

The Russian Military Doctrine of 2014

A Threat Analysis for Georgia

Written in Tbilisi prison in 2017

"Mass media encompass a multitude of roles. On one hand, it can serve as a tool, while on the other, it has the potential to inflict significant harm. Today, it possesses the ability, when wielded by the wrong hands, to act as an investigator, a prosecutor, a judge, and an executioner simultaneously. I am concerned that we may slowly become individuals who wield these weapons in the most detrimental manner" - Defense minister of Russia

Introduction:

The formulation of Russian military doctrine stands apart from its Georgian counterpart or security concept due to its characteristic consensus among military, political, and academic spheres. Notably, the "Gorbachev Military Doctrine" of 1987 serves as a significant exception, which warrants further discussion, as elaborated below.

My task entails conducting a concise analysis of various facets of the Russian military doctrine from the perspective of Georgia, considering Georgian interests in direct contrast to those of a neighboring state endowed with a robust security apparatus. The distinction lies in the prioritization between a small, occupied, immediate neighbor like Georgia and a non-immediate neighbor fortified with significant security measures. Notably, esteemed strategists from nations such as the United States or Britain, when analyzing Russia's military doctrine, typically first scrutinize its own formidable security system, followed by global concerns, regional dynamics, and only then delve into Russia's influence on neighboring states and smaller countries in its immediate vicinity.

While I do not assert superior comprehension of the Russian military doctrine compared to others, nor do I insinuate disregard among analysts engrossed in contemporary Western strategic analytics, it's important to acknowledge that equal attention isn't naturally allocated to every aspect outlined in the doctrine. For instance, while intercontinental armaments and nuclear strategic forces garner significant attention, comparatively lesser emphasis might be placed on clauses such as the one introduced after the 2014 revisions, concerning "Interaction with the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia, common defense and security to ensure," a surprising addition absent in the 2010 edition.

Moreover, another significant factor to consider is the phrase highlighted in the epigraph, attributed to the Russian Minister of Defense, which imbues the military doctrine with diverse hybrid force implications across different nations. For instance, when comparing Georgia and hypothetically Canada, the impact of such weaponry can vary drastically. In Georgia's context, these weapons could potentially pose an

existential threat, not to mention the challenges of relatively low-grade military-political tasks. Conversely, in the case of Canada, leveraging such tactics might only serve to shape the "image of Russia" or, at most, spark political discussions akin to those witnessed in America today, representing an indirect attempt to influence elections

It's not surprising that the thesis articulated in the doctrine carries varying degrees of significance. According to this thesis, the presence of a government in neighboring states that opposes Russian interests is deemed a direct military threat. This declaration is particularly applicable to states sharing a direct border with Russia. While this formulation may indirectly, albeit minimally, impact global security in certain cases, Russia essentially denies these neighboring states the right to self-determination.

Hence, the Russian military doctrine is structured and articulated in a manner that underscores the necessity of interpreting it from a Georgian perspective. The Russian casus belli resonates differently in different linguistic and geopolitical contexts.

„Умом Россию не понять,

Аршином общим не измерить:

У ней особенная статья —

В Россию можно только верить“.

Фёдор Тютчев

Fyodor Tyutchev:

"Russia cannot be understood by the mind,

Nor can it be measured by common yardstick:

It has a special status —

Russia can only be believed in."

Russian military strategic thinking, as a direct consequence of documents like the military doctrine, represents a truly distinctive and independent phenomenon shaped significantly by geography, cultural, and ideological factors. The vast expanse of Russia and its geographical layout pose the primary challenge, dominating military strategizing with a constant apprehension of vast borders amidst a disproportionate population distribution.

The stark contrast in population density between Russia and countries like Germany is striking: with only 8 people per square kilometer in Russia compared to 130 in Germany. This demographic reality exacerbates the challenge, with 78% of Russia's population occupying a mere 23% of its territory,

contributing to 70% of the GDP. Consequently, over time, Russia has cultivated a perspective where its remote territories and borders are perceived as distant and defended, shaping the notion of "buffer zones" as a means to extend influence.

Ironically, Russia's own expansive and vulnerable borders prompt the expansion of unofficial buffer zones, viewing immediate neighbors as living shields. This perspective rationalizes Russia's continuous interest in annexing additional territories. The Russo-Finnish war stands as a testament to such thinking, where Russia engaged in a large-scale conflict to establish a buffer zone around Leningrad.

Despite claims of defensive military policies, Russia's approach reflects an aggressive defensive doctrine, dictated by the realities of geography and economics. This approach remains consistent regardless of Russia's leadership, embodying a military logic akin to Israel's doctrine of swiftly moving any potential conflict into enemy territory.

Indeed, beyond the military logic shaped by geography, there exists another factor that imbues Russia's military approach with a distinctly political dimension, setting it apart from, for instance, Israel's strategy. This factor underscores a shift beyond the mere concept of an offensive-oriented defense doctrine, edging toward a more imperialistic nature.

Central to this dynamic is the intrinsic nature of the Russian state itself, which continues to embody the concept of a "prison of nations." This characterization reflects the historical and contemporary reality of Russia as a federation comprising numerous ethnic groups and nationalities, often with complex and contentious relationships. This internal dynamic, coupled with Russia's historical aspirations for regional and global influence, injects a political dimension into its military approach, extending beyond mere defense strategies.

Therefore, while geography may provide the framework for military thinking, it is the political landscape, characterized by Russia's historical and contemporary identity as a multi-ethnic state with imperial ambitions, that amplifies the political content of its military doctrine.

Over time, geographical factors have spurred a significant "war migration" from Asia into the heartland of Russia. This phenomenon has consistently fueled Russia's policy of border expansion, exemplified by its historical expansion into the Caucasus region. As Russia navigates the search for geographical boundaries and barriers, its nationalist fervor has rendered it a "prison of nations," constrained within artificially created natural geographic confines.

Within the contemporary Russian state, where ethnic Russians now represent a diminishing proportion of the population, this reality poses an additional burden and concern. The concept of a "prison of nations

" underscores the delicate balance required to prevent internal fractures. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a pivotal moment in Russian military thinking, highlighting the vulnerability of the state to internal pressures.

However, it remains a pertinent reality today, serving as a fundamental element shaping Russian military doctrine. As long as Russia persists in its current form, the "prison of nations" narrative will endure as a central consideration in its strategic calculus, reflecting the complex interplay between geography, demographics, and political dynamics

During Yeltsin's era, his statement "take as much sovereignty as you can carry" symbolized the unraveling of the Soviet Union, offering encouragement to constituent nations to assert their independence. However, Yeltsin likely never envisioned that Russia itself would face a similar fate. Ironically, his words were later seized upon by Chechens in their struggle for sovereignty, a conflict that Yeltsin's administration brutally suppressed.

This historical context has left Russia with a lingering imperative to foster and magnify external threats at the national level. The rationale behind this strategy is clear: by diverting attention to external dangers, the risk of internal conflict diminishes. As Nicholas Spykman astutely observed, "Only during their decline and weakness do states fight at home, and when they are strong, they fight on other people's land." This sentiment succinctly captures the essence of modern Russian military thinking, which underpins its aggressive military doctrine.

From Gorbachev to Putin's Doctrine

In addressing this subheading, it's crucial to highlight a significant distinction that may initially appear unconventional but stems from empirical analysis: Gorbachev's relatively liberal military doctrine was predominantly shaped by his singular vision, lacking robust institutional support, whereas Putin's autocratic doctrine reflects a consolidated effort involving military and academic spheres. Gorbachev's doctrine bore the imprint of his personal beliefs, whereas Putin's doctrine embodies the collective perspective of the Russian state.

Despite maintaining an equal stance towards both leaders, acknowledging their detrimental impact on the Georgian people and the limitation of Georgia's freedom, and assessing their strategic acumen critically, it's noteworthy that Gorbachev's doctrine, which initially leaned towards defense in 1987.

In 1987, at the UN General Assembly, Gorbachev stated: "It is clear that the threat of force can no longer be, and should not be, an instrument of foreign policy." In his book on „Perestroika“, he went even further with the phrase: "Clausewitz's view that war is the continuation of politics by other means - a view that was classic in its day - is backward for today. It should go on the library shelf."

Gorbachev's criticism of Clausewitz is a complete delusion from a purely military-political point of view, but a delusion that contributed to the collapse of the "Evil Empire".

It's crucial to emphasize that Gorbachev, alongside a small circle of associates, rather than Soviet military thinking, utilized concepts related to nuclear weapons to draw conclusions. These conclusions posited that nuclear armaments rendered traditional warfare obsolete. However, merely six years later, President Yeltsin's 1993 doctrine for an independent, non-communist Russia sanctioned the possibility of a nuclear first strike under certain circumstances. This marked a significant shift towards a more aggressive doctrine, a development unforeseen during the final years of the Soviet Union's existence.

Indeed, the evolution of modern Russian aggressive military doctrine commenced amidst the euphoria following the Soviet Union's collapse, with a weakened Yeltsin administration forging closer ties with the West. This transformation represents a stark departure from the initial optimism surrounding the post-Soviet era.

The subsequent Russian doctrine, adopted in 2000 during Putin's presidency, underscored the threats emanating from ongoing conflicts in Russia's immediate vicinity. Moreover, it viewed the policies of NATO and the European Union as potential destabilizing factors for Russia's security. A notable offspring of this doctrine was the emergence of the concept of "informational aggression."

A pivotal aspect of the doctrine centered on the comprehensive reform of the Russian Armed Forces. Notably, this initiative has demonstrated significant progress, signifying a tangible commitment to enhancing military capabilities and readiness.

From Surkov to Shoigu

A prominent aspect of the 2000 edition of the military doctrine was the emphasis on army reform, a matter that wasn't merely mythical. Despite initial skepticism from objective observers and doubts among many Russian generals regarding its effectiveness, the ongoing process of reform persisted.

The tenure of Ministers Surkov and Shoigu witnessed two significant tests for the Russian army: the 2008 war with Georgia and the annexation of Crimea. The dire state of the Russian army during the Georgian invasion is evident from internal criticisms, which span from extremely chauvinistic experts to balanced observers, all expressing unequivocal negativity. This internal critique underscores the failure in leadership during the 2008 conflict, as aptly articulated by Andrey Sushentsov, an expert at MGIMO and the Moscow International Analytical Center, who, despite expressing a pro-Russian stance, provides a measured assessment:

"The 2008 Russia-Georgia war served as a bitter lesson for the Russian military, exposing numerous deficiencies in military organization, armaments, and outdated concepts of warfare."

In specialized circles, the distinction between the Russian units that invaded Georgia and those that invaded Crimea is noticeable, particularly evident at the operational level. However, even for unofficial

observers, discerning the contrast is as simple as observing the equipment of the aggressor's soldiers. Russian troops in Georgia were often poorly equipped and undernourished, presenting a stark juxtaposition to the well-equipped and well-fed Russian soldiers in Crimea. While visualization alone isn't a robust criterion for evaluating military effectiveness, in this instance, it parallels the evident progress in operational refinement within the Russian army.

My intention in this article is not to delve into the details or discussions surrounding the Russian-Georgian war. Instead, I aim to highlight a technical aspect present in the 2000 doctrine that persists in today's edition. This aspect pertains to the concept of RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs), which has been a dominant feature in recent Russian military doctrines.

RMA, originating from Western military thought, embodies fundamental changes in warfare characterized by significant technological advancements and innovative doctrinal and operational concepts. While RMA has been prevalent in Western military-strategic discourse since the latter half of the 20th century, its prominence waned temporarily due to the asymmetric forms of warfare witnessed in the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns. However, it's essential to recognize that RMA traces its roots back to the Soviet Union, specifically Marshal Ograkov's concept of Military Technical Revolution (MTR).

Marshal Ograkov envisioned revolutionary changes within the Soviet Army driven by the proliferation of information technology. He foresaw the modernization of military capabilities through the operational integration of technological advancements. In his vision, both NATO and the Soviet armies were poised at the precipice of such a revolution, wherein computers, space capabilities, long-range missile complexes, and the development of suitable doctrines and operational concepts would play pivotal roles.

The concept of RMA, which integrates new technologies and strategic concepts, continues to drive Russian military doctrine forward. Regrettably, the progress of Russian military capabilities in this realm has been gradual but steady. As a consequence of such developments, the notion of "hybrid war" has emerged, a topic we will explore further shortly. Before delving into that, it's essential to briefly discuss Serdyukov's reforms, which have played a pivotal role in shaping the current state of the Russian army. Without these reforms, the Russian military would likely be significantly weaker and less adaptable than it is today.

Serdyukov stands out as one of the most contentious figures in Russian history, marred by allegations of corruption and unpopular reform efforts within the military. Interestingly, his unpopularity wasn't solely due to corruption, as evidenced by Defense Minister Shoigu's widespread popularity despite facing similar accusations.

Serdyukov was one of the most unpopular defense ministers in Russian history, Additionally, his choice to wear civilian attire, unlike Shoigu's more traditional approach resembling a civilian manager rather than a military general, further fueled discontent among the Russian military elite.

Nevertheless, despite the controversies surrounding Serdyukov, his reforms were instrumental in shaping the trajectory of the Russian military doctrine. Without his efforts, the document would have remained little more than a theoretical construct.

Surprisingly, Serdyukov's reforms were aimed at aligning the Russian army with a NATO model. A comprehensive analysis of these reforms, focusing on modernization and mobility, might give the impression of a nation earnestly striving to adhere to "NATO standards" without mentioning Russia or considering the scale of the numbers involved.

Its mission was to transition towards a flexible, highly lethal, and agile army. However, for an institution steeped in grandeur and accustomed to large-scale operations, navigating this transition necessitated making painful, massive decisions that would impact tens of thousands of military personnel

As part of Serdyukov's reforms, the officer corps underwent significant downsizing, reducing from 400,000 to 150,000 officers. This reduction saw 866 of the 1,107 active generals remain, along with 9,114 instead of 22,663 colonels. Similarly, the number of majors decreased from 99,550 to 25,000, while captains dropped from 90,000 to 40,000.

At first glance, these changes might seem like "cuts," as they were labeled in the Russian army. However, they represented a rational standardization. Concurrently with the reductions, there was a targeted increase in staff where necessary. For instance, the number of active lieutenants saw a rise of 10,000, and the introduction of sergeant's contract service marked a historic first for Russia. Additionally, there was an attempt to move away from a strictly hierarchical command and control system, favoring a more flexible corps of lieutenants and sergeants

The true cornerstone of fundamental reforms becomes evident through the decisions undertaken in the realm of military education. Numerous military schools, characterized by redundancy and complexity, underwent consolidation and streamlining. Particularly noteworthy were the substantial content changes introduced across military educational institutions. For instance, the General Staff Academy abolished 17 redundant departments while establishing two new ones: the first focused on military art and the second on national security and defense.

Equally impressive were the revisions made to curricula and programs. Serdyukov's reforms mandated that the first year of military schools be fully dedicated to military organizational, operational, and strategic studies. Subsequently, military topics were to comprise no more than 20% of the curriculum in subsequent years, with the remaining 80% dedicated to "civilian subjects." To bolster these courses, experts from Russia's top higher education institutions were invited to deliver lectures.

Simultaneously, the Russian Armed Forces grappled with the painful repercussions of reducing the astronomically bloated staffing system of the General Staff. The Ministry of Defense experienced a substantial reduction from 27,873 employees to just 8,500 staff units. This reduction was followed by a 40% decrease in personnel within the military intelligence service.

Transitioning to Western-style one-year staff and command courses was no less irritating for the acting officers.

Understandably, these initiatives, their conduct, initiation, and implementation have met with enormous displeasure within the Army and Navy. To illustrate the extent of the discontent, it will suffice to say that Serdukov was openly criticized by serving officers, generals and admirals, as well as experts. For example, former Minister of Defense Grachov sharply criticized the "transition to the organizational structure of the American-style brigade". Without going too far in the description of this opposition process, it is enough to recall that Minister Serdukov was asked to resign three times by the Chief of the General Staff due to the incompatibility of his visions.

I do not like to describe the process of these correct reforms, but the fact is stubborn, the result of these sensible reforms is already visible, and the greater result is yet to come.

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." Sun Tsu

When the foundations of vital reforms were largely laid and as much as could be accomplished, Russia's most unpopular defense minister, Serdukov, was replaced by Russia's most popular defense minister, Shoigu.

The first noticeable change was Shoigu donning the uniform of an army general. Additionally, he undertook a few populist measures, albeit minor ones that failed to adequately address the underlying issues. For instance, he reinstated the position of "praporshik," albeit in a limited capacity. Some brigades reverted to the divisional structure, but the changes were minimal.

It's important to note that these adjustments, while legally permissible, primarily amounted to political maneuvering. The groundwork for these reforms had been laid during Medvedev's presidency under Serdyukov's tenure. Upon Putin's return to the presidency, Shoigu initiated the practical implementation of aspects of the military doctrine, particularly focusing on the procurement of new weapons for the army and navy until 2020.

Currently, a \$600 billion rearmament effort is underway, encompassing a vast array of equipment, including 2,300 new tanks, 2,000 artillery systems, 10 Iskander brigades, 10 S-300 anti-aircraft brigades, 56 S-400 battalions for space forces, 38 S-500 battalions, 600 new airplanes, 1,100 helicopters for the forces, 30,000 armored vehicles, several dozen ships, several dozen submarines, and various other components. It's important to note that all of this equipment is brand new, representing additions and enhancements to the existing arsenal.

Personally, I don't find the technical aspects of the doctrine particularly captivating, especially given my limited means to track them. However, what's crucial to acknowledge is that this large-scale rearmament constitutes a priority for global players. Unfortunately, it's due to this emphasis on military hardware that vital provisions of the military doctrine, particularly those crucial for countries like Georgia, may be overlooked.

However, in relation to the process of technical rearmament, we must mention the widespread fuss about the purchase of a French helicopter carrier., notably the Mistral. This raises intriguing considerations. The

doctrine guiding the creation and operational deployment of Russian strategic and tactical forces typically excludes the integration of non-Russian military equipment into the arsenal, particularly in strategic-level armaments. This is driven by both security requirements and the support of Russia's own military-industrial complex.

Considering this doctrinal stance alongside the Russian military fleet's orientation toward submarines, it's reasonable to question whether the acquisition of the Mistral-type helicopter carrier directly served Russian military needs. From a practical standpoint, it seems almost as absurd as the United States purchasing a Russian anti-aircraft system that Russia could potentially disable, rendering it ineffective.

Moreover, at the time of the Mistral purchase, Russia had already demonstrated its capability to develop much more powerful and technologically advanced naval assets independently. Therefore, the acquisition of the Mistral from France appears more like a political agreement, wherein Russia offered a "state-political bribe" to France through the French military-industrial complex for political purposes.

Those who perceive the Mistral purchase as a genuine military contract might as well consider it standard practice for a winery in Kakhet, Georgia to purchase German grapes for \$10 per kilogram.

Attention should also be drawn to a seemingly inconsequential aspect - tactically, the Mistral serves as a helicopter landing platform, designed to deploy helicopters in close proximity to a potential adversary's territory. During the negotiation of this contract, Georgian experts speculated about the possibility of a significant Russian helicopter assault on Georgia. However, this assumption overlooks a crucial point: Russia possesses an ample natural platform in the form of the neighboring North Caucasus, from which it can launch a much swifter and larger-scale helicopter assault.

For instance, in the event of a storming of Tbilisi, the Mistral's airstrip offers limited and vulnerable capabilities, while the North Caucasus provides virtually unlimited potential. Helicopters launched from the North Caucasus can reach Georgia's military and political nerve center much more rapidly, return for refueling and re-arming quicker, and operate continuously. In comparison, the Mistral's capabilities pale in comparison to the resources available from the North Caucasus.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to dismiss the Mistral's potential threat to Georgia entirely. It does present an additional risk, albeit one far less significant than estimated by Georgian experts in recent years.

Acting Doctrine 2014

Regarding the recent Russian military doctrine, the 2014 edition caught my attention, especially since I had previously reviewed the 2010 version. While the two editions share considerable similarities and are

nearly identical in content, there's a notable discrepancy in length: the 2010 edition comprises 53 articles, whereas the 2014 edition contains 58 articles.

What struck me about the latest doctrine is the explicit mention of the "Republic of Abkhazia" and "Republic of South Ossetia." This departure from the usual practice, where no specific state is named individually (as the doctrine typically employs collective abbreviations for threats such as NATO and allies like the СНГ and ОДКБ), is significant. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are explicitly referenced three times in the doctrine, a departure from its usual structure and tone.

By the time the 2010 military doctrine was adopted, the Russian-Georgian war loomed on the horizon, accompanied by Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and Ossetia's independence, a move that contravened international norms. Simultaneously, there was a prominent anti-Russian sentiment within the Georgian government embodied by the "National Movement". Surprisingly, Abkhazia and Ossetia remained conspicuously absent from that doctrine.

It wasn't until the "Georgian Dream" came into power, publicly announcing its intent to engage in dialogue with Russia, that a notable shift occurred. The establishment of the "Abashidze-Karasini" dialogue format, though personally unacceptable to me, bore a specific and tangible name. With the Georgian government's proactive efforts to alleviate tensions and adopt a conciliatory stance towards Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia found a place in the 2014 Russian military doctrine.

Compared to Russia's recognition of their independence in 2008, their inclusion in the 2014 doctrine marks a significantly more alarming development. Unlike before, the 2014 doctrine doesn't consider whether entities are recognized by others. Instead, it pledges military assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, treating any non-violent intervention in their "internal affairs" as a direct threat of war. While the doctrine's threats aren't explicitly confined to the three articles mentioning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the document's unified tone implies that any action resonating with Georgia's interests could be construed as a provocation warranting military response, potentially escalating into conflict.

Below, I aim to analyze these articles, starting with a seemingly innocuous example that many in Georgia might not directly associate with war, but the Russian doctrine perceives differently. Let's consider a hypothetical scenario: during one of the ongoing, unrecognized elections in separatist Abkhazia, a faction opposing Russia's interests emerges victorious, or a change in the "self-proclaimed government" occurs due to internal unrest in Abkhazia. According to the doctrine, such an event automatically triggers a war threat.

Article 12 of the doctrine stipulates that any change in government within neighboring states whose interests clash with Russia's constitutes a threat of war. Since Abkhazia is considered a neighbor by Russia, the emergence of an anti-Russian government there is seen as a direct threat to Russia. It's worth noting that Article 12 also extends to Tbilisi, but we'll delve into that later. At this juncture, I'm merely illustrating

that if individuals in Sukhumi, irrespective of Tbilisi's influence, seek alignment with Georgia, Russia denies the separatists this option as well.

Consider another scenario, one that modern Georgian society might view as a “wise” policy rather than a cause for war. Let's suppose there exists a political group or non-governmental organization in any occupied territory, be it Abkhazia or Ossetia, that seeks reintegration with Georgia. According to the doctrine, the financing of such non-violent groups from Georgia is not merely a diplomatic or civil action, but it's considered a modern form of warfare.

This perspective is detailed in the 15th article of the doctrine, which outlines that external financing of both political forces and non-governmental organizations constitutes a form of waging war. Notably, the doctrine considers any funding from Georgia to support public activities in Abkhazia as "external financing". It's important to reiterate that these activities are non-violent in nature. However, the doctrine equates non-violent actions with acts of war and perceives them as a threat of war through the lens of hybrid warfare.

By incorporating Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the doctrine, the realm of acceptable conduct is narrowed beyond rational bounds.

According to paragraph "Д" of Article 12, any interference in the internal affairs of Russia's allied states is deemed a threat of war. Currently, both occupied regions are considered "Russia's allied states." Thus, any attempt by Georgia to intervene in their "internal" affairs could potentially trigger war without hesitation. This means that even without funding separatist elections, any involvement with opposition groups or non-governmental entities—actions categorized as interference in "internal affairs"—can provoke conflict, regardless of whether they relate directly to the reintegration process.

By incorporating Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the military doctrine, not only is Georgia's sovereignty undermined, but the autonomy of separatist regimes is severely restricted. The doctrine, while not officially enacted but theoretically permissible, bars separatists from rejoining Georgia through military threats and force.

Consequently, Doctrine 2014 virtually forbids any peaceful initiatives, leaving no room for strategic maneuvers that do not conflict with its clauses. The doctrine interprets even the slightest potential movement of separatist regimes toward Georgia as a severe infringement on Russia's national interests, warranting war. To simplify but capture the essence, if the leader of Abkhazia were to express intent to reunite with Georgia today, Russia reserves the right to launch a military attack on Tbilisi in response.

Russian Perception of Threats

In the chapter of the doctrine concerning threats to Russia, numerous factors are listed, some of which warrant critical examination. While I won't delve into the widely acknowledged notion that NATO expansion poses a threat, I will focus on other aspects. The doctrine initiates its discussion of threats by addressing tensions arising from global competition and concludes Article 8 by noting a "gradual redistribution of influence" at both international and regional levels, favoring new economic and political centers of attraction.

Remarkably, this statement subtly implies that the emergence of new regional economic hubs is perceived as part of the array of military threats. Such an assertion underscores the doctrine's broad scope and reveals how the Russian perspective on threats encompasses not just traditional military concerns but also geopolitical shifts in economic power and influence.

What could this mean for Georgia? To remove any political context from the development of our country, to cancel the military force altogether, or to put it more clearly, to use a popular term in Georgia, to turn Georgia into a politically completely, absolutely neutral state and to take care only of economic development (which is unthinkable in practice, but still be guided by such an assumption) today's Russia According to the doctrine, even such a rich, economic center of gravity is a threat. Depending on the level of its own economic development, it is perceived as a threat to any strong economy in the neighborhood that can have such an attraction as, for example, Switzerland. Russia likes Switzerland in Switzerland, but in its neighborhood it scares them.

Threats II

This time, I will delve into Article 12 of the doctrine, focusing on its main foreign military threats outlined in points "Б", "Д", and "H". These points share a common regional focus and represent distinct risks.

Paragraph Б) identifies the danger of "destabilization of the situation in individual states and regions."

Paragraph Д) highlights the threat of "... territorial claims for its allies and external interference in their affairs."

Point H) underscores the threat posed by "the establishment of such regimes in the states bordering Russia, which are against the interests of Russia, including the establishment of such regimes through the overthrow of legitimate bodies."

Let's address the last point first. This clause suggests that regardless of the method through which an anti-Russian regime comes to power, it is considered a threat. The manner in which an anti-Russian regime seizes control is deemed secondary; the primary concern lies in its opposition to Russian interests.

The same perspective is echoed in the section concerning destabilization. This clause fails to differentiate between unlawful destabilization and the legitimate exercise of a universal right—the uprising against tyranny—under autocratic regimes. Interpreting these doctrinal statements theoretically yields a troubling image: a government elected through legitimate means in Georgia, which opposes Russian interests, is deemed as much a threat as, for instance, a mass popular movement in a Central Asian state seeking to peacefully remove an autocratic ruler who has held power for decades. Even mere involvement from external entities in the internal affairs of autocratic regimes is equated with war threats. These postulates endorse "autocratic stability" while apprehensively viewing conventional democratic change, guided solely by the alignment with Russian interests.

It is noteworthy that according to the doctrine, such a conception of state authority applies exclusively to Russia's immediate neighborhood, specifically to countries it regards as remnants of the Soviet era and within its exclusive sphere of influence. From the coherence of the doctrine, it can be inferred that in the event of an unfavorable change of government, Russia will likely resort to military actions against them. However, it's essential to highlight that such a war wouldn't resemble traditional conflicts with tanks and missiles. Rather, it would likely manifest as a "hybrid war," predominantly employing non-violent and indirect methods.

The military doctrine itself allows for this possibility, prioritizing new hybrid methods of warfare while minimizing reliance on traditional methods. Logically, such a war would be less detrimental to Russia while inflicting significant damage on the adversary.

This perspective is reinforced by the modern warfare doctrines outlined in the military doctrine, along with the attention and detail given to them. This suggests that Russia perceives itself as proficient in these methods. One of the primary weapons in this arsenal, as emphasized by Minister Shoigu, is information and information warfare. He articulates, "Mass media encompass a multitude of roles. On one hand, it can serve as a tool, while on the other, it has the potential to inflict significant harm. Today, it possesses the ability, when wielded by the wrong hands, to act as an investigator, a prosecutor, a judge, and an executioner simultaneously. I am concerned that we may slowly become individuals who wield these weapons in the most detrimental manner."

Russian Methods of Modern Warfare - Hybrid Warfare

Article 15 of the doctrine, titled "Characteristic Features and Peculiarities of Modern Military Conflicts," delves into the core aspects of the widely discussed concept of "Russian hybrid warfare."

The opening paragraph of the article outlines a spectrum of forces involved in contemporary warfare:

Military forces

Political forces

Economic forces

Information forces

Other non-military forces

The article suggests that military force is of lesser importance compared to other non-military methods. It underscores the extensive utilization of the population's protest potential and the backing of specialized operations services.

Article 15, alongside Article "K," warrants close examination. Paragraph "K" of Article 15 discusses "the utilization of externally funded and directed political forces and public movements." An in-depth analysis of this article reveals its focus on waging warfare of a non-military nature. It recognizes the protest potential of the population as a significant method, encompassing political, economic (pertaining to social issues), and informational (based on authentic or fabricated information) aspects.

The doctrine acknowledges the utilization of existing protest potential and the deliberate cultivation of such potential, including its external creation and subsequent utilization. This perspective is reinforced by Article 15, paragraph "K," which underscores the importance of externally managed and financed political and public activities

The same spirit is shared by the famous report of the Chief of the Russian General Staff Gerasimov, where he emphasizes the importance of such a form of action as "the creation of a front of permanent tension by the internal opposition on the territory of the adversary."

Regarding the nature of the information force, as previously described as either "authentic or inauthentic," Article 15 does not explicitly provide such terminology. However, it can be categorized based on its use. Generally, the doctrine acknowledges the existence of "information warfare." Additionally, Article 13 emphasizes Russia's obligation to safeguard its population, particularly the youth, from the influence of information that may compromise "spiritual traditions."

This underscores a mirror effect: what Russia perceives as a threat to its own security is automatically considered a tool that it can employ against its adversaries.

Clause "B" of Article 15 introduces another method, focusing on exerting influence on the opponent both domestically and in the global information sphere. This provision also discusses indirect and asymmetric forms of action. When linked to the financing of external political forces and public movements, it implies indirect control over the funding process. This involves not only literal "external" financing but also "indirect financing" sourced within the country, aligned with Russia's interests. For instance, this could manifest through charitable endeavors or support for cultural initiatives.

Based on the outlined scenario, it's essential not to perceive the new Russian approach to warfare as solely centered on non-military aspects. While the forms described primarily aim to achieve short-term political objectives such as changing governments in states, they also encompass traditional armed conflict involving direct military engagement. However, concerning this conventional warfare, the primary principle of the new hybrid form is recognized as its "delegated execution."

Article 15 introduces two notable concepts: paragraph "Ж" discusses the establishment of permanent war centers within the opposing parties' territories, while paragraph "З" addresses the utilization of "informal armed units." While the terminology may be new in the doctrine, we are familiar with such phenomena, as seen in the Abkhaz conflict, where terms like "militants" and "nayomniks" were common. These groups, known as "irregular armed formations" in the doctrine, are exemplified by entities like Abkhaz separatists or groups associated with the self-proclaimed "Republic of Donbass," contributing to ongoing clashes in conflict zones.

The phenomenon of "informal forces" found application during the Russo-Georgian war, notably through the involvement of "Chechen volunteers." However, it was more extensively utilized in a relatively autonomous manner during the Abkhazia conflict, particularly through the participation of North Caucasian volunteers.

It is evident that the concepts delineated by Russia as "new forms of warfare" in the 2014 military doctrine, encompassing the entirety of hybrid warfare components, including both non-violent and militaristic aspects, executed under the banner and by the actions of others, were effectively "field-tested" in Georgia across various periods.

Hence, discussions surrounding the contemporary Russian "hybrid war," the "Gerasimov doctrine," or comparable terms stem from two primary factors. The first factor is the Ukrainian crisis, while the second, more significant factor, is the inclusion of these strategies within the framework of the Russian military doctrine. In essence, there's nothing entirely novel here, particularly nothing as groundbreaking as gunpowder or tanks from a technical standpoint, nor as revolutionary as Napoleon's Grande Armee or the German Blitzkrieg from a conceptual perspective.

Indeed, there has been a refinement and consolidation of traditional methods, albeit with a relatively short history of use. The perception of a knock-on effect arises from Russia's adeptness in refining and solidifying these methods and concepts. What's disheartening is that Russia has already conducted successful military-political operations using these forms of warfare. Georgia stands as clear evidence of this perspective. Prior to the August 2008 war, Russia was already engaged in a hybrid war with Georgia. Following the five days of August, it further intensified its hybrid warfare tactics with non-violent and indirect methods, ultimately achieving significant military-political objectives. The argument that there is nothing new and revolutionary in these new forms of war finds support in Russia's primary use of these methods for its exclusive influence in its immediate neighborhood. It is unlikely to pursue similar military-political objectives on a global scale using the same means.

In summary, according to the Russian military perspective, a modern, comprehensive form of warfare would encompass the following methods:

Utilizing the protest potential of populations, whether externally generated or naturally occurring;

External funding and control of political groups and public movements—funding sourced directly from Russia or from third-party financial entities aligned with Russian interests;

Employing informational and political pressure on adversaries, leveraging influence agents, domestic propaganda, and the global information space;

Implementing political and economic sanctions, or the threat thereof;

Severing diplomatic ties when necessary;

Providing clandestine support for non-violent activities through special forces and intelligence services;

Deploying informal armed forces in active conflict zones;

Establishing permanent conflict zones within opposing territories and maintaining focal points of tension during non-conflict periods;

Prioritizing indirect and asymmetric actions in both military conflicts and non-violent confrontations.

Conclusion:

This analysis has not aimed to provide a comprehensive commentary on the doctrine nor has it attempted to delve into Russian politics in its entirety. The focus has been on examining specific components of the military doctrine that are pertinent to the threats faced by Georgia.

A military doctrine is an integral part of government policy, addressing questions about the means and methods used to achieve political objectives. The Russian military doctrine contains explicit political messages, formulated within a military context, unlike other strategic documents. It encompasses both military and political components, with significant implications for neighboring countries like Georgia.

The doctrine reveals Russia's political stance on various issues. For instance, it clearly opposes reconciliation efforts with Abkhazians and Ossetians, equating such actions with acts of war. While diplomatic channels may emphasize peaceful negotiations, the doctrine advocates for the establishment of permanent conflict centers and the use of "informal" forces to achieve political objectives.

The document also serves as a means of intimidation, covertly instilling fear among neighboring states and their populations. Despite being largely unread by the masses, its messages permeate societies, contributing to a pervasive sense of anxiety regarding Russia's intentions.

Importantly, the doctrine prioritizes avoiding direct military confrontations, but only in the face of strong opponents. Strength, in this context, refers to stable governance, robust institutions, and a capable military. Finland, for instance, achieved stability and security through these means, rendering Russia's military doctrine irrelevant in its political-military circles.

In response to the overt threats posed by the doctrine, there are two options: succumb to fear, poverty, and subjugation, or pursue sustainability, prosperity, and resilience. When economic development is deemed a casus belli, succumbing to fear is not a viable option; instead, resilience and prosperity offer the path to a secure future.

In essence, the Russian military doctrine represents a component of hybrid warfare, subtly influencing perceptions and behaviors while serving as a reminder of the potential consequences of geopolitical interactions. Thus, understanding its implications is crucial for strategic decision-making and ensuring national security.

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