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## The Russian Federation Dominance in the International Security Environment

**Abstract:** This article presents the research results, which set out to explain the mechanisms leading to the achievement of dominance by the Russian Federation in the international security environment. In the research process, the systemic approach was applied. Analysis and criticism of the literature, non-participatory observation and case study elements were used to solve the research problems. As a result, it was determined that the theoretical basis for the Russian Federation's achievement of international dominance is the concept of new generation war. The model of the strategic influence of the Russian Federation is directed at the shaping of the security environment and includes the synchronisation of kinetic and non-kinetic measures, indirect and direct effects, the blurring of the boundaries between war and peace and the application of pressure and aggression. The Russian Federation achieves strategic dominance through asymmetry, chaos, reflexive control, and strategic deterrence. Armed forces provide a key role in asserting dominance, focused on conducting offensive activities and inflicting losses with conventional and nuclear weapons.

**Keywords:** *strategic dominance, Russian Federation, international security, armed forces, new generation war*

### Introduction

In one of his official statements in 2015, referring to Tsar Alexander III, Vladimir Putin stated that Russia's only allies are its ground troops and navy, confirming that militarisation is the key to the regime's survival. The president keeps the public convinced of Russia's greatness (Putin, 2015) and mobilises them against the eternal external enemy of the United States of America (USA) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). He argues that the West started a war against Russia more than 15 years ago, conducted mainly through non-kinetic means (Blank, 2019). Encouraged by the unpunished violation of international law in the annexation to the Russian Federation of the territory of Crimea and military successes in Syria, it seeks

to revise the international order established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially against the states that emerged as a result of its collapse. As in the case of Crimea, before intervening in Syria, V. Putin correctly calculated that the West was more risk averse than Russia and concluded that he would not oppose it. Based on this assumption, the Russian armed forces intentionally created dangerous situations in Syria by giving the impression of unpredictability to deter the West from responding (Weiss, 2019).

Understanding the importance of power in international relations, the Russian Federation is trying to constantly increase it by acquiring new operational capabilities. With modern hypersonic weapons and the modernisation of nuclear weapons, it is trying to bring about the domination of the Russian Federation not only regionally but also globally, thus creating the conditions for the establishment of a new balance of power in the international dimension (Radin & Reach, 2017, p. 87). It was reflected in the demands for a revision of the current European international order in favour of Russia and a return to relations with NATO along pre-1997 lines.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the armed forces have become Moscow's most important instrument for conducting the Russian Federation's expansive foreign policy. An analysis of Russian security and defence policy, as well as defence spending, military potential, and military activity, indicate that Russia's military power is growing for domination, aiming not only to prevent NATO and the European Union from admitting new members but above all, to expand Russian influence globally. The Russian Federation is aware that military dominance creates a certain strategic advantage and allows it to achieve the broader goals of international competition.

The literature search determined that there is limited literature available in political science that treats the relationship between states in terms of hegemony rather than domination. In security sciences, there is a lack of studies focusing on the mechanisms for achieving dominance in the international security environment. Available analyses are limited to the achievement of military superiority, ignoring other instruments of international influence and do not indicate the mechanisms of strategic influence that may lead to the domination of the Russian Federation in the future.

Based on the existing cognitive gap, the main research problem was formulated: How does the Russian Federation achieve dominance in the international security environment? The main research problem was fragmented, and the following specific problems were identified: 1) What are the sources of strategic dominance of the Russian Federation? 2) What model of strategic influence will the Russian Federation use to achieve dominance in the international security environment?

The research presented in this article aimed to explain the mechanisms used by the Russian Federation to achieve domination in the international security environment.

In order to direct the research process, a research hypothesis was formulated, expressed in the following assumptions. The theoretical basis for achieving international domination by the Russian Federation is the concept of new generation warfare. The model of Russian

influence will be based on the offensive use of armed forces, the implementation of pressure and aggression, including nuclear weapons, and the utilisation of asymmetry and reflexive control.

The research process assumes that the Russian Federation's influence is carried out with the help of instruments and tools at the disposal of the state, which forms a strictly ordered system. Therefore, a systems approach was used to study the interactions, interdependencies and relationships between the mechanisms of influence of the Russian Federation and the participants in the international security environment. Based on it, the states and processes of achieving dominance with the use of military force and other instruments of influence in the international arena in the past and present were studied, which allowed to identify a model of influence that can be applied in the future. In solving the research problems and obtaining objective qualitative data, mainly literature analysis and criticism, non-participant observation and case study elements were used. Comparative analysis and generalisation were also helpful in determining the trends and mechanisms used to dominate the international security environment by the Russian Federation. The conclusions presented in the article result from the application of inductive and deductive reasoning.

## **The Sources of Strategic Dominance of the Russian Federation**

The sources of the Russian Federation's dominance in the strategic dimension should be sought in the principles of warfare and conflict resolution. Russia's contemporary military strategy is based on historical experience and the knowledge of the most prominent Russian strategists<sup>1</sup>. Russian military thought recognises the need to use modern technologies, but traditionalists warn against exaggerating their importance in achieving victories, and they adhere to the principles of the art of war as formulated by Carl von Clausewitz and Alexander Svechin (Voyennaya).

The Russian General Staff does not view modern warfare in defensive terms. Rather, it focuses on offensive operations aimed at inflicting heavy losses, leading to the destruction and disorganisation of the enemy, which at the same time creates the conditions for gaining dominance over him. Accordingly, during the threat of war, the Russian Federation prefers pre-emptive and preventive strikes to seize the initiative and impose its own will. Despite the defensive nature of Russian military doctrine, proactive neutralisation of threats to state security is envisaged, expressed in the active defence strategy. In this context, the importance of seizing the initiative through swift and decisive offensive actions, identifying the enemy's weak points, creating threats, and inflicting heavy losses is emphasised. Dominance in a direct armed clash is achieved by gaining and maintaining strategic initiative (Russian,

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Dragomirow, Heinrich Leer, Aleksandr Swieczin, Michał Tuchaczewski, Georgii Isserson, Nikołaj Ogarkow, Sergiej Czekinow, Sergiej Bogdanow, Machmut Gariejew, Vladimir Slipchenko, Martin Vladimirov.

2019). Using kinetic and non-kinetic means of influence, strategic intimidation and coercion, and nuclear deterrent strikes are envisioned.

Achieving dominance through offensive operations has its roots in the 1920s and is based on the concept of the so-called deep operations, which emphasises conducting combined arms operations at the tactical, operational-tactical, and strategic levels. Its main creator Mikhail Tukhachevsky believed that indirect fire creates conditions for breaking the enemy's frontal defences and penetrating deep into his defences and will prevent the enemy from reconstituting the forward edge of the defence (Radin et al., 2019, p. 89). Modern for the time, the concept of conducting armed combat was an attempt to incorporate new technology into traditional Russian strategy. The essence of conducting deep operations was to prevent the enemy from reaching the forward edge of the defences of second strikes and retreats and to paralyse the troops by fire throughout the depth of the battle grouping. The indirect fire was to create conditions for executing manoeuvres and changing combat grouping of own troops, as well as to conduct deep penetration of the combat grouping of the opposing side. Moreover, the operation's goal was not to achieve victory in a single battle or even operation but rather in several operations conducted simultaneously, which ultimately led to the strategic defeat of the enemy (Russia, 2017, p. 34). The capability to conduct active operations in the enemy's deep rear was the basis for creating elite airborne troops and the key to the Russian paradigm of conducting non-linear offensive warfare (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2). The contemporary Russian understanding of non-linear warfare (Galeotti, 2016) combines Soviet deep operations theory and reflexive control theory to create what is known as a masked strike blitzkrieg. To this end, Moscow uses elite branches of the armed forces and a wide range of non-military means, concealing its true geopolitical intentions and covertly influencing the decision-making algorithms of strategic rivals (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2).

As for conducting active defensive activities, they were the opposite of passive defence in the early 1920s. The most prominent Russian commanders did not prefer this type of strategic activity because it required the possession of considerable forces. The active defence was considered an indecisive form of defensive activity. Turning to passive defence, which included using well-fortified positions, was advisable only when it was necessary to hold off the attacker with smaller forces, which allowed to gain the time necessary to prepare offensive actions. It was believed that active defence was only viable when the defending side had at least the same military strength as the attacking side. Therefore, it was used extremely rarely (Voprosy).

After World War II, the term active defence evolved and was understood as activity in defence, which is closer to its modern meaning. Active defence meant uninterrupted action by the defending forces against the enemy. It assumed defeating the enemy by applying intense fire, disrupting offensive preparations, holding successive defensive positions by manoeuvrable second throws and retreats, and executing counterattacks against enemy forces breaking through defensive lines (Aktivnost'). In this context, it is worth noting two contemporary principles of Russian military art, which can be considered components of

active defence. These are: conducting manoeuvre defence and non-contact warfare, the essence of which consists in executing precise strikes from a distance against selected objects of critical infrastructure located throughout the territory of the attacked state (Banasik, 2021, p. 135).

Modern Russian strategy is naturally inspired by modern technologies and forms of their use, but it does not reflect an approach to war based on denying access to one's own territory. It is based on the assumption that the initial period of the war will be decisive, therefore, according to theoretical assumptions, the main effort will be directed at pushing back, destroying and disorganising and slowing down the attacking troops, which is supposed to prevent the attacker from realising his preferred way of conducting the armed struggle, and failure to achieve a quick victory is supposed to lower the political determination to continue fighting (Kofman, 2019a). Even though the Russian General Staff seeks to raise the cost of access to the theatre of operations and limit troop manoeuvre, it is still assumed that a hypothetical US air and space blitzkrieg will not be blocked in the early stages of the conflict. Therefore, the goal will be to block troops and thwart the conduct of offensive operations, destroy the adversary's ability to fight, and claim victory in a direct military clash. In short, it is assumed that Russian strategic operations will raise the adversary's cost of conducting operations high enough to force him to deescalate the conflict. If this is not possible with general-purpose troops, the possibility of using non-strategic nuclear weapons is always envisaged. Thus, in the Russian Federation, pre-emptive and preventive strikes are preferred to conducting positional defences to seize the initiative and bring about ultimate domination (Kofman, 2019a).

## **Model of Russian Strategic Influence in the International Security Environment**

The Russian concept of strategic influence is oriented toward shaping the security environment during the build-up to conflict and achieving success in international competition during the initial war period. In Russian military thought, there is no notion of a war based solely on conventional solutions, nor is there a belief that it is short-lived. Moscow has always assumed the prospect of using nuclear weapons (Kofman, 2019b, p. 4). In past conflicts, Russia has used military force on a reasonable sufficiency basis, not seeking numerical superiority but rather coercive power to achieve dominance and desired political goals. The political-military conflicts of the last decade have demonstrated some effectiveness in combining indirect action with conventional military force, but the hard military force has determined the ultimate outcomes (Kofman, 2019b, p. 4).

The Russian Federation achieves strategic dominance by applying the concept of new-generation war (Fabian, 2019), which reflects Russian trends of transforming quantitative changes into qualitative ones with the acquisition of new operational capabilities and developing strategies for their use. The influence model is comprehensive, which means

using military and non-military forms of influence, emphasising information tools and controlled chaos (Bartosh, 2018, p. 12). The war scenario is built based on the strategy of exhaustion, which causes the conflict takes the form of a continuum. In Russia's new generation war, there is no provision for respecting the norms of international law, and there is no concept of a front or a hinterland. The line between war and peace is blurred, and the scope of aggression is unlimited. Such a model of war is closely related to long-term influence in the informational and psychological sphere long before it begins, which is why the new generation war is considered permanent. Moreover, it is believed that forward-looking information technologies will set a new level of quantitative and qualitative domination since information weapons will enable impact on a spatial scale previously unavailable and will create qualitatively new threats. It is assumed that the use of futuristic information technologies by the Russian Federation will allow for a radical transformation of all spheres of life of the society it will affect (Bartosh, 2018, p. 12).

Recognising the stronger states and the unfavourable disproportions existing in selected systems of international influence, Russia will seek to achieve and maintain strategic dominance through the advantages offered by the phenomenon of asymmetry. In this case, a less costly impact than open warfare will be key, relying on the Russian Federation's use of information operations capabilities, cyber operations, the creation of A2/AD anti-access zones, and nuclear strike systems (Kagan et al., 2019, p. 32). The operationalisation of an asymmetric approach to international competition and the achievement of dominance will materialise, as it has so far, in a war in the grey zone<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that asymmetry is not universal but relative, which can sometimes obscure the picture of perceived reality. It means that the same power can be asymmetric against one side and symmetric against the other, which forces a certain strategic dynamic. Russia takes advantage of this differentiation by engaging on the global stage asymmetrically where it is weak and symmetrically, mainly locally where it is strong (Bristol, 2021). Overall, the Russian development of asymmetric thought is based on understanding the weaknesses inherent in an adversary's thinking, decision-making, and national interests. It is also based on understanding the evolving nature of military and non-military operations

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<sup>2</sup> The term gray zone warfare also refers to the deliberate, multidimensional impact of a state below the threshold of aggressive use of armed force. In this type of conflict, according to F. Hoffman, a number of national and regional instruments of influence are applied in an integrated manner and through ambiguity, operating below the threshold of open conflict, specific strategic objectives are achieved. To increase the effectiveness of military force, proxy subdivisions without clear signs of nationality are used, making it impossible to unmask them (Hoffman, 2016, p. 26). Phillip Kapusta's understanding of grey zone warfare is slightly different. His definition relating to challenges arising from the informal economy is more general and includes non-state actors. In Kapusta's understanding, the informal economy involves competitive interactions between and within states and non-state actors that lie between the duality of war and peace. This duality is the cause of ambiguity. The ambiguities arise from the nature of the conflict, the uncertainty of the actors involved, the uncertainty of the policy and regulatory aspects (Kapusta, 2015, p. 20).

conducted in the information age and the resulting vulnerabilities. The sources of Russian asymmetric thought lie in but are not limited to surprise, systemic warfare<sup>3</sup>, disorganisation and chaos, and indirect operations (Thomas, 2019, pp. 5–12). Asymmetric political, economic, informational, technological, and environmental campaigns, most often in the form of indirect operations and non-military means, are intended to be used extensively to nullify the adversary's advantage in armed struggle. They mainly involve using various forms, methods and techniques of non-military influence, including information warfare, to neutralise the adversary's actions without using kinetic weapons (Chekinov & Bogdanov, 2013, pp. 15–17).

One mechanism that serves this purpose is reflexive control. Under this mechanism, strategic dominance is achieved by the adversary making predetermined decisions and actions unfavourable to the adversary. This process relies on crafted information messages that distort the perception of the world (Ajir & Vaillant, 2018, p. 72). In this context, reflexive control is a key asymmetric enabler of critical benefits for the influencing party. These mainly consist of neutralising the adversary's strengths by forcing it to choose courses of action conducive to achieving the Russian Federation's desired political goals (Giles et al., 2018, p. 4). The informational context for the decisions made is also created by agitation, understood as one of the forms of informational-psychological influence on the emotional level to lead to specific activities (Giles, 2016, p. 21). Reflexive control is a form of warfare in which the attack does not destroy the enemy from the outside but leads it to self-destruct through self-disorganisation and self-disorientation. Proponents of this type of influence seek to find weak links in the adversary in the realm of knowledge, ideas, and practices simultaneously central to their decisions. For example, carefully constructed false messages secretly introduced into the information system, taking the form of rumours, hoaxes, political manipulation, and other forms of influencing the opponent's cognitive sphere, are created and used (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 7). Effective reflexive control over an adversary is an art rather than a science. It makes it possible to exert the widest possible influence on the adversary's operational plans, assessment of the current situation, and the way the adversary conducts war. In this context, it is tantamount to producing a certain model behaviour in a system subjected to reflexive control (Thomas, 2004, pp. 241–243) and aims to achieve dominance over the adversary.

The Russian Federation also uses nuclear weapons to achieve global dominance. Russian strategists combine deterrence with containment and coercion, intended to make a potential adversary fearful and apprehensive (Bruusgaard, 2016, p. 16). It could be seen during Russia's war with Ukraine. On February 27, 2022, Putin put the nuclear forces on special alert mode (Karmanau et al., 2022), which meant that strategic nuclear missiles had been deployed on

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<sup>3</sup> The Russian General Staff perceives warfare as systemic or nodal, with the military system having critical nodes that can destroy its ability to fight. Similarly, a political system has elements essential to its political will or determination to deal with a crisis (Kofman, 2019b, p. 4).

their means of delivery and had reached readiness for use (Hastings, 2022). By threatening to use nuclear weapons, Moscow wants to discourage Western governments from supporting Ukraine more substantially and intimidate Western public opinion. On the other hand, Russia's successful strategic deterrence creates favourable conditions for the continuation of conventional war (Horovitz & Wachs, 2022, p. 1). Third, V. Putin's statements suggest that the functions of the nuclear arsenal go beyond the narrow defensive role defined in the Russian Federation's official doctrinal documents. It can be assumed that the Kremlin is using nuclear weapons (Hastings, 2022) as a tool to achieve expansive political goals. Indeed, under the nuclear umbrella, Putin is shielding a conventional assault on Ukraine and pursuing a strategy of total annihilation. At the same time, he is effectively discouraging NATO from interfering in a war he considers local. Thus, with the help of nuclear weapons, the Russian Federation achieves the goals of strategic intimidation and manages the escalation of the conflict (Horovitz & Wachs, 2022, p. 1).

The Russian Federation believes that strategic deterrence can be achieved through various strategic instruments and tools. A great deal of flexibility in this regard is provided by non-nuclear and non-military capabilities in addition to nuclear weapons (Fink, 2017, p. 3), as well as the indirect use of armed forces (Kokoshin et al., 2015, p. 5). It makes the Russian concept of deterrence holistic. On the other hand, it can be applied in peacetime, crises, and war. However, given the wide range of instruments and tools of influence at the disposal of the Russian Federation, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between strategic deterrence conducted in peacetime and wartime. It should be believed that deterrence conducted in different states of the state's functioning has been deliberately distinguished, as nuclear, non-nuclear, military and non-military deterrence complement the strengths and weaknesses of the Russian Federation in peacetime, crises, and war (Encyclopedia). Thus, Russian strategic deterrence can be considered to take the form of a continuum. Merging all potential threats to Russian interests into a single security domain and blurring the line between war and peace simultaneously leads to using coercive and deterrent instruments (Lucassen, 2018, p. 19).

Although the new generation of wars reflects a combination of classical and asymmetric modes of conflict resolution, where military actions are short and decisive, it is believed that the Russian Federation will continue to refine the theory of armed confrontation. The priority of military strategy is dominance by increasing the combat power of troops, mainly by making qualitative changes and high readiness for armed combat (Monaghan, 2020, p. 4). Admittedly, it is believed that non-military means influence the course and outcome of the war, but these are separate activities with their own strategies, means, and resources that the military should coordinate rather than direct (Monaghan, 2020, p. 4). Therefore, in the future military strategy, the key role will be played by pre-emptive actions to neutralise threats and limited military actions aimed at dominance, conditioning the implementation of tasks to protect and promote the national interests of the Russian Federation. These military strategy features are part of a broader strategic perspective that will be dominated by ever-



increasing competition for resources, trade routes, and market access. Therefore, a condition for future global dominance will be the need for the Russian Federation to possess new power projection capabilities (Monaghan, 2020, p. 4), which it does not possess today.

## **Conclusions**

The research confirmed that the West currently does not face a new Russian military strategy but a new, comprehensive strategic thinking aimed at domination of the Russian Federation in all possible spheres of international competition. The sources of this domination lie in historical experience and the achievements of theoreticians and practitioners of the art of war. The armed forces play a key role in maintaining international dominance, which, thanks to the acquisition of new operational capabilities, are gaining a qualitative advantage over their strategic rivals. The Russian Federation prefers to conduct strategic offensive actions and impose its own will. The essence of the Russian paradigm of offensive non-linear and non-contact warfare is the conduct of activity at the deep rear of the adversary, which involves the execution of precision strikes from a distance against critical infrastructure facilities located throughout the territory of the attacked state.

The Russian Federation's strategic influence model aims to shape the security environment and includes synchronising kinetic and non-kinetic actions, indirect and direct effects, blurring the lines between war and peace, and applying pressure and aggression. Innovative strategic thinking expressed in the new generation theory of war focuses on achieving international dominance by exploiting the phenomena of asymmetry, chaos, reflexive control and strategic deterrence. It is estimated that the future strategy of international domination will focus on maintaining the strategic initiative by conducting pre-emptive strikes and inflicting losses using conventional and nuclear weapons. At the same time, it is assessed that the future focus will be on limited military action in favour of other non-military actors capable of neutralising threats and protecting and promoting the national interests of the Russian Federation.

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