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Armed Forces As The Russian Federation's Strategic Tool

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Abstract: The experience of the past decade shows a steadily increasing role of the armed forces in the implementation of Moscow's strategic aspirations. The aim of this work is to present the geopolitical ambitions of Russia in competition with the West and the role of the armed forces in satisfying these ambitions, as well as to evaluate their modernisation. The article identifies the directions of Moscow's strategic aspirations and presents a vision of Russia's future war. The reforms carried out by the Russian national defence ministers Anatoliy Serdyukov and Sergey Shoygu are evaluated. The conclusions resulting from the involvement of Russian armed forces in the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria are explained. It indicates the changes that will take place in particular branches of the armed forces in the near and long terms.

Keywords: Russia, ambition, strategy, armed forces, competition, experience, modernisation

1 Introduction

The conclusions and experiences of the war with Georgia in 2008 became the basis for the most radical and comprehensive military reforms in Russia. The transformation of the armed forces consisted in moving away from the model of mass mobilisation towards a high level of combat readiness of the armed forces, which are prepared to perform nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence functions, large-scale warfare, as well as non-linear armed and non-armed activities in local conflicts. The new perspective of the Minister of National Defence, Sergey Shoygu, on the issue of strategic use of the armed forces was of key importance for the modernisation programme and, at the same time, became the essence of the reforms being carried out. It was expressed in a series of spectacular uses of the military instrument in the international dimension. At the beginning of 2014, the Russian Navy, Airborne and Landing troops, as well as Russian Special Forces, occupied Crimea. For the first time, the world was shown a disciplined and well-prepared army, diametrically opposed to the image of the 1990s, ready for unconventional action and rapid achievement of political goals. In the spring of 2014, Russian Special Forces and camouflaged military units planned and directed the activities of rebels in Eastern Ukraine and have been supplying weapons and equipment. Ukrainian regular armed forces were exposed to Russian rocket fire during the anti-terrorist operation, while separatists were shielded with anti-aircraft kits and provided with precise reconnaissance data. In September 2015, Russia organised and conducted an expeditionary operation in Syria for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian army has so far supported Bashar al-Assad's regime with aviation, special units, artillery, separate naval forces and logistics (Sutyagin 2015). Russians are constantly increasing the scope and frequency of military exercises, and increasingly often, very dangerous incidents occur (not only in the Baltic Sea area), which may indicate that the risk of an outbreak of armed conflict with Russia is constantly growing.

The above examples of the use of Russian armed forces prove that they are not currently limited to tasks related to the defence of own territory. They are an excellent tool for political deterrence and force projection (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2018), as well as for the implementation of other strategic objectives related primarily to international competition. Demonstration of force and the threat of its use are now increasingly a means of intimidating potential opponents and ensuring the fulfilment of one's own strategic interests. The experience of the past decade

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provides evidence that Russian intentions are not fully transparent. Acquiring new military capabilities and adapting the strategy of their use to changing international conditions may indicate that Russia's true intention is to rebuild the hegemony in the post-Soviet sphere and change the European security architecture, which, at the same time, poses threats to the entire Euro-Atlantic area.

The problem situation identified in this way leads to the formulation of the main research problem expressed in the question: What are the directions of transformation of the armed forces and what role do they play in achieving the strategic goals of the Russian Federation? In order to solve the main research problem, it was defragmented and the following specific problems were formulated: (1) How are the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation used in the strategic dimension? (2) What are the directions of evolution of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation?

The aim of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, was to identify the directions of transformation of the armed forces and their role in the achievement of strategic goals of the Russian Federation.

2 Russia's Strategic Ambitions And The Role Of The Armed Forces

The Russian Federation's strategic documents define the status of Russia as a power that plays a leading role in resolving global security problems. A position of its own in the globalised world created in such a way may testify to nostalgia related to its status during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union was a real superpower. The assessment of the national security strategy suggests that Russia, similar to the United States, with its significant nuclear weapons arsenal, will aim to restore the status of the world's hegemon and will play a greater role in solving international security problems, among other things, influencing the resolution of military conflicts (*Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Federacji Rosyjskiej* 2015).

The assessment of strategic documents and past practice shows that Russia's plans to modernise its armed forces will be shaped by the geopolitical ambitions of Russia's political and military leaders, the perception of threats and the vision of a future war. It is estimated that Russia's potential goal on the international arena is to aspire to play a significant role in the multipolar world by influencing the global order while simultaneously pursuing its own national interests, especially in strategically important regions (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016). According to Margarete Klein, armed forces are seen alongside diplomacy and energy resources as one of the three fundamental pillars of Russian power. In this context, the most important role is played by nuclear weapons and the possessed ability to project power in places most important for Russian interests (Klein 2015, p. 4). Although according to the provisions of the concept of Russian foreign policy, Asia and the Middle East are to become the key areas of Russian activity, it is estimated that Vladimir Putin will strive to control the post-Soviet area and block all initiatives to bring the West closer to the borders of Russia (Bugajski 2018) and maintain domination in the Arctic region. According to Putin, Putin's vision of the world is based on the post-Yalta order, which guarantees stability and security. It is contrary to the principles of post-Cold War order and calls into question the sovereignty of small- and medium-sized states. In its international policy and aspirations for regional domination, Russia treats these states not as subjects but as objects (Vladimir 2015). It seems that maintaining influence in the post-Soviet zone remains the main priority of Moscow's foreign policy. In the strategic dimension, Russia will strive to create a buffer zone to protect against the influence of external instability. It is estimated that it will do so with both political and military instruments (Facon 2017, p. 7).

Russia's strategic goal is to weaken the West and change the European (Eurasian) security order. Moscow will probably seek to reduce the United States' presence in Europe, undermine the credibility of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and disintegrate the European Union (Gotkowska and Szymański 2017, p. 3). Russia does not have the advantage over all the armed forces that NATO has, so it will focus on asymmetrical compensation in the strategic dimension by acquiring the capabilities to surprise and prevent NATO from accessing certain territorial areas that are important from the Russian point of view. Furthermore, it will continue its hybrid war against the West and upgrade strategic nuclear forces (Klein 2015, p. 4).

The geopolitical interests of Russia will be the factor shaping the level of ambition for transformation of the armed forces, but the real need for ability is determined by the perception of threats. Both President Putin and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, Valery Gerasimov, prefer hybrid warfare over conventional warfare and the occupation of a specific territory, as has been the case in previous decades. The assumed political goals can thus

be achieved relatively quickly. Costs are also lower compared to the classical use of the armed forces, and the risk of conflict escalation is rather limited. The use of hybrid warfare is particularly beneficial for the former republics of the Soviet Union. The experience of the direct influence of the armed forces and the threat of their use in the conflict in Ukraine clearly show that the way in which they are used depends on the central management. On the other hand, the ability of the Russian armed forces to concentrate in any place and engage immediately in combat represents a large threat to the Baltic States and the NATO, which, as expert assessments show, are not properly prepared to respond to such challenges (Harris 2018, p. 9).

The provisions of the security strategy are a clear signal from Moscow that relations with the West will continue to deteriorate. The deterioration of these relations is a natural consequence of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, supported by Russia, as well as Russian intervention in Syria. In this situation, it is to be expected that the United States and NATO are the main source of threats to Russia. Apart from those mentioned above, Russia fears global instability, proliferation of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, information struggle, corruption, diversion and numerous cross-border threats. Russia feels respect for elements of the US missile defence shield and fears a global, American attack with all available means, including strategic non-nuclear precision-guided weapons, as well as the militarisation of space (*Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Federacji Rosyjskiej* 2015). The provisions of the strategy concerning Moscow's usurping of the right to a nuclear response to a conventional attack may cause particular concern to NATO. Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons aggressively, applying the principle from escalation to de-escalation. This means that it may first use or threaten to use nuclear weapons in order to force the Alliance to stop participating in the conflict or to reduce the intensity of its military efforts. Russian military doctrine allows the use of nuclear weapons at all levels of combat. It is not treated as a backup tool in the event of a conventional military conflict nor used against another opponent who also uses the same weapon (*Doktryna wojenna Federacji Rosyjskiej* 2015). However, it should be made clear that it can be used by Russia at any level of conflict escalation (Bugajski 2018, p. 42). The question of whether Russia can use nuclear weapons in operational activities or as a deterrent to the Alliance cannot therefore be asked. In Russian perception and conflict resolution rules, it can be used in all operational conditions. It can also be used in a situation where Russia finds it unfavourable to conduct a restricted war. This thesis is confirmed by Moscow's maintenance of a diverse nuclear arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons (Bugajski 2018, p. 42).

Russian military leaders assume that conventional armed forces, with their high level of combat readiness, are capable of inflicting unacceptable losses on the military and the economy of the adversary, which is why they can be seen as part of the deterrent. For a long time, the role of non-nuclear weapons in conventional deterrence has been relatively limited and treated more as a tool to hinder access to the defended area. Russian deterrence is closely linked to the concept of active resistance. The development of modern technologies and the transformation of the armed forces may, however, make conventional deterrents play a greater political role in overall strategic deterrence (Minasyan 2016, p. 32). In Russia, deterrence is used in a slightly different way than in the West. In the case of NATO, deterrence creates conditions for action, while in the Russian military doctrine, it is treated as an active and flexible process applied consistently across the entire spectrum of operational activities (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 23). Such provisions are somewhat contradictory to the essence of the understanding of deterrence. Russia defines strategic deterrence as a package of integrated and coordinated political, diplomatic, economic, ideological, moral, spiritual, informational, military, technological and other actions taken by the state to demonstrate the readiness of political leaders to use all instruments of national power simultaneously or sequentially to de-escalate the conflict and stabilise the strategic environment of international security (Rühle 2018).

Russia is particularly concerned about the approaching borders of the allied armed forces (and possibly future military infrastructure) as a consequence of the decisions taken at the Warsaw summit to strengthen the eastern NATO area. Secondly, according to Russian experts, there are significant disproportions between the capabilities of weapons of precise non-nuclear destruction. It is therefore reasonable to believe that in striving for balance of power, Moscow will modernise nuclear and conventional forces and, in particular, will try to acquire both offensive and defensive strategic weapons for precise destruction and impact in space (Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2014).

Apart from geopolitical ambitions and perception of threats, the key determinant of the transformation of the armed forces is the vision of a future war. The evaluation of Russian theory and practice over the past decade leads to the thesis that it is derived from both one's own experiences and those of the West. On the basis of global trends, it can be concluded that contemporary conflicts are unpredictable. Nowadays, wars are not declared, but, in fact, they are conducted long before the actual identification of aggressive actions of the other side. Traditionally, interstate wars

between two mobilised, linearly deployed armies become a relic of the past (Gerasimov 2013). Nowadays, there is the integrated use of the armed forces with instruments of political, economic and informational influence. Increasingly often, special forces and agencies aimed at creating hostility to legal authorities in the society are used. Military doctrine also stresses the importance of the activities of irregular and private subdivisions, as well as the use of asymmetric and indirect actions (*Doktryna wojenna Federacji Rosyjskiej* 2015). New forms and methods of competition and different levels of aggression make war non-linear and blur the boundaries between war and peace, between regular and irregular activities, between military and non-military subjects (Gerasimov 2013). In the non-linear war, the differences between intentional and unintentional effects are blurred, creating ambiguity. The actual goal of war is not to achieve military victory but, rather, to continuously stimulate the strategic military, political and social spheres. In the aspect of non-linear war, the military transformation of the armed forces should focus on shortening the decision-making process, effective coordination of actions between all entities involved in hybrid warfare and the speed of implementation of special forces (Klein 2015, p. 9).

Nowadays, owing to the development of modern technologies, it is possible to integrate all kinds of armed forces, armies and weapons, achieve informational advantage, overtake the opponent, hitting him/her precisely from a distance, take the initiative and consequently win (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2013, pp. 15 and 17). Chekinov and Bogdanov (2013, p. 15) believe that non-contact impact from a distance on the most important objects of state functioning in the whole territory of the country is an example of non-contact fighting and entering the age of high technology. They prove that the technological advantage of armaments eliminates the quantitative advantage and calls into question the possession of large and heavy structures of the armed forces, dominated by the land component. The consequence of the use of new technologies is the blurring of the boundaries between the warring parties and the lack of a clear front line, which proves the non-linearity of the new generation of wars. They confirm the need to integrate reconnaissance and fire with radio-electronic and informational interaction. The use of satellites, networked armies and electronic combat elements will have a decisive influence on the development of the doctrinal use of the new generation of armed forces. Achievement of combat objectives will be facilitated by robotisation, automation of weapon systems, as well as effective reconnaissance and communication systems (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2013, p. 14).

It is assessed that Russia will strive to achieve its own political goals mainly through the limited and hidden use of armed forces. However, if the situation requires it, it is in readiness to openly use military force, which – in the opinion of Diego A. Ruiz Palmer (2015, p. 2) – will be able to cause devastating operational effects. The new concept of international competition provides for the integrated use of nuclear, conventional and unconventional weapons. Such a specific toolbox allows for the flexible and selective use of its elements according to the operational needs. Military leaders attach great importance to having the ability to prevent the opposing party from accessing strategically important territorial areas, such as Crimea, Kaliningrad or the Arctic region. The abilities are as follows: the capabilities of anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence; the ability to strike with ballistic missiles; manoeuvring missiles launched from land, sea and air; and the ability to fight submarines and surface ships (Facon 2017, p. 15).

Assessment of the experience involving the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass shows that Russia is increasingly resorting to non-military instruments of influence. Military tools have always been supported by political campaigns, economic pressure and offensive activities in cyberspace. It is expected that in the future, military elements will be even more disguised, limited in quantity, difficult to identify and combined with other instruments and forms of impact, which will create certain ambiguities and make it difficult to distinguish between war and peace. As the practice of the past decade shows, soft-impact instruments can be treated as a kind of weapon whose effects are sometimes greater than with the use of regular armed forces (Gerasimov 2013). In Makhmut Gareev's opinion, the perfect use of soft, i.e. political, diplomatic and informational, tools leads to greater effectiveness in terms of strategic deterrence, and therefore, these tools can be treated equal to nuclear weapons and conventional precision weapons (Persson 2016, p. 110).

3 Modernisation Of The Russian Armed Forces

The analyses show that the subdivisions of the armed forces of the Russian Federation underwent a thorough transformation, which was confirmed by the equipment, discipline and professional behaviour of soldiers during the

annexation of Crimea. Compared to the war in Georgia, which took place in 2008, Russian troops involved in the conflict in Ukraine presented a high flexibility of action and the ability to adapt to operational conditions, which significantly facilitated the achievement of the set political goals. The scope and scale of the changes that have occurred over the past decade cannot be underestimated by the West, despite the fact that not all military units of the Russian Federation Armed Forces present such a high level of training and preparation for modern conflicts as the elite subunits that took part in the Crimean operation. Certainly, however, it can be said that the Russian armed forces do not resemble the post-Soviet army (Giles 2016, p. 13).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, although the armed forces inherited an impressive arsenal, due to financial constraints, they were in a state of decay. Over the next 15 years, many interesting concepts for the modernisation of the armed forces collapsed due to the unwillingness of military leaders to make any changes and the lack of political will (Klein 2015, p. 10). Those reforms that were successfully implemented were chaotic, practical and unproductive (Blank 1997). According to Alexander Khramchikhin (2018, p. 7), until the end of 2000, the Russian army was on the verge of disintegration, and its combat force consisted of groups of independently functioning subdivisions armed with Kalashnikovs. In other words, for almost two decades, Russia was a paper tiger. For this reason, it did not engage in large conflicts. However, this did not prevent it from conducting so-called proxy wars, irregular activities and special operations with its neighbours. In the war with Chechnya, the level of implementation of combat tasks was unsatisfactory, which is why warfare was quickly transformed into a police operation, for which the Ministry of the Interior took responsibility (Gressel Gustav 2016, p. 2).

The lack of money and bureaucratic resistance to the transformation of the armed forces had its consequences in the war with Georgia in 2008. In order to prevent Georgia's integration with the West, Moscow decided to use elite airborne subdivisions in conjunction with ground troops, air forces and navy, but it turned out that they were moving too slowly (Harris 2018, p. 10). The troops were also not attuned to conducting combat operations in the prevailing conditions of the Caucasus. Large problems were created by conscripted soldiers who were not prepared to carry out military operations. Operational planning turned out to be inflexible and did not take into account the need for coordination between different types of armed forces and armies. The situational awareness was weak, which led to frequent firing by own troops. The advantage in the air was not used, and the supply lines were too long and poorly organised. In contrast to the Russian units, the Georgian units were more motivated to fight. Having modern night vision and communication means, they were more effective than the Russian ones, despite the fact that they did not have heavy tanks and anti-aircraft means of defence (Gressel Gustav 2016, p. 2). It turned out that the Russian operation was ineffective, and the assumed strategic goals were not achieved. Many mistakes were made in commanding the troops, and the logistical activities proved to be a complete disaster. These negative experiences became the basis for deep reforms of the Russian Federation's armed forces (Harris 2018, p. 10).

In 2008, the Russian Minister of Defence, Anatoly Serdiukov, launched ambitious reforms aimed at transforming a heavy, massive post-Soviet military organisation prepared to conduct a large-scale land war into quickly mobilisable and flexible subdivisions of the armed forces, ready to conduct small, regional conflicts and expeditionary operations (Russell 2015, p. 9). The main political objective of the implemented defence reforms was to reduce disparities in comparison with the capabilities of other powers and to reduce sensitivity to the possibility of global impact, mainly by the United States. Russia needed to restore its military credibility in the international arena, which was the main factor of deterrence. On the other hand, armed forces were and still constitute a convenient tool for conducting foreign policy and for satisfying the ambitions of strategic political leaders (Giles 2016, p. 13). The conclusions of the research indicate that the aim of the reforms was to oppose the United States on a global scale and to ensure freedom of action for its own troops all over the world. Russia's long-term aspirations were, therefore, aimed at creating privileged zones where Moscow's interests could be achieved. These aspirations may also explain the long-term perspective of transformation aimed at the entry of the armed forces into the third decade of the 21st century. On the other hand, a strong army is an attribute of the state's superpower and always serves to satisfy its ambitions. At this point, however, Sergey Karaganov (2012) is right to say that a strong army compensates for the relatively weak Russian economic, technological, ideological and psychological spheres.

The efforts on defence reform were focussed on acquiring new operational capabilities and maintaining high military readiness (Klein 2015, p. 10). It was assumed that the staff would be reduced from 1.3 million to 1 million in 2016 (Thornton 2011, p. 20) and that the number of military districts, which at the same time served as strategic commands, would be reduced from six to four (Gawrilov 2010). In 2015, the fifth command responsible for operational activities in

the Arctic zone was established, and the number of administrative and security posts was reduced. At the same time, airborne and landing forces, as well as strategic rocket forces, were included in the strategic commands. The new structures of command of the armed forces allowed for a shortening of decision-making processes and made it possible to conduct integrated joint operations (Klein 2015, p. 16).

The change in the command system introduced by A. Serdiukov was also connected with the elimination of the division and corps levels. The basic module of the armed forces consisted of brigades directly subordinated to the army commander. At the same time, they were the basic tactical module with elements of combat support and logistics in their organisational structures, which allowed for independent operational activities without the need to involve the superior level (Thornton 2011, p. 22). The elimination of the divisional and corps levels from the command structure obviously allowed for financial savings, but unfortunately, it was a major obstacle in the efficient management of large military operations.

Reforms of the system of command and control of the state defence were continued in later years, especially after Sergei Shoigu came to power. On 1 December 2014, the National Centre for the Control of Defence of the Russian Federation was established in order to integrate the management system with the war structures of the state administration and economy and to prepare to conduct defence in the event of war. At all levels of command, full-time on-call operational shifts with the same peace and war structure began. The tasks of the centre include the monitoring of all areas of activity of the armed forces and the military command system with regard to projects defined in the state defence plan and selected security actors. The Head of the General Staff plays a leading role in the centre, but it also includes civilians holding state functions. Comprehensive thinking about achieving political goals requires the joint action of a military entity and the broadly understood civil domain. In the opinion of the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the amount of information has increased many times in contemporary conditions, the cycle of its exchange has been shortened from weeks and days to hours and minutes, which makes it necessary to constantly monitor the processes taking place in the world, in the country and in the armed forces and to conduct a constant comprehensive analysis of the situation, as well as to develop options for responding to these changes. The new structure ensures that the information cycle is shortened and that the management process is carried out in real time. The Centre coordinates 49 ministries and agencies, including Ministries of the Interior and Emergency. As a result, it is possible to apply all influencing tools available to the state in an integrated manner and to conduct non-linear activities (Baranets 2014).

The first phase of the reforms focussed on the professionalisation of the armed forces and the creation of leaders. The number of officers was reduced, the corps of ensign was dissolved and a new model of training of non-commissioned officers was introduced, which allowed to shape the pyramidal structure of employment and restore the proper proportions between the number of soldiers in headquarters and the number of soldiers serving in combat subunits. Since 2000, the number of professional soldiers has been steadily growing and the number of conscripts has been reduced. Owing to this, it was possible to introduce technically complicated combat equipment. The educational system has also been changed (Gressel Gustav 2016, p. 3).

The second phase of the reforms was carried out after 2012 under the leadership of Szojgu. A new look at the reforms was based on a change in the vision of international competition. The idea of conducting large, intensive armed conflicts with the use of nuclear weapons was revisited, with a simultaneous focus on new forms of competition based on the concept of hybrid warfare. It was assumed that the armed forces would continue to play a fundamental role in the accomplishment of Russian interests (Giles 2017, p. 2). Thus, the so-called mixed solutions were adopted. It was assumed that the restructured armed forces would have to be able to perform a number of functions, i.e. nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence, conventional and nuclear warfare, as well as non-linear and anti-terrorist activities (Klein 2015, p. 10). Szojgu consolidated the reforms, and at the same time, he verified them. As a result, the divisional level of command was restored, and preparations were made for large military operations. The dislocation of military units was also changed. It is worth noting that many branches and subdivisions of the Russian armed forces were brought closer to the border with Ukraine at the turn of 2012 and 2013 (Harris 2018, p. 11).

The transformation was focussed on increasing the military combat readiness, changing the organisational structures and logistic security rules so that, in a short time, as many troops and subunits as possible were ready to move to operational areas and conduct combat operations. In order to increase the ability to respond to threats occurring at the borders of the Russian Federation, it was planned to increase the number of mobilised military units and conduct intensive military exercises. The time taken for airborne units and restructured general military brigades

to reach operational readiness was reduced to 24 hours, which was a remarkable achievement compared to the pre-war period in Chechnya, when some divisions were preparing to conduct combat operations around 1 year in advance (Gressel Gustav 2016, p. 3).

Military exercises with combat firing are continuously conducted on Russian training grounds and a high number of military units in full combat readiness are maintained. As in wartime, troops are not rotated for months. In 2013, unannounced military exercises were conducted near the NATO borders with the participation of >160,000 soldiers who were deployed in designated areas within 72 hours (Pezard *et al.* 2017, p. 10). S. Szojgu continues to carry out unannounced inspections and tests of the mobilisation readiness of the troops. The conducted exercises are increasingly comprehensive and focus not only on the combined activities of all types of armed forces and armies but also include the involvement of various non-military entities. Exercise scenarios include anti-terrorist operations, landing manoeuvres, as well as air and landing operations, which are the basic forms of conducting offensive operations (Klein 2015, p. 17).

The experience from the conflict in Ukraine confirms the thesis that armed forces are able to take on challenges related to the movement of large formations over long distances, logistical security and the conduct of combat operations spread over time within a short period of time after political decisions on their use have been taken. The annexation of Crimea is proof that selected units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation remain highly ready to carry out extraterritorial special operations, requiring reliable means of communication. Efficiently conducted military operations indicate that the Special Component can cooperate with the elite mechanised subdivisions, characterised by high mobility and competence to conduct operational manoeuvres. It can be stated that the experiment in Crimea showed the high effectiveness of the military force in achieving political goals (Kofman 2016, p. 9).

The course of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was different. Russia used political war, as well as irregular, hybrid and conventional actions. Conventional actions, however, had their own specificity in that independent battalion battle groups were sent deep into Ukrainian territory to engage in decisive battles, for example in Slavonic or Debalcev. Very often, the combat grouping consisted of mixed subdivisions such as special forces, airborne troops and infantry, which did not reflect either the organisational structure of the Russian troops or their doctrinal assumptions. The results of direct clashes with the regular Ukrainian army indicate that the Russian army had a significant technical advantage (Kofman 2016, p. 10). Moreover, in both Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Russia was able (i) to hold between 40,000 and even 150,000 soldiers at the border for months and (ii) to conduct exercises with up to 80,000 soldiers deep inside the territory, which was a significant factor in the deterrence and intimidation of Ukraine, as well as apply artillery rocket fire from Russian territory (Gressel Gustav 2016, p. 4).

In the conflict with Ukraine, Russia has tested and continues to test new combat capabilities, particularly for precise destruction, electronic combat and cybernetic impact, as well as using unmanned aerial and artillery means and technologically advanced vehicles for transporting soldiers on the battlefield. For example, unmanned aerial vehicles were used not only to conduct reconnaissance and to transfer weapons but also to carry out direct attacks on enemy objects, such as the suicide attacks carried out by kamikaze (Giles 2017, p. 7).

In September 2015, after providing political support to the Bashar al-Assad regime, Russia launched the first expeditionary operation since the intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, involving air forces and special forces, as well as dedicated naval and land forces. Strategic bombers, new combat helicopters, tactical aviation, and reconnaissance and electronic combat aircraft were engaged in operations against the so-called Islamic State (Kofman 2016, p. 11). Russia used Syria to prove its military modernisation programmes, including advanced conventional weapon systems that allow for force projection in any part of the world. The effectiveness of cruise missiles was tested. Kalibr missiles were launched from ships in the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean (Next 2017). Cruise missiles were also fired over Iranian territory from a supersonic strategic bomber with variable wing geometry Tu-160M1 Blackjack [Tu-160], from a heavy Tu-95MS Bear H (Butowski) bomber and from a Tu-22M3 Backfire (NI) aircraft. The assessment of the operations carried out shows that Russia has strategic capabilities that the world should take into account (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 44).

Experiences from armed conflicts are usually much more important than training exercises. As a result, the use of weapon systems and equipment significantly increases the ability to conduct warfare. Ukraine and Syria are completely different cases but can be considered complementary due to the involved training, arms testing, tactics and organisational structures of the military. In Ukraine, the confrontation with an opponent with similar weapons and equipment was checked, as exemplified by similar combat tanks, infantry vehicles or unmanned aerial vehicles. In Syria, on the other hand, electronic combat systems, new-generation unmanned aerial vehicles, communication systems

and anti-tank weapons have been tested. There are also unique opportunities for practical practice in coordinating air-to-land operations or interacting with local fighters. Russia demonstrated its readiness to secretly, and without collision, move troops with combat equipment over long distances and to immediately use its combat capabilities in combat (Giles 2017, p. 3). The conflict in Ukraine and the involvement in Syria show that Russian soldiers have extensive military experience and the Russian Federation's capabilities allow for extensive conventional operations.

The priority of the transformation of the Russian armed forces is nuclear power, as it makes it possible to preserve Russia's superpower-oriented ambitions. The primary function of nuclear power is to act as an effective deterrence. The doctrinal provisions assume the use of strategic forces to make a pre-emptive strike, a strike after prior warning or a retaliatory strike (unannounced). The execution of a retaliatory strike is the most difficult, as it requires the ability to function in conditions of radioactive contamination (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 31). By 2022, the modernisation programme assumes the acquisition of 400 new intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, eight strategic Borjanean class submarines (*Rosja buduje strategiczny okręt podwodny* 2015) and six Delta class IV submarines (*Rosja buduje strategiczny okręt podwodny* 2015). SS-18 missiles will be replaced by liquid-fuel-powered new ones, called RS-28 Sarmat, and SS-19 will be replaced by RS-24 Yars missiles. Analysts and experts were greatly surprised by the nuclear manoeuvring missile announced by Vladimir Putin. In theory, its solutions, including a new-generation nuclear propulsion system, mean that the new Russian weapons have unlimited range and the ability to bypass missile shields. The missile was allegedly tested in the autumn of 2017. Moscow also announced the construction of a new version of the strategic Tu-160 bomber after 2021 (Gorenburg 2017). After 2020, it is also planned to reduce the total number of ballistic missiles owned by Russia but, at the same time, increase their effectiveness and resistance to detection and destruction, which is why the main effort is focussed on obtaining them in a mobile version (Klein 2015, p. 11). Putin – in his address to the Federal Assembly – confirmed that the Status-6, which is 100 times smaller than the reactors in submarines, is in fact being created, and in December 2017, the testing phase was completed. The Russian president has announced that Status-6 will carry nuclear weapons and is faster than most of the torpedoes used and that there is no way to stop it. It will target carriers and naval infrastructure (*Rosyjski RS-28 Sarmat, pocisk manewrujący i podwodny dron Status-6 - nowy wyścig zbrojeń?* 2018). In his address, he also warned that *Russia would consider any use of nuclear weapons against it or its allies as a nuclear attack, regardless of the power of the weapons used. The answer will be instant, with all the consequences* (*NATO odpowiada na orędzie Putina: oświadczenia nie do przyjęcia* 2018).

In addition to strategic nuclear forces, tactical nuclear weapons are being modernised. Great emphasis is also placed on the acquisition of non-strategic capabilities that can be integrated into both conventional and nuclear weapons. Examples include Iskander launchers, Kalibr manoeuvring missiles and P-800 Oniks launched from coastal Bastion missiles, among others. Given the lack of clear rules on the use of nuclear weapons, Moscow's efforts to modernise nuclear weapons may raise serious concerns in the West (Adamsky 2015).

The transformation of the land forces is based on the modernisation of the existing equipment and the acquisition of new ones. A great influence on the directions of modernisation has been exerted by the experiences from Ukraine, which showed a new tactic of creative combination of reconnaissance, armoured, mechanised and airborne forces, as well as cooperation with paramilitary formations, such as partisans or Cossacks, combined with the application of an aggressively waged information warfare. The main combat force of land forces is based on tanks, infantry combat vehicles with high mobility and increased resistance to impact, classic and rocket artillery, and radio-electronic combat (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 52). A modern T-14 Armata tank with an unmanned tower arouses general interest. Armour resistance corresponds to a uniform layer of rolled steel with a thickness of 1 m. The tank has an active defence system, which allows to detect and destroy incoming anti-tank guided missiles. The 2A82-1M cannon used in the tank is supposed to offer a much greater force than a weapon of the same calibre, used in T-90A and T-72B3M tanks. It is known that the T-14 has the ability to launch not only kinetic but also anti-tank guided missiles, such as 9K119 Refleks, which can fire up to 5 km away, or the developed target version of the missile for this 3UBK21 Sprinter with an impressive range up to 10 km (Michalik 2017). By 2020, the army will have 2300 tanks of this type (*"Armata" T-14 - tajny czołg rosyjskiej armii* 2015). In the next 8 years, the Kurganets Infantry Combat Vehicle and Boomerang Wheeled Transporter, with its enhanced capabilities to protect personnel, are to be added to the army's equipment. The main weapons are a 30-mm-calibre 2A42 cannon and four Kornet-EM guided missiles designed to fight tanks. The transporter is equipped with an automatic fire control system, which independently selects the targets to be destroyed, and in addition, the turret of the vehicle can be remotely controlled. The vehicle also has

thermal sensors, a laser rangefinder and a professional navigation system (*Kurganets-25: nowoczesny transporter rosyjskiej armii* 2015). By 2019, all artillery units will probably have been equipped with Iskander rocket systems, while the multi-leader Uragan, Smertch and Grad launchers will be gradually replaced by Tornado systems (Gorenburg 2017, p. 3). The modular set of equipment and armament of the Russian soldier, namely the Ratnik system, is also worth mentioning. The set includes several dozen elements of equipment and armament in several basic modules: combat, security, survival, communication, etc. Some of them, e.g. the Strielec communication system, gives new possibilities for Russian soldiers in terms of communication and command, which – on the other hand – forces changes in tactics. In Syria, for example the Ratnik system has been used to guide aviation (Gawęda 2016). At the tactical level, the command system of Sozvezdie is also being introduced. The technical innovations presented here testify to a change in the mentality of the Russian military and a move away from the mass army. Currently, the main modernisation effort reflects a well-trained and secured soldier who is able to operate modern, complex weapon systems (Klein 2015, p. 12).

The Navy is the most underinvested type of armed force since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's modernisation plan focusses on the construction of new submarine structures and small surface ships. As for surface ships, Russia plans to build several types of corvettes with high mobility and better weapons than those currently available. The project to build a new Super Gorshkov frigate has been delayed for a long time. Priority for modernisation has been given to nuclear submarines, which will be armed with Bulawa or Sarmatian missiles and will be directed to the North Fleet and the Pacific. It is planned to complete the construction of seven nuclear-powered Yasen-M ships and modernise six post-Soviet Oscar and Akula ships. The construction of a new, fifth-generation submarine called Husky is planned to start in mid-2020 (Gorenburg 2017, p. 4). All newly built nuclear and non-nuclear ships, as well as corvettes, frigates and other larger ships, will be equipped with Kalibr missiles (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 70). Experts' assessments indicate that Russia will not be able to build new cruisers and destroyers, let alone carriers, in the short or medium term. The modernised and acquired new ships will be directed to the most important strategic locations of the Russian Federation and will be used to strengthen coastal defences, protect important transport routes and prevent access to specific areas. Geographically, these will be the Arctic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea areas (Klein 2015, p. 13).

Over the past 7 years, the air force has received a significant number of modern aircraft. The fifth generation of the SU-57 (T-50 PAK FA), comparable to the American F-22, is currently being tested but will not be mass-produced until its engine is upgraded. It is estimated that it will be possible not earlier than in 2027. In the following years, Russia intends to acquire new SU-35 fighters. The new contract signed in 2016 includes the purchase of 50 such aircraft. Moreover, it is planned to purchase about 12-18 SU-30 SM fighters and 12-18 SU-34 strike planes, as well as fewer MiG-35 fighters each year. Helicopters will be acquired at a similar level. The construction of new structures is planned only after 2027 (Gorenburg 2017, p. 5). After 2019, production of the modernised aircraft IŁ-76 is planned at the rate of about 10–12 aircraft per year. The prototype of the light transport aircraft will probably be available after 2024. The construction of a new early warning and air command aircraft was supposed to start in 2016, but due to unknown reasons, it has been delayed. Russia is producing significant quantities of miniature unmanned aerial vehicles, but new and larger projects are expected, which can be applied at the tactical and strategic levels. Currently, the implementation of unmanned aerial vehicles in the armed forces is being worked on (*Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* 2017, p. 65). No less importance is attached to the acquisition of land- and airborne early warning and air defence systems. Work has already begun on the S-500 system, which will replace the currently implemented S-400 system. Geographical priorities for its deployment include the Western and Eastern Military Districts (Klein 2015, p. 13).

4 Conclusions

The evaluation of doctrinal documents shows that their main message is Russia's rivalry with the West. Russia's geopolitical ambitions are almost limitless, which indicates that the Kremlin will seek to change the architecture of European and Eurasian security. The main tool used to achieve these strategic goals will be the modernised armed forces with capabilities based on modern technologies and used in an unconventional way. Moscow's primary strategic objective will probably be to create a buffer zone in the south and west of Russia and to take control of the High North, as well as to broaden its borders in connection with melting Arctic ice and create a new sea route between Europe and

Asia. Russia will try to weaken transatlantic relations and force some European countries to subordinate to Moscow. The ideal situation for the Kremlin would be for the United States and Canada, or even the United Kingdom, to be completely removed from Europe and for a new European security architecture to be created under the leadership of Russia. The implementation of strategic objectives will take place through unconventional actions, including the use of various forms of fighting by modernised armed forces. Competition with the West will take the form of non-linear actions, manipulation of public opinion and strategic masking, as well as actions in the sphere of information, which will constitute the sense of asymmetric actions aimed at the most sensitive elements of Western civilisation.

Russia's war strategy will combine the impacts of all types of armed forces and troops aimed at destabilising and promoting chaos. Disinformation and destruction will facilitate the achievement of this status quo, leading to the state failing to exercise its basic functions. At the military level, Russia will use US involvement in other parts of the world to show that Europe does not have its own defence capabilities and that NATO will not be able to defend its allies. The modernisation of the Russian armed forces will aim to strengthen the nuclear capabilities and intimidate the West with conventional capabilities as well, including denied access to its own territory, precise long-range strikes, and the possibility of rapidly mobilising large armed forces capable of conducting warfare in accordance with new doctrinal solutions.

The modernisation of the armed forces, which began in 2008, was the first successful project since the breakup of the Soviet Union. A major challenge for the transformation of the armed forces was to change the mentality of thinking about how to use them, to move away from the concept of a mass army and to overcome the economic constraints that were the legacy of the post-Soviet era. The beginnings of the transformation were mainly related to the modernisation of inherited, obsolete armaments and equipment. The biggest problem for the Russian defence industry, which was successfully solved, was the improvement of submarines, the modernisation of rocket systems and the acquisition of unmanned aerial vehicle systems. No less successful were the anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence measures and the modernisation of surface ships. At present, tanks, infantry combat vehicles and combat planes have a lot of catching up to do. New weapon and equipment systems have been acquired over the past 8 years to significantly strengthen the combat power of land-based troops. The proportions of units with high combat readiness in relation to the general land forces have changed in favour of the new system. The ability of land-based troops to conduct combat operations of a warfare nature has increased. Some experts claim that Russia is now ready to conduct even two large military operations simultaneously (Giles 2017, p. 11).

The research carried out shows that Russia has changed the philosophy of strategic use of its own armed forces. The new concept integrates conventional, nuclear and unconventional elements of the force and creates a specific set of instruments that can be flexibly used depending on the operational and strategic situation. The new capabilities made available to the armed forces in the transformation process enable them to strike more precisely than in the past and achieve greater impact using less force and resources. Russian armed forces pose a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic states. Moscow deliberately intimidates the West and exploits its fears of a major conflict and thus achieves its own strategic goals. In the opinion of Marek Galeotti (2016, p. 1), Russia may apply extensive, aggressive and multidimensional military pressure and, in combination with diplomatic pressure, effectively discourage Europe from taking up security challenges in its neighbourhood. Russia has a broad arsenal of weapons at its disposal, which threatens not only Europe but also the latter's North American allies. Russian armed forces have constantly modernised strategic nuclear weapons, which can be fired from land, air and sea to strike targets located practically all over the globe. Particularly dangerous are the hardly detectable and constantly changing locations of nuclear-powered submarines, which can wait months under the ice of the Arctic for an order to launch a missile. Non-strategic nuclear weapons and constantly acquired conventional precision-guided weapons are also becoming increasingly dangerous. Here, we can mention the Iskander or Bastion sets with the Kolibr missiles carrying both nuclear and conventional charges. The question is still open: how should the West respond to Russian deterrence and intimidation?

The study concludes that Russia is now strong enough to wage conventional war on any aggressor and has enough nuclear weapons to effectively deter and discourage violations of its territorial integrity. Russia can effectively compete internationally with both NATO and China. Advantage in terms of anti-aircraft and missile defence and radio-electronic combat has already become apparent. In terms of strategic precision-guided weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as the combat capabilities of tanks and infantry vehicles, Russia is constantly reducing the distance between itself and the West. It stands out slightly only in the means of command and control automatised systems.

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