages are only representative examples of the 31 tasks allocated in the NSS 2021 to establish a totalitarian state with extensive rights to interfere with the life of Russian citizens. To be precise, the citizens of an all-Russian Federation of Putin’s notion will have no physical, mental, or financial freedom outside the Russian leader’s directions. If the Russian leadership implements the measures of the NSS 2021, the Russian state will establish not only an Iron Curtain but rather an Iron Container preventing any kind of exchange of ideas and knowledge from crossing the border. The NSS 2021 leads to a conformed and ideologically aligned society. Figes refers to surveys showing that most Russians already believe the narrative of the Russian leadership and preserved a kind of “Soviet personality.”²⁰⁸ The number of believers will very likely increase with the implementation of NSS 2021 measures to control the hearts, minds, and abilities of the Russians.

2. Transformation of the Russian Economy

The high number of tasks to transform the Russian economy suggest a fundamental shift. Among the overall five objectives and 59 tasks addressing the Russian economy, the evaluation identified three objectives and 20 tasks that directly transform of the Russian economy. The NSS 2021 aims at “strengthen [ing] the economic sovereignty” and at “technological independence.”²⁰⁹ The “institutional and structural reorganization” tries to overcome “the critical dependence of the Russian economy on imported technologies, equipment and components through accelerated implementation of advanced Russian

²⁰⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 92.

²⁰⁸ Figes, *Story of Russia*, 282.

²⁰⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 66, 75.

technological developments and localization of production in Russia.”²¹⁰ The areas of food production and of the Russian financial system are also part of the approach to decouple the economy.²¹¹ The Russian experience of Western economic sanctions after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 has likely led the Russian leadership to the conclusion that the resilience of the Russian economy must be further increased because more sanctions are to be expected in case of further escalation. However, the fundamental economic transformation can be difficult to reverse.

The comprehensive nature of tasks to increase the resilience of the Russian economy suggest that the Russian leadership anticipates an escalation of the strategic situation. The NSS 2021 tasks “the economy to ensure the protection of the state from armed attack and to meet the needs of the state and the needs of the population in wartime.”²¹² Furthermore, the economy is to increase the “resistance to external and internal threats” and henceforth to strengthen “the leading positions and competitive advantages . . . in the aviation, shipbuilding, rocket and space industries, engine construction, nuclear power complex, as well as in the field of information and communication technologies.”²¹³ The named economic branches are considered to be relevant for war material. In parallel, the Russian leaders want to increase advantages from civil-military dual-use technologies by “ensuring the transfer of knowledge and technology between the defense and civilian sectors of the economy.”²¹⁴ The “intensification of scientific research in the field of biological, radiation, and chemical safety” is eligible to prepare Russia for military conflict with weapons of mass destruction.²¹⁵ The NSS 2021 likely aims to increase the resilience of the Russian economy against military strikes with the “distribution of productive forces on the territory of the Russian Federation, overcoming the trend of concentration of economic entities, activities and population in

²¹⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.1, 67.17.

²¹¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.14, 67.17.

²¹² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 40.10.

²¹³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 66, 67.8.

²¹⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 76.19.

²¹⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 76.18.

metropolitan agglomerations.”²¹⁶ The numerous measures are regarded to require enormous investments and are not likely to stimulate economic growth. Therefore, the political purpose must be very important for justifying the high costs. This rationale emphasizes that the Russian leadership already calculates an escalation of the strategic situation with the West.

The designated tasks to significantly strengthen “the system of state control (supervision) in the sphere of economic activity” suggest that the Russian government can rapidly switch the economy from peace into a state of war.²¹⁷ To achieve encompassing state control, the Russian leadership allocated the “development of the strategic planning system” which can mitigate “potential external and internal challenges and threats to the economic security.”²¹⁸ Furthermore, the Russian leadership strives for controlling technological research and development and orders the “creation of a unified state system of scientific, scientific-technical, and innovative activity management.”²¹⁹ This approach includes measures to conduct “research in the interests of national defense and state security.”²²⁰ Harmonized efforts of state and economy are crucial in times of crises and war. By the Russian leadership putting the economy into a prelude to a state of war, escalation of the strategic situation easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

3. Foreign Policy for Great Power Ambitions

The high number of tasks to guide foreign policy suggests that the Russian leadership wants to assume a shaping and formative role. The NSS 2021 specifies the detailed framework for the Russian foreign policy in 33 tasks and three objectives.²²¹ The tasks cover a wide spectrum of foreign policy areas in which Russia aspires to influence the international relations for its benefit. This includes engagements like international

²¹⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.25.

²¹⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.24.

²¹⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.23.

²¹⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.3.

²²⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 76.17.

²²¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 100–101.

peacekeeping, stabilizing the “international legal system,” forming “a secure and equitable global information space,” increasing ties with China and India, or enfolding the potential of Russian transport routes.²²² However, the objectives in the foreign policy domain are designed for Russian benefits only and direct the tasks to create “favorable conditions for sustainable socio-economic development” of Russia and to strengthen its position as a “influential center of the modern world.”²²³ Therefore, the Russian leadership deploys all instruments of politics to shape foreign policy according to their standards.

The comprehensive nature of the tasks in foreign policy is suitable for exercising great power politics. The Russian leadership wants to assert Russian interests globally and in outer space.²²⁴ Furthermore, the Russian leaders aspire to increase the importance of Russian culture, language, education, and history in the global communication sphere.²²⁵ The NSS 2021 explicitly highlights the importance of the “fraternal ties between Russian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian people.”²²⁶ The orientation of foreign policy to bolster the great power claim becomes particularly clear in the reservation to respond to “unfriendly acts” with force according to Russian government standards.²²⁷ Therefore, with the implementation of great power politics, the Russian leadership knowingly accepts a violent escalation.

D. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Russian standpoint and the strategic environment has shown that the Russian leaders feel existentially threatened by the West, but, within the framework of great power ambitions, they attempt to shape the world order. The NSS 2021 puts this political will into practice by enveloping the Russian society with extensive protective approaches, gearing the economy toward self-sufficiency, and seeking to advance and

²²² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 101.

²²³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 100.

²²⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 101.17.

²²⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 101.18, 101.21.

²²⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 101.20.

²²⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 99.

assert foreign policy. In detail, the tasks lead to the state taking absolute control over society, and the economy finds it difficult to re-establish advantageous global connections.

Already, the first part of the two-stage analysis has provided a result that enriches the political debate with a disturbing counterargument. The political debate about the NSS 2021 was too focused on the primarily protective character of the Russian interests and strategic priorities and, therefore, lost sight of the offensive character of the Russian standpoint as well as the numerous offensive tasks in the document. The analysis of the structure of the NSS 2021 using Clausewitz's theory was useful to keep the hierarchy of the Russian arguments in mind. The results have shown that the Russian leadership has created a system that makes an escalation highly likely because they perceive an existential threat from the West, transfer the economy and society into a state of war, and, at the same time, pursue great power ambitions. It is hard to imagine how the adversaries can break free from this escalation spiral.

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IV. ANALYSIS OF THE KEY FEATURES OF THE RUSSIAN NSS 2021

The war in Ukraine generates a political situation with high risk of escalation. The war directly involves Russia and Ukraine. Yet the war is contained to the region. However, Western countries supply weapons to Ukraine and therefore interfere with Russian interests. Therefore, the situation is risky to escalate into a major armed conflict between Russia and the West. With the NSS 2021, this chapter evaluates the Russian position in this political antagonism and assesses the risks of escalation. The evaluation of the NSS 2021 shows that the interplay of grand political ambitions, negative emotions stemming from a threat perception, and a strong ideology creates a system that leads to a dangerous escalation spiral. The Russian leadership controls the escalation spiral.

The examination of the strategic causal chain in the NSS 2021 reveals that the Russian strategy possesses four key features: the Russian leadership perceives existential threats; the Russian policy follows great power ambitions and the pursuit to change the world order; the Russian government asserts total control over the society of Russia and its periphery; the Russian government transforms the economy from a globally connected into a self-sufficient autarkic economy.

This chapter explores the identified core elements of the NSS 2021 from the perspectives of emotionality, rationality, and identity to assess the risk of escalation and the limits of the escalation level, as well as to identify areas which can cause unpredictable reactions. Based on the findings from Clausewitz's theory, the research uses three presumptions. First, emotionality tends to increase the risk of escalation and the level of intensity in a conflict. Second, rationality provides reasonable limits for escalation and conflict intensity related to the importance of the political will. Third, matters of identity lead to high uncertainty because they cause both increasing as well as decreasing influences on the risks of escalation and on the intensity of conflicts. Overall, the evaluation of the key features of the NSS 2021 provide an understanding of the context for actions of the Russian leaders which contains many risks to escalate the antagonistic situation between Russia and the West.

A. EMOTIONALITY IN THE RUSSIAN STRATEGY

This section identifies the share of emotionality in the Russian threat assessment, their great power ambitions, state control of the society, as well as economy transformation, and it assesses the escalation risk for the strategic situation. The Russian strategy generates both positive emotions such as loyalty and trust, as well as indifference, fear, or even negative feelings such as anger, dissatisfaction, enmity, and vindictiveness. Overall, the identified emotions tend to increase the risk of escalation respectively the level of violence.

1. Emotionality in the Russian Threat Assessment

The perception of societal, economic, and political threats from the West suggests that the Russian leadership is predominantly driven by negative emotions. The NSS 2021 postulates that Western values undermine the Russian society with liberal values, depraved morals, false stories about history and culture, and aim to “rehabilitate fascism, and incite interethnic and intercultural conflicts.”²²⁸ The threats from the information space support active Western measures to “instigate and radicalize protest movements.”²²⁹ The perception of these societal threats express negative emotions like fear, disgust, and enmity. The Western liberal economic order threatens Russia because it enables economic and financial sanctions and the exclusions from markets and transit routes.²³⁰ The economic threat perception shows the dissatisfaction and anger of the Russian leaders with the current situation. Hence, the NSS 2021 designs a political threat which basically results from the Western struggle against the decline of its hegemony.²³¹ The Russian leaders particularly accuse the West of threatening the “strategic stability and international security” and undermining international law and weakening international institutions.²³² The political threats reveal enmity, dissatisfaction, and a kind of greed to take over the hegemonic position in a multipolar world.

²²⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 19.

²²⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 20.

²³⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 16.

²³¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 7.

²³² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 17.

The negative emotions, which are inherent in the threat perception of the Russian leaders, increase the escalation risk between Russia and the West and—in case of an open conflict—increases the intensity level of the violence. Since the Russian leaders specifically describe the threat in the NSS 2021, all named emotions can be attributed to the Russian leadership. However, it is unclear to what extent these emotions are shared by the population. This opens up a field for further empirical research.

2. Emotionality in the Russian Great Power Ambitions

The great power ambitions express both the pride of the Russian leadership in Russia's history and culture and their confidence in Russia's current political, economic, capabilities.²³³ The Russian leaders derive their political claim from their status as a military and nuclear power as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.²³⁴ Russia's "leading position" in the global economy and technology, and innovation support the great power claim.²³⁵ The "high quality of human potential" and the education system also feeds the self-perception of the Russian leaders.²³⁶ Furthermore, the Russian leadership derives the great power status from Russian and Soviet achievements in history (e.g., territorial size, victory in World War II, contribution to de-colonialization) as well as from civilizational aspects (e.g., leader of the Orthodox church, enduring independence).²³⁷ All claimed elements of the Russian great power ambitions show emotions like pride and self-confidence. These emotions likely lend the Russian leaders to overestimating Russia's abilities to shape global affairs what can lead to an overreaction.

Although pride and self-confidence are positive emotions, they can also increase the risk of escalation in the context of great power competition. Disregarding rational

²³³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 10.

²³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, para. 5.

²³⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 22.

²³⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 22.

²³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, paras. 4–5.

calculations, the Russian leaders likely feel strong enough to contribute to accelerating the decline of Western hegemony and the overthrow of the liberal world order.

The NSS 2021 does not contain evidence to what extent the Russian population shares the emotionality shown by their leaders. Orlando Figes shows how the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula has restored national pride in wide sections of the Russian population.²³⁸ These findings suggest that the Russian people generally approve Russian expansion. Therefore, it is likely that the great power ambitions—including the exaggerated opinion of Russia’s abilities—entangle in the Russian society. Consequently, it is less likely that the Russian society regulates the great power ambitions of their leaders and the resulting escalation risk. Nevertheless, additional research should investigate how strongly the Russian people support the great power ambitions.

3. Emotionality in a Government-Controlled Russian Society

The efforts of the Russian government to increase the level of state control over society demonstrate a strong distrust of its own population. The NSS 2021 implements extensive measures to put the information space under government control to shield the Russian population from the outside world and to manipulate public perception.²³⁹ Furthermore, the government increases the control over the education and training of children, teenagers, and adults, and does not hesitate to intervene into families or private financial aspects.²⁴⁰ The measures are supported by a surveillance system to monitor the behavior as well as the physical development of the people.²⁴¹ Sabine Fischer states that “tipping into totalitarianism, the state has finally transgressed the line between public and private.”²⁴² The extensive measures to establish a Big Brother state reflect the government’s deep distrust that the Russian population actually believes the propagated

²³⁸ Figes, *Story of Russia*, 291.

²³⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 41–46.

²⁴⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 30, 33, 67, 93.

²⁴¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 33, 83.

²⁴² Sabine Fischer, “Russia on the Road to Dictatorship. Internal Political Repercussions of the Attack on Ukraine,” *SWP Comment* No. 30, no. April 2022 (2022): 5.

Russian achievements, values, and norms. Moreover, the measures also suggest the government's fear that the Russian society is not resilient enough to withstand harmful Western influences. The Russian leader's fear is founded to some extent. Sabine Fischer states that "repression, censorship, and . . . economic repercussions" have led Russia to an "exodus . . . unprecedented in the country's post-Soviet history."²⁴³ Nevertheless, the NSS 2021 does not provide information about the Russian public opinion. Therefore, further research should focus on the opinion of Russians who still remain in Russia, because they can have an effect on the actions of their leaders.

The emotions which are connected to the total government control over the society do not directly influence the escalation risk with the West. However, if the government shields its population from anything other than government information, the society is unable to regulate or stop the actions of the government. Hence, the Russian leadership finds itself in a vicious cycle in which the emotions of a few persons influence the destiny of a country, its neighbors, and possibly the world.

4. Emotionality in the Transition of the Russian Economy

The Russian leadership strives to disruptively transform the Russian economy to get rid of Russia's dependence on imports in essential economic and technological areas. The Russian government aspires to overcome the "critical dependence of Russia's economy" especially in the areas of agriculture, technology, equipment, and mechanical components.²⁴⁴ Therefore, the NSS 2021 directs a "structural transformation" of "basic sectors of the economy (industry, construction, communications, energy, agriculture, mining)" to establish Russia's economic sovereignty.²⁴⁵ The research did not find credible information that allows for an assessment of how emotionality influences the substantial economic transformation, and further research is necessary.

²⁴³ Fischer, 5.

²⁴⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 67.7, 67.14.

²⁴⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 66, 67.7, 67.9, 67.14.

5. Summary

This section discusses the role of emotionality in various aspects of Russia's strategy as outlined in the NSS 2021. In the assessment of Western threats, the Russian leadership predominantly experiences negative emotions driven by perceived societal, economic, and political threats from the West. The section also highlights that Russia's great power ambitions are fueled by emotions like pride and self-confidence, which can contribute to an escalation of tensions in the context of global power competition. However, the research did not find evidence that emotionality based on the stronger control over the society and the transformation of the economy has a decisive effect on the risk of escalation.

B. RATIONALITY IN THE RUSSIAN STRATEGY

This section identifies the share of rationality in the threat perception, the great power status, and in the comprehensive state preparations for wartime stated in the Russian NSS 2021. The section also shows that the strategy does not create a system which sets political limits to an escalation level.

1. Rationality in the Russian Threat Assessment

The Russian government sees Russia constantly threatened from the West in areas that are vital for the Russian existence. The NSS 2021 accuses the West of threatening and attacking the Russian civilization, undermining, and thwarting the Russian moral, spiritual, and cultural identity:

Information and psychological sabotage and the “Westernization” of culture increases the threat of the Russian Federation losing its cultural sovereignty. Attempts to falsify Russian and world history, distort the historical truth, and destroy historical memory, incite inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflicts, and weaken the state-forming people have increased. Russia's traditional confessions, culture, and the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation are discredited.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021* (Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, 2021), paras. 88–89, Quotation marks are from the original document.

Western attacks on the Russian economic and financial system have forced Russia to increase its economic resilience.²⁴⁷ However, the Western economic measures are still “limiting the access of Russian companies to export markets, restraining the development of Russian industry, establishing control over transport routes and hindering Russia’s development of the Arctic.”²⁴⁸ The information space and the liberal economic order are Western tools to constantly interfere with the Russian identity to attack the Russian economic and financial sectors.²⁴⁹ The Russian leaders draw the rational conclusion that all Russian actions are always protective and reactive in their character. Hence, the rationality helps the Russian government to label the measures, which counter the Western threat, as existentially important.

The Russian leadership labels the Western threat as an existential threat against Russia’s identity and economic prosperity. The significance of the existential threat provides the Russian leadership with the rational reason that Russia uses all available instruments and power to counter the existential threat. The NSS 2021 states that the Russian government decides with which measures and intensity the country strikes back, and there are no limits on the response.²⁵⁰

2. Rationality in the Russian Great Power Ambitions

The Russian identity is a part of the Russian great power status and therefore a matter of political rationality. Especially according to the Foreign Policy Concept 2023 (FPC 2023), the Russian great power status fundamentally relies on Russian values, history, culture, and inter-ethnic relations.²⁵¹ With being one part of the great power status, these aspects of Russian identity are inseparably connected to Russian actions pursuing the

²⁴⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 13.

²⁴⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 16.

²⁴⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 19, 44.

²⁵⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 99.

²⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023*, paras. 4, 5; Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 10, 100.

great power ambitions. Consequently, every countermeasure from other powers, especially from the West, can be perceived as an attack on the Russian identity.

The fusion of values and rationality increases the risk of a limitless escalation. Weber calls the duality of values and rationality “value rationality.”²⁵² According to Weber, value rational actions obey a higher authority and the benefit of the action cannot secularly be measured.²⁵³ In this logic, it can be reasonable to counter an attack with limitless escalation because the purpose is larger than life. Therefore, the character of the Russian great power ambitions, according to the NSS 2021 and the FPC 2023, does not set boundaries to violence.

3. Rationality of Preparations in Society and Economy for War

The extensive measures aimed at preparing the Russian society and the economy for wartime suggest that the Russian government anticipates a conflict on a large scale. In addition to the tasks to increase state control over society, the NSS 2021 outlines steps to ensure the societal needs and the protection of the population in times of war.²⁵⁴

The preparation of government bodies, local government bodies and organizations, the Armed Forces, other troops, military formations, and bodies to ensure the protection of the state from armed attack and to meet the needs of the state and the needs of the population in wartime.²⁵⁵

The document also militarizes the Russian society and allocates “military-patriotic education and training for military service of citizens.”²⁵⁶ The NSS 21 tasks the Russian military with “maintaining a high level of moral” as well as with planning and preparations of extensive measures to protect the Russia, its populations, and the cultural values.²⁵⁷ The Russian government tasks the economy to increase its efforts in areas which can be used

²⁵² Weber, *Economy and Society*, 101.

²⁵³ Weber, 102.

²⁵⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 10, 11.

²⁵⁵ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 40.10.

²⁵⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 13.

²⁵⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 10–12.

for civilian and military purposes (i.e., “aviation, shipbuilding, rocket and space industries, engine construction, nuclear power”), and to ensure the food supply for the population.²⁵⁸

Preparation of the economy of the Russian Federation, the economies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the economies of municipalities . . . to ensure the protection of the state from armed attack and to meet the needs of the state and the needs of the population in wartime.²⁵⁹

Moreover, the NSS 2021 assigns the economic production and people to disperse from metropolitan into smaller cities and into rural areas.²⁶⁰ These measures are extensive and include all elements of the Russian polity and are suitable to prepare the country for a major war at great power scale.

The logic in extensive preparatory measures for wartime indicates that Russia is already on the brink of a major conflict. In addition, the Russian leadership’s use of rhetoric to escalate with force including nuclear strikes in reaction to Western action.²⁶¹ Thus, the wartime preparations of the NSS 2021 transfer people in Russia into a state of high alertness. Under these alerted conditions, the risk of escalation is higher than in a peaceful environment, because the Russian people learned from their government that the escalation is inevitable.

4. Summary

The rationality of the Russian threat perception, the great power ambitions, and the war preparations in state, society, and economy indicates that the NSS 2021 creates a strategic system which does not include any political limit for a potential escalation. The fusion of values and rationality in Russia’s great power perception increases the risk of escalation and sets no limits to the level of intensity. Moreover, the NSS 2021 further reduces the ability of the Russian people to regulate the actions of their leaders. Therefore,

²⁵⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.7.

²⁵⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 40.10.

²⁶⁰ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 67.25.

²⁶¹ Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt, “Russia’s Catch-All Nuclear Rhetoric in Its War against Ukraine: A Balancing Act between Deterrence, Dissuasion, and Compellence Strategies,” *SWP Comment*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C60>.

the NSS 2021 transfers more power and control over the scale of potential Russian violence into the hands of the Russian leadership.

C. IDENTITY IN THE RUSSIAN STRATEGY

This section evaluates the share of identity in the Russian threat assessment, the great power ambitions, as well as the measures for society control and economic transformation. The evaluation concludes with an assessment that asserts that the four key elements of the NSS 2021 can lead to unpredictable reactions and escalation. The assessment suggests that every external action that is perceived as unfriendly toward Russian identity can lead to unannounced escalation.

1. Identity in the Russian Threat Assessment

The Russian threat perception that Western influences attack Russian identity generates a context which cannot be resolved from the West. The NSS 2021 points out that the Russian statehood fundamentally depends on the Russian identity.²⁶² Because the uncontrolled and free flow of ideas and opinions are an inseparable part of Western liberal values, the “Westernization of culture” threatens the sovereignty of Russia in the view of Russian leaders.²⁶³ Therefore, the Russian identity and free flow of information according to the Western liberal values are in an antagonistic relationship. Neither side can dissolve this antagonistic relation without violating its core principles.

In the NSS 2021, the Russian leadership claims that executing “symmetric and asymmetric measures” against actions which threaten the Russian sovereignty is legitimate.²⁶⁴ Therefore, the Russian violent option increases the risk of unannounced escalation in the duel-like situation of antagonistic value systems.

²⁶² Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, para. 28.

²⁶³ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 88.

²⁶⁴ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 99.

2. Identity in the Russian Great Power Ambitions

The share of Russian identity in the Russian great power ambitions has two different aspects. The previous section has discussed how the Russian leadership makes the Russian identity a matter political rationality. The second aspect must consider to what degree the Russian population follows the government's opinion. Orlando Figes' argues that in 2014, "the annexation of Crimea was broadly welcomed," by the Russian public. The broad support might rely on the fact that the 2014 annexation did not include high intensity warfighting. The German Press Agency refers to British Ministry of Defense information indicating that 80 percent of the Russians supported the assault on Ukraine in 2022 while in 2023 "data indicated 55 percent of Russians favor peace talks with Ukraine, with only 25 percent claiming to support continuing the conflict."²⁶⁵ Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that less public support for violent military operations in general prevents the Russian government from escalating. Nevertheless, further research is required to take a position on the Russian public opinion to implement great power ambitions with violent means.

3. Identity in a Power Vertical of State, Society, and Economy

The totalitarian character is an identifying feature of the Russian political system. Sabine Fischer explains that the Russian political system is a "power vertical" in which all elements of the political system (i.e., state administration, society, economy) are oriented toward the President and directly connected to him.²⁶⁶ Despite protests, which ended in more than 10,000 detentions, the increasing suppression of public rights does not lead to a general uprising.²⁶⁷ The research for this section did not find evidence that the allocated transformation of the Russian economy has led to open opposition.

²⁶⁵ Christoph Meyer, "British Intel: Russian Public's Support for Ukraine War Waning," Wire Feed (Hamburg: dpa Deutsche Presse-Agentur GmbH, December 4, 2022), 1, <https://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/british-intel-russian-publics-support-ukraine-war/docview/2745548864/se-2?accountid=12702>.

²⁶⁶ Fischer, "Russia on the Road to Dictatorship. Internal Political Repercussions of the Attack on Ukraine," 1–2.

²⁶⁷ Fischer, 4–6.

In accepting the suppressive measures and the increased state control over the society and the economy, the Russian population signals that the centralizing power vertical is part of the Russian identity. However, the connection between the Russian identity and the totalitarian tendencies do not indicate that there is any direct influence on the escalation of the situation between Russia and the West. Indirectly, the power vertical increases the risk of unannounced escalation because it narrows the decision to act down to a few people of the Russian leadership or possibly to President Putin alone.

4. Summary

The assessment indicates that Russian identity plays a significant role especially in shaping its responses to perceived threats. While the influence of the Russian identity on great power ambitions increases the unpredictability of unannounced escalations, is it possible that a lack of public support for violent military operations prevents the Russian leadership from overreactions. These elements can contribute to the risk of unpredictable reactions and escalation in Russia's interactions with the West.

D. CONCLUSION

In the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, the political debate often revolves around the potential for escalation in the conflict between Russia and the West. Analysts and policymakers have primarily focused on assessing the risk of escalation concerning Western actions. However, this chapter investigates the Russian strategy and adds another perspective on the potential for escalation to the political debate.

The evaluation of the NSS 2021 reveals a crucial interplay between grand political ambitions, negative emotions stemming from a perceived threat, and a strong ideology. This combination creates a system that poses a substantial risk of dangerous escalation, and that the Russian leadership is in control of the escalation.

Emotionality, as observed in the context of threats from the West and Russian great power ambitions, is recognized as a significant factor in increasing the risk of escalation, especially in global power competition. However, the research does not find evidence that

emotionality resulting from increased control over society and economic transformation has a decisive effect on the risk of escalation.

The rationality of the Russian strategy outlined in the NSS 2021 does not appear to include any inherent political limits for potential escalation. The fusion of values and rationality in Russia's great power ambitions further heightens the risk of escalation, effectively transferring control over the scale of potential Russian violence into the hands of the Russian leadership.

The assessment underscores the importance of Russian identity in shaping its responses to perceived threats, which introduces unpredictability into the potential for unannounced escalations. However, the lack of strong public support for violent military operations could potentially serve as a counterbalance, preventing overreactions from the Russian leadership. These factors collectively contribute to the risk of unpredictable reactions and escalation in Russia's interactions with the West.

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V. CONCLUSION

The examination of the Russian National Security Strategy (NSS 2021) applied the structural guideline of Carl von Clausewitz's strategic causal chain and reveals that the strategic thinking of the Russian leadership is determined by four key features:²⁶⁸

- the perception that the West constitutes an existential threat to Russia's society and economy,
- the belief that Russia is destined to be a great power and must shape a new world order,
- the conviction that Russian society needs a high degree of state control, and
- the will to transform the Russian economy from export orientation and import dependencies toward a self-supplying autarky.

These four key features of the NSS 2021 create an antagonistic context between Russia and the West. Furthermore, the analysis of the key features with Clausewitz's trinity proposes that the NSS 2021 context contains high risk of escalation—and that it does not contain regulating factors that are suitable to reduce the risk of escalation or to limit the level of violence in an armed conflict.

While political scholars share the common position that the Russian NSS 2021 has a defensive character protecting Russia from external influence, the thesis adds a counterargument to the debate. Julian Cooper, Dimitri Trenin, Rainer Böhme, as well as Larysa Leszczenko and Olena Tarnavska believe that the NSS 2021 expresses a Russian

²⁶⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*; Clausewitz, *On War*.

perception of being beleaguered.²⁶⁹ Moreover, Larysa Leszczenko and Olena Tarnavska claim that the NSS 2021 is not dangerous for the West because it would be “certainly an element of strategic communication rather than a list of threats and challenges for the next years.”²⁷⁰

The findings of this thesis militate in the opposite direction: although the Russian interests and strategic priorities have a protective and defensive character, the Russian great power ambitions and its approach to overthrowing the existing liberal world order are aggressive and offensive. The details of multiple tasks clearly show that the NSS 2021 prepares the Russian society and economy for a major conflict with the West.²⁷¹ Connecting the strategic means with the political standpoint, the Russian war preparations serve the great power ambitions. Therefore, the overall character of the Russian NSS 2021 is offensive and not simply reacting on Western actions. Only the application of Clausewitz’s strategic causal chain and the trinity led the way to this new counterargument. The strategic causal chain prevents one from losing sight of the political standpoint amid the complexity of strategic details. The tendencies of the trinity reveal how the NSS 2021 is threatening the West with escalating the strategic situation into a limitless armed conflict and therefore strengthened the counterargument.

This thesis has added two new perspectives to the scholarly debate about the practical utility theory. Strategy scholars mainly use theory to understand and describe specific wars or to develop strategies.²⁷² The present work agrees with their positions.

²⁶⁹ Julian Cooper, “Russia’s Updated National Security Strategy,” *NATO Defence College Research, Russian Studies Series 2/21*, July 19, 2021; Böhme, “Zur nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie Russlands 2021” [On the Russian National Security Strategy 2021]; Dimitry Trenin, “Russia’s National Strategy: A Manifesto for a New Era,” *Modern Diplomacy*, July 11, 2021, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2021/07/11/russias-national-security-strategy-a-manifesto-for-a-new-era/>; Larysa Leszczenko and Olena Tarnavska, “Russia’s 2021 National Security Strategy in the Context of the State’s Strategic Culture,” *Actual Problems of International Relations* 147.2021, no. 147 (2021): 18–26.

²⁷⁰ Leszczenko and Tarnavska, “Russia’s 2021 National Security Strategy in the Context of the State’s Strategic Culture,” 7.

²⁷¹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 40, 99.

²⁷² Abenheim and Halladay, *Soldiers, War, Knowledge, and Citizenship*; Aron, *Clausewitz, Philosopher of War*; Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*; Souchon, *Strategy in the 21st Century*; Wirtz, “The Reluctant Theorist: Colin Gray and the Theory of Strategy.”

Nevertheless, these pages forge a new path. The work has shown that Clausewitz's theory—with some support from Max Weber's theory of social action—can fruitfully be utilized to understand strategies and open the mind for arguments which are not considered with other techniques. Furthermore, this thesis proved that it is indispensable for a comprehensive estimate to consider the political standpoint within a strategic environment. Therefore, for analyzing strategies, the commonly used causal chain ends-objectives-ways-means should be extended to environment-standpoint-ends-objectives-ways-means.

Certainly, the use of the theory has limitations because it cannot help to predict future steps of the Russian leadership. Regarding the NSS 2021, it is uncertain how far the Russian population accepts the total state control; how far the Russian economy can be transferred toward self-reliance; and how far the Russian bureaucracy can implement the measures planned in the NSS 2021. Clausewitz's theory cannot foresee global developments and this thesis did not consider Western strategies. Nevertheless, the present analysis sheds some more light on the political will of the Russian government. Furthermore, the thesis highlights areas where current developments must be closely monitored to prevent escalation and assess Russian actions, for example:

- degree of militarization of the Russian society,
- degree of emotional bonds between leadership and society,
- importance of the government imposed Russian identity to the society,
- degree of self-sufficiency of the Russian economy, and
- progress of moving factories, companies from large cities into small towns and rural areas

The political and scholarly debate in Western countries about the right amount of support for Ukraine is determined by the restriction not to escalate the conflict with Russia. Politicians and scholars discuss the possible consequences of Western supplies to Ukraine especially how Putin might perceive Western actions. Snejjina Michailova categorizes the

debates as “impression management and perception management.”²⁷³ The debate considers multiple influences that must be considered to prevent an escalation. While Marina Favaro and Heather Williams discuss the influence of technology on perception, Snezhina Michailova exemplarily mentions the perception of history, personal or national reputation.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, the RAND Corporation links Putin’s decisions to contemporary developments especially to “a changing environment may prompt him to rethink the risk calculation, making escalation preferable to other options.”²⁷⁵ This thesis adds another perspective to the already multifaceted debate: Putin’s plan.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Western support to Ukraine further destabilized the relation between Russia and the West. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Western countries supplied Ukraine with weapons. While the invasion of Ukraine implements Russian great power ambitions, the Western weapons supply to Ukraine confirms Moscow’s threat perception. The logic of strategies is that the leaders pursue their strategic objectives until they do not perceive a threat anymore and until they achieve the desired end state. Hence the Kremlin believes to have legitimate rights to react with a level of force at their discretion until liberal Western influences have no impact on Russia anymore.²⁷⁶ However, the liberal idea demands free flow of opinions, thoughts, and expressions. Therefore, liberalism automatically stands against Moscow’s idea to protect the Russian people from external influences. Hence, the antagonism between Russia and the West has an ideological character.

The West must consider in its decisions that the Russian polity lacks an element that is capable to moderate and mitigate the risk of escalation. The NSS 2021 generates a

²⁷³ Snezhina Michailova, “An Attempt to Understand the War in Ukraine – An Escalation of Commitment Perspective,” *British Journal of Management* 33, no. 4 (October 2022): 1675, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12633>.

²⁷⁴ Marina Favaro and Heather Williams, “False Sense of Supremacy: Emerging Technologies, the War in Ukraine, and the Risk of Nuclear Escalation,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 28–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2023.2219437>; Michailova, “An Attempt to Understand the War in Ukraine – An Escalation of Commitment Perspective,” 1674–76.

²⁷⁵ RAND Corporation, “Understanding the Risk of Escalation in the War in Ukraine,” 2023, 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep53227>.

²⁷⁶ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, paras. 88, 99.

political environment in Russia with both a totally contained society, and a state-controlled and regulated economy.²⁷⁷ The Russian population only receives Kremlin filtered information. Therefore, the Russian leaders take all means from their people which were suitable to moderate and mitigate political actions. Hence, all Russian reactions to Western decisions and actions rely on the emotions, judgements, and perceptions of some individuals or possibly of Putin alone.

Western politicians should cautiously consider the effect of their decisions and actions on the Kremlin's emotions and perceptions and identify vectors for how to prevent the NSS 2021 being implanted. If the West wants to prevent the regional war in Ukraine escalating into a major armed conflict, Western politicians should continue to intensely consider the sort and extent of their weapons support to Ukraine. Admittedly, this cautious approach extends the suffering of Ukrainian people for the sake of buying time. Therefore, Western leaders are strongly urged to identify and implement a way to prevent that the Russian leaders successfully implement the NSS 2021. European politicians especially must acknowledge that the Russian strategy substantially threatens their people and territory, as well as their liberal and diverse Western identity.

Arguably, the Western sanctions might support Moscow's approach to transform the Russian economy. Therefore, the findings of the thesis suggest that the Russian people are the only force that can prevent their leaders from escalation. Therefore, the West should help the Russian population to form a free opinion and, based on that, be able to influence their political leadership.

This thesis has provided evidence that Putin plans to achieve Russian supremacy over Slavic and Orthodox countries with Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus as a core. The findings prevent any conclusion that some territorial concessions from Ukraine to Russia could lead to a lasting peace. The NSS 2021 provides evidence that Putin will likely pursue his plan as long as necessary to fulfil Russia's destiny of being an uncontested great power or "one of the influential centers of the modern world."²⁷⁸ According to the NSS 2021,

²⁷⁷ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, paras. 84–93.

²⁷⁸ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 100.

Putin plans to escalate until Russia wins.²⁷⁹ Considering the contemporary weakness of the Russian armed forces, a powerless economy, and a untrustworthy society, the nuclear weapons are the only powerful means remaining to achieve Putin's great power ambitions. Therefore, the risk of escalation rises as time goes by. Consequently, the West must identify—and implement—options to prevent Putin bringing his great power ambitions into reality.

²⁷⁹ Registry of the President of the Russian Federation, para. 99.

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