



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
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Russian Strategic Intentions

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Introduction

In May 2019, a White Paper was made publicly available under the aegis of the US Defense Department and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff entitled “Russian Strategic Intentions - A Strategic Multilayer Assessment.”¹

The publication of documents on various topics is a very common practice for US agencies. Even intelligence agencies, which are generally associated with clandestine operations and confidentiality that obviously decreases their level of transparency, follow the practice of making their documents publicly available.

This particular White Paper has been published for the first time. It is quite a lengthy paper (167 pages), consisting of different topics, which are up to four to six pages each, all of them devoted to the assessment of various aspects of the Russian Federation. More than 20 experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations contributed to the publication.

The White Paper provides a wide-ranging assessment of Russia’s global interests, objectives and actions within the context of the ongoing and anticipated tendencies to improve the understanding about the existing world order, the international security environment and upcoming developments.

At the beginning of the White Paper (pp. i), it is stated that this publication provides government stakeholders—intelligence, law enforcement, military and policy agencies—with valuable insights and the analytic framework to assist the US, its allies and its partners in developing a comprehensive strategy to compete and defeat this Russian challenge.

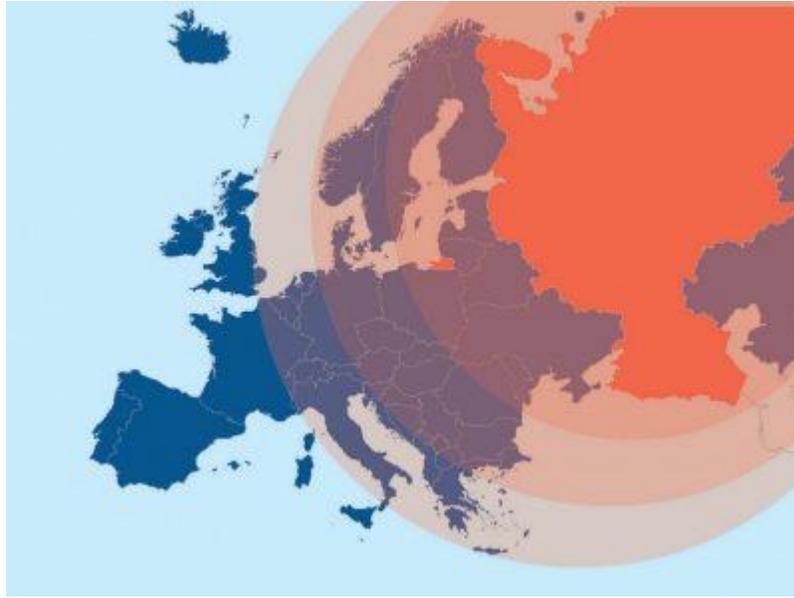
Specifically, in our publication, which has been developed under the aegis of the Security Review, we will provide only those assessments and information from the White Paper which describe the international environment, Russia’s global strategy and objectives and which illustrate the main peculiarities of this country. This will be done in the form of extracts from the White Paper. In a separate chapter, also in the form of extracts, we summed up those assessments and information which are particularly important for Georgia’s national security context.

International Environment According to the White Paper

(Pp. 29) Along with Beijing, Moscow seeks a multipolar world in which US hegemony comes to an end.

(Pp. i) The National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and National Military Strategy all note that future confrontations between major powers may most often occur below the level of armed conflict. In this environment, economic competition, influence campaigns, paramilitary actions, cyber intrusions, and political warfare will likely become more prevalent. Such confrontations increase the risk of misperception and miscalculation, between powers with significant military strength, which may then increase the risk of armed conflict.

¹ The White Paper is available on the NSI website at the following address: <https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SMA-TRADOC-Russian-Strategic-Intentions-White-Paper-PDF-1.pdf>



(Pp. 22) Faster communication speeds, the quickening of the news cycle, and the highly globalized nature of the 21st century information ecosystem increased the effectiveness of Russian propaganda. These advances have made it easier for the Russian government to influence global public opinion through the Internet, social media, 24-hour news agencies, and other platforms.

Russian Global Strategy and its Objectives

(Pp. ii) Russia is adopting coercive strategies that involve the orchestrated employment of military and nonmilitary means to deter and compel the US, its allies and partners prior to and after the outbreak of hostilities.

(Pp. 7-8) We can disaggregate that broad national interest into three key objectives that sum to a grand strategy that I term “Yalta 2.0”:

- First, Russia seeks to ensure its military, political, and economic security through an uncontested and exclusive sphere of influence in the territory that once formed the Soviet Union (Graham, 2016). Equally important, Yalta 2.0 denies other great powers from pursuing interests and influence within Russia’s exclusive sphere of influence. It should be noted that establishing a sphere of influence is not synonymous with the reconstruction of the Soviet Union or the annexation by Russia of the former Soviet republics. Though this has been claimed as Russia’s objective in recent years, it fundamentally misreads Russia’s true objective, which is to enjoy the benefits of uncontested influence without bearing the cost of administering new territory and populations (Hill, 2015). ~
- Second, the vision of Yalta 2.0 seeks for Russia a seat at the table and decisive voice on issues in regions where a regional great power is absent (such as the Middle East), or where there are multiple great powers in the region (such as the Arctic). In other words, it positions Russia as a global player with global influence.
- Third, in order to achieve its grand strategic objectives, Russia seeks to contain and constrain the United States’ unopposed unilateral pursuit of its interests globally. This mandate is most urgent in the post-Soviet region. In order to carve out its sphere of influence, Russia must push

the United States out of the region. Similarly, Russia must muscle its way into a seat at the table in other regions where it seeks influence, often by limiting or complicating what may have previously been uncontested American pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Finally, Russia must pursue a general strategy of complicating matters for the United States and raising the cost of action, even in regions where Russia lacks a direct interest. By throwing sand (or worse) in the United States' gears wherever it can, it makes it more difficult for the US to carry out its policy agenda in general. Importantly, most of the tactics used to pursue this objective of American constraint are not those of traditional military balancing. Rather, they are tactics of "asymmetric balancing."

(Pp. 43) Russia today is a spoiler in the US-led international system, especially in Europe, where the Kremlin continues to enjoy advantages over USG and NATO in key areas such as espionage and propaganda, in which Russian asymmetric power punches far above its weight.

(Pp. 49) Russia continues to present a threat to the United States in Europe, specifically through the use of media, trade relations, foreign direct investment, energy trading, diplomacy, military posturing (war games, air and sea space violations), interference in the political processes, and the continuation of frozen conflicts.

(Pp. iv) Its intervention in Syria speaks to a centuries-long interest in attaining some sort of geostrategic Mediterranean foothold.



(Pp. 58) Russian activities in the Middle East have been animated by a number of objectives. These include making sure that the region does not serve as a source of support for Chechen and other Muslim rebels in Russia, pursuing Russian economic interests, demonstrating that Russia can operate as a great

power in areas beyond the former Soviet Union, and advancing Russia's image as a more successful mediator than the United States.

Main Peculiarities of the Russian Federation

(Pp. 2) Russia still sees the global system as a great power/balance of power system with distinct spheres of influence for each great power.

(Pp. 2) The desire to be a great power stems not only from a perception of the world as a great power system, but also from a shared perception among Russian elite of a Russian sphere of influence.

(Pp. 1) Of the various motivations driving Russia's global activities and strategy, three of them are particularly important for understanding Russia's general strategic aims: the desire shared by the Russian elite for Russia to be recognized as a great power, the desire to protect Russian identity and a broader Slavic identity, and the desire to see the US global power limited.

(Pp. 14) Most Russians applaud the official narrative that Russia has re-emerged as a great power under Vladimir Putin, particularly with the annexation of Crimea, and also agree with the claims of the Russian state that America is an unfriendly power. Yet they increasingly disagree with the assertions of the Kremlin that the United States is a looming external danger and a subversive force in Russian domestic politics.

(Pp. 14) Russian society often finds domestic problems much more worrisome than US military power or a "color revolution" fomented by the West, both of which the Kremlin has framed as important threats in its efforts to mobilize domestic supporters and isolate opponents. Drawing extensively on opinion surveys in Russia, the paper concludes that a majority of Russians are likely to believe that the Kremlin should not emphasize costly policies intended to counter US military power or other potential American threats.

(Pp. 15) Large majority of Russians do not favor the creation of an empire reminiscent of the Soviet Union or tsarist Russia.

(Pp. v) As Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya's contribution suggests, the Russian leadership's worldview is zero-sum; it believes that in order for Russia to win, the US must lose. However, Dr. Christopher Marsh's contribution suggests that this world view is not necessarily shared by the Russian population or its elite.

(Pp. v) As evidenced by the range of "gray zone" activities it engages in, a number of the expert contributors argue that the Russian leadership sees itself as at war with the US and the West as a whole.

(Pp. 33) As viewed from Moscow, the war is not total, but it is fundamental. For Russia, the war is about overturning the existing international order in order to create an environment in which the Kremlin achieves three essential, even existential, goals. The first is gaining a veto over any action by the United States and its allies that might threaten Russian security. The second is creating a sphere of influence that encompasses the states to its east and south. The third is being granted the right to prevent its political, legal, and economic system from being "infected" by Western ideas and values.

(Pp. 33) As Putin and other Russian leaders have made clear, this war is one using primarily non-military means and intended to destabilize the Russian government and political system. The threat they fear is one of political destabilization at home.

(Pp. 44) One aspect of Putinism that is unique in Russian history is the dominant role of the security agencies, what Russians term the 'special services,' in nearly all regime affairs. The dominance of these secretive agencies in the formulation of policy, foreign and domestic, has no precedent in Russian history, which for centuries has valued its spy services more than Western countries do.

(Pp. 44) It should be noted that Russians are not especially religious in terms of churchgoing but under Putin, Orthodoxy has been reborn and weaponized to bolster the regime and encourage popular support for its policies.

Most Important Assessments for Georgia's National Security Context

(Pp. 29) Together, Russia's tentacles on its former Soviet neighbors and Moscow's strategic alliance with Beijing in pursuit of a multipolar world (in which the US is no longer the global hegemon) form the two main pillars upon which Putin's grand strategy rests.

(Pp. vi) Russia utilizes a variety of gray zone tactics around the globe. These include the use of paramilitary forces and other proxies, interference in political processes, economic and energy exploitation (particularly in Africa), espionage, and media and propaganda manipulation. Putin is also adept at blending military and civilian elements for maximum impact (Weitz).

(Pp. ii) Russia's gray zone tactics are most effective when the target is deeply polarized or lacks the capacity to resist and respond effectively to Russian aggression.

(Pp. vi) Although Russian tactics vary significantly, in all regions of the world energy has been a key source of Russian power and influence (Weitz; Lamoreaux; Borshchevskaya; Devyatkin; Pyatkov; Werchan).

(Pp. 21) Moscow has a variety of military, paramilitary, and non-military assets available for use in hybrid operations. These elements include Russian special operations units, paramilitary militia groups associated with the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Russian military intelligence (GRU), hybrid businesses that are connected to the Russian political-economic elite, and Kremlin-friendly media conglomerates.

(Pp. 21-22) The main goals of Russian information and influence operations include exploiting divisions in targeted states to achieve Russian foreign policy aims, ensuring continued domestic support for the regime, maintaining compliant governments in other states, keeping unfriendly governments weak and off balance, and influencing international perceptions of Russian actions while excluding Western sway from Moscow's sphere of influence.

(Pp. 22) Russian information operations adhere to four main principles: taking a small truth and stretching it, using propaganda to elicit an emotional response from its intended audience, sending conflicting messages to create myths and chaos, and ensuring its narratives remain in the information ecosystem for extended periods.

(Pp. 22) One tactic Russia has used is its covert support for both right- and left-wing opposition groups. Internationally, Russia has sought to develop relations with leftist governments and ties with prominent European leaders. Russia also employs cultural organizations like the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Russian Orthodox Church to influence ethnic Russians or Russian speakers residing abroad. Within some nearby countries, Moscow can resort to more explicit subversive tactics such as the provision of financial support to pro-Russian political parties and economic bans of certain foreign imports purported to be contaminated or unsafe for domestic use or consumption.

(Pp. 22) Russia's energy and economic assets—comprising oil and gas sales, other trade and investment, embargoes and cutoffs, remittances, and tariff and currency manipulation—provide important weapons in Moscow's hybrid toolkit. These economic assets can be employed alone, or in concert with other economic, military, and political tools such as military force, arms sales, and economic coercion.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Crimea's annexation, the USA and other Western democracies increased their awareness of the threats emanating from Russia. They also enhanced their knowledge on Russia's strategy and the main directions of its modus operandi. As a result, countering Russia's destructive policy is now conducted with a more consolidated approach and one of its priorities is enhancing cooperation with partner states.

Taking into account the abovementioned, it is urgently important for Georgia to identify its specific function in countering Russia's destructive policy with the partnership of the USA and other Western democracies.

Relevant Georgian agencies should study the White Paper and other conceptual documents published by our partners in depth. Consequently, on the one hand, this will improve our understanding of Georgia's security environment and contribute to planning Georgia's national security policy accordingly. On the other hand, we will be able to identify Georgia's specific mission and task that we can offer to our partners in an effort to strengthen regional and international security.