

# The Evolution of Military and Non-Military Means in Russian Strategic Thinking (1991-2022)

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## Abstract

This article discusses how Russian strategic thinking has evolved from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the present day (1991–2022). Special emphasis is placed on non-military means and how their presence has evolved over time. Both the statements of prominent Russian military figures and the articles of leading Russian theoreticians are employed in examination of this matter. The ideological changes exhibited overtime in national security documents issued by the Russian Federation are also considered. As we will see, the role of non-military means has undergone major changes since the birth of the contemporary Russian state in 1991. Non-military means are central to Russia's increased aggressiveness in the international sphere and allows us to understand why it has decided to attack Ukraine.

## Keywords

non-military means, Colour Revolutions, controlled chaos, non-contact warfare, hybrid warfare, security, adaptive approach, use of force

## Introduction

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation began armed hostilities against Ukraine. Russian tanks, planes, missiles, and soldiers attacked Ukrainian territory in an action that has shocked the international community. However, this is not the first time since the dissolution of the USSR that Russia has used military means in contiguous nations to advance its interests. The most obvious cases are its invasion of Georgia in 2008 and its initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014. In the latter case, the combination of military and non-military elements allowed Russia to gain considerable control over the narrative of the conflict.

After the 2014 events, a significant number of theorists, including Mark Galeotti, referred to a speech issued in 2013 by Chief of Staff of the Russian army, General Valery Gerasimov. Terms such as 'hybrid warfare' and 'grey zone' can be extracted from this speech — although their meanings can vary depending on whether Russians or Westerners use them. In general, the central ideas of Gerasimov's statements are the growing importance of non-military means in conflicts and the blurring of lines between war and peace. From this discourse came the term 'Gerasimov Doctrine', which gained popularity after appearing in many articles and even Euro-Atlantic defence documents. Foreign analysts assumed that this was Russia's new way of waging war.

A definition of 'non-military means' is difficult to find among Russian theorists. In Russian thought, concepts are often vaguely defined, lack definitions entirely, or even carry different meanings among authors. For the purpose of this article, we will define 'non-military means' as 'all those means employed by one country to pursue its interests in another country to the exclusion of the use of force'. Non-military means include the use of economic pressure, support for political groups, and most importantly, the use of information and the propagation of narratives in the media. For example, Russians consider non-military means to have been used against them in the so-called 'Colour Revolutions' — pro-Western social uprisings that took place in post-Soviet countries and succeeded in enacting changes of government, such as the Rose Revolution (2003) in Georgia and Orange Revolution (2004) in Ukraine. Military means are much simpler to define, being those employed during an open, armed conflict.

The distinction between 'violent' and 'non-violent' means is also tricky to define, and there exists no consensus among theorists concerned with Russia's military existence. Clearly, 'violent' means include military means, and we could expand the definition to include the use of paramilitary, terrorist, or subversive groups that employ violence to pursue their objectives, even during a state of peace between countries. The effort to provide a definition of 'non-violent' means is more complicated. The terms 'non-violent means' and 'non-military' may be considered almost synonymously; however, a major dilemma emerges here which is crucial to the argument advanced in this article. If 'non-violent' means, such as supporting a

political group, generates political turmoil such death and injury, can we really consider them to be 'non-violent'? This is partly what Gerasimov means when he states that 'the line between war and peace is blurring',<sup>1</sup> in turn generating another debate: should one respond with military means to non-military means, with violent acts to non-violent acts? In Russia, the answer is in the affirmative, partly because its non-military or non-violent means are considerably more limited than those of the West, due to the latter's economic and technological advantages over Russia.

Galeotti elucidates that the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' did not exist, but that Gerasimov simply wanted to establish a rhetoric that would be attractive to the public. The topic discussed at the conference did not concern new Russian modes of strategic thinking or a new doctrine, but the non-military means which were used from the Euro-Atlantic space to attack Russia, such as anti-government narratives in mass media, non- governmental organisations, or the funding of political parties. Gerasimov's speech described what tools were used to attack the Russian Federation<sup>2</sup>, tools which constituted a hybrid approach to conflict which has permanently changed decision- making in Moscow. At a time when the possibility of large-scale, open conflict with Russia was very unlikely, the use of non-military means became an accessible way to achieve goals which would traditionally require the use of violence. However, it should be noted that Russia's perception of non-military means has significantly evolved overtime. As non-military means are now perceived by Russia to be a security threat as grave or even more so than military conflict, they are understood to be a component of 'latent' conflict. Russian policymakers would have us believe that their violence is simply an increased, visible escalation of conflict which had already existed beforehand.

This is the likely explanation for Russia's decision to attack Ukraine: the former considered the political situation in the latter to be detrimental to its interests, and the ineffectiveness of its non-military elements to draw Ukraine back into its sphere of influence saw an armed attack emerge as the only possible strategy for domination. It is worth recalling that the use of armed force has traditionally been more effective for Russia (as evidenced by its military conflicts in Syria, Libya, Chechnya, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus) than non-military methods with which the West has a comparatively greater advantage. To study the evolution of strategic thinking and its relationship with non-military means, we will divide this topic into three chronological sections which each treat particular moments when the Russian position on non- military means exhibited marked changes. In relation to each epoch, we will remark

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<sup>1</sup> Valeri V. Gerasimov, 'Mir na granyakh voyny' [World on the Brink of War], *Voyenno-Promysh Lennyv Kuryer*, 10 (674) 2017, <<https://vpk-news.ru/articles/35591>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Mark Galeotti, 'The Gerasimov Doctrine', *Berlin Policy Journal*, May-June 2020, <<https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/the-gerasimov-doctrine/>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

upon the most relevant authors and their works, as well as national security documents issued by the authorities of the Russian Federation at the time.

## 1993 - 2000: The Defeated

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new Russian armed forces were faced with an extremely demanding situation. The 1990 Iraq war demonstrated that a small force with sophisticated technology could impose itself upon a superior force using Soviet tactics and material. The various ethnic conflicts that were developing throughout the post-Soviet space due to the power vacuum during this period should also be considered. The inability of Russia's security forces to control the country's territory in the Caucasus should also be highlighted, as well as the great economic crisis of 1998 which considerably reduced military spending. The performance of Russian troops during this period has been described by Russian Security Studies experts such as Bettina Renz as regrettable. Russia's presence as a global military player at the time was ruled out, and it was assumed that these forces were 'dangerously close to ruin'.<sup>3</sup> However, developments in Russian military thinking did not cease; in fact, Russia exhibited an incredible capacity for innovation and adaptability. I will analyse how Russian thought evolved and adapted to a world that had left it behind.

As a result of the great post-Soviet ideological vacuum within Russian strategic thought, as well as Marxist-Leninist ideology which was the methodological basis of all theoretical development during Soviet times, there emerged an 'international' perspective to examinations of the conflict. Three documents were drawn up as the basis of Russian security policy:

- Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation
- Military doctrine of the Russian Federation
- Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation. The last document to be drawn up (1997) since in these years it was not yet clear whether it should apply only to the Russian Federation or to the entire Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>4</sup>

## National Security Documents 1993 – 2000

### *Foreign Policy Concept 1993*

The understanding of conflict advanced in this document maintains the traditional military view and makes no reference to non-military means in conflict. It highlights sources of local

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<sup>3</sup> Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Marcel De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, (London: Routledge, 2010).

conflict on the country's borders, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and international terrorism as the main threats to the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>

### *Military Doctrine 1993*

This document does not greatly distance itself from the ideas advanced in the Soviet Military Encyclopedic Dictionary published seven years earlier. It identifies the greatest threats to the Russian Federation as follows: local wars, territorial claims against the country, internal destabilisation, and international terrorism. The document does not explicitly define the term 'war', however it specifies that armed conflict is the defining characteristic of war, and the terms are treated synonymously.<sup>6</sup> In this doctrine, three notable changes with respect to Soviet thought can be identified. Firstly, Brezhnev's policy which prohibited the initiatory use of nuclear weapons in the event of conflict against nuclear-armed states and prohibited their use against nuclear-unarmed states is discarded. The prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons in this document applies only to those states which are members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and do not cooperate with another nuclear-capable state. This change can be accounted for by the loss of conventional military capabilities after the dissolution of the USSR.

Secondly, the notion that war is inevitable is definitively discarded. Russian foreign policy, having shed the ideological burden of the Soviet period, could afford to be more flexible, and a climate of cooperation with the West was developing. This doctrine establishes that ideological confrontation can be overcome through cooperation. It is noteworthy that this doctrine does not identify any specific country as an enemy of the Russian Federation. Thirdly, the NATO bloc is not identified as one of the main threats to the country, although its eastward expansion is described as 'worrying'. The 1993 doctrine, with its general reference to international security, can be considered a positive document in its vision of international relations, focused largely on internal problems and socio-economic development. This is due to the serious economic problems that the country was experiencing at the time, as well as the Chechen conflict. At the military level, the traditional approach to conventional military means is maintained, with a special emphasis placed on technological innovation. Overall, this doctrine sustains the traditional understanding of Russian warfare which is defined by gun violence.<sup>7</sup>

### *Concept of National Security 1997*

The content of this document was significantly affected by the context in which it was published, particularly the defeat in Chechnya and the initial effects of the impending fiscal

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<sup>5</sup> Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

crisis of 1998. Military means lost significance in light of terrorism, nationalist conflicts, and the threat of economic ruin. States are accused of using their intelligence services to destroy Russian territorial integrity by exploiting ethnic tensions. The document states, '[p]olitical parties, banks, industries, scientific organisations and the media are becoming the target of their activities'.<sup>8</sup> There are also increased tensions with NATO, whose eastward expansion is assessed as unacceptable and considered to pose 'a threat to Russian national security'.<sup>9</sup>

## Main theorists between 1993 – 2000

### *General Makhmut Gareyev*

Gareyev began his military career at the age of eighteen by participating in World War II as an infantry officer in the Western Front. He received many promotions, assuming the rank of Major at the end of the war after fighting in Manchuria. He subsequently turned to military theory, a field in which he notably excelled. Gareyev served as Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff and was one of the top advisers during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. He also founded and chaired the Russian Academy of Military Sciences from 1995 until his death in 2019. One of the leading figures of Russian strategic thinking, his views concerning the conflict constantly evolve during his lifetime. During the 1990s, his ideological position was situated mid-way between those of the traditionalists and the Soviet innovators. While he considered 'armed conflict' to be the most important component of war, Gareyev recognised its multiple components. In his own words, '[w]ar is a complex social and political phenomenon that encompasses all spheres of life of the nations involved with various means of struggle against the enemy, including industrial, political and psychological means, armed conflict being the supreme among them'.<sup>10</sup>

Integral to Soviet military thought was the notion that the 'nature' of war — the attainment of political objectives — is immutable. One of the most significant problems regarding the essence of war arose with the development of nuclear weapons: they could not be used for political purposes as they ensured mutual mass destruction. In this sense, Gareyev argued that, despite the difficulty of achieving political objectives with nuclear weapons, they do not change the nature of war, noting that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fulfilled the political objectives of the United States. Another aspect of his thought in accordance with the ideas of the Soviet period was his explanation of the causes of war. Gareyev argued that various factors including economic objectives, territorial gains, and obtaining natural resources are always the causes of conflict, even if they are veiled by other

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<sup>8</sup>President of the Russian Federation, *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 1300*, 1997, <<http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/11782>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Makhmut A. Gareyev, ed. by Jacob W. Kipp, *If War Comes Tomorrow? The Contours of Future Armed Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

motives such as political or religious ones. Additionally, he predicted that future wars would be motivated by the control of raw materials.<sup>11</sup> Gareyev considered morale, willpower, and the number of soldiers to be decisive for victory, identifying technology as a force multiplier but not a substitute for war.

### **Major General Vladimir Slipchenko**

As Deputy Head of the Academy of Military Sciences, Slipchenko preserved the Soviet concept of 'Conflict States' under the name 'Generations of Conflict'. His taxonomy of the 'Conflict Generations' is an essential framework employed by modern Russian theorists:

- I. First generation (500 A.C. - 900 D.C.): use of sharp weapons.
- II. Second generation (900 – 1700): expansion of use of firearms.
- III. Third generation (1700 -1800): expansion of use of artillery, trench warfare and extension of naval combat.
- IV. Fourth generation (1800 – 1945): development of automatic weapons, tanks, and aircrafts.
- V. Fifth Generation (1945 – 1990): development of nuclear weapons.
- VI. Sixth Generation (1990): Use of precision weapons, development of electronic and information warfare. Characterised as 'Contactless Warfare'.

The focus of his study is the notion that a new generation of conflict was emerging. It would be the sixth generation, its main characteristic being 'non-contact warfare.' The main weapons used would be long-range guided missiles, and the infantry of both sides would not have direct contact with one another. The Kosovo War (1998-1999) was an example of sixth-generation warfare. According to Slipchenko, traditionally war had three objectives: to destroy the enemy's economic potential, to overcome its armed forces, and to overthrow or replace its political system. In sixth-generation wars, it is enough to destroy the economic capacity of the adversary from a distance and, faced with a bleak economic situation, the population itself would oppose the government and the war.<sup>12</sup> Slipchenko argues that 'in Yugoslavia, it was enough for the United States to destroy 80% of the economic capacity of the country, which would make the citizens change the political regime for themselves shortly after'.<sup>13</sup>

The two pillars of this new type of war are 'high-precision weapons' and 'information'. The first establishes that a military offensive can be initiated from anywhere in the world, while the second affords traditionally non-military means a considerably more significant role than preceding thought on the matter. Slipchenko refers to a massive psychological offensive

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Slipchenko, *Future War*, (Moscow: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, 2005)

launched by the United States globally after the September 11 attacks, with the aim of gaining international support in its 'War on Terrorism', particularly in relation to military operations in Afghanistan. Although Slipchenko does not revolutionise our understanding of war, he does something very novel by qualifying a non-violent phenomenon, i.e., information, as one with destructive potential. Slipchenko states, '[i]nformation has become a destructive weapon, such as a bayonet, a bullet or a projectile'.<sup>14</sup> He was to become a thinker with profound influence on subsequent Russian security studies.

## 2000-2010: Russia Returns to the International Arena

During this period, a series of striking events took place which affected the very pillars of the Russian Federation. Following Vladimir Putin's appointment to leadership, the country's turmoil came to an end as economic recovery was driven by greater political stability and the sale of the country's natural resources, mainly oil and gas. Control over the Caucasus was also progressively reacquired due to increased military efficiency and improved organisation. Russia aimed to redevelop an influential foreign policy as the country regained its status as a relevant international actor.

The event that marked Russia's return as an assertive international actor can be dated to the 43rd Munich Security Conference in 2007, at which Vladimir Putin gave a speech about the nature that Russia's international policy would assume in the impending years and was very critical of a unipolar world dominated by the United States. Increasingly irritated by interference in its neighbouring countries and the promotion of liberal values threatening the Russian political project, Russia voiced opposition to the growing Euro-Atlantic bloc. The early 2000s also saw the first Colour Revolutions take place, which affected several countries within the Russian orbit: Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. The last case is notable since Russia would engage in a brief war with Georgia in 2008. This war demonstrated technical weaknesses within the Russian army, as well as the fact that Russia had ceased to be a passive state in the face of international events and would not tolerate the expansion of NATO on its borders.<sup>15</sup>

### National Security Documents 2000 – 2010

#### *Foreign Policy Concept 2000*

This document, more positive in tone than those aforementioned, highlights the opportunities for cooperation offered by the new international scene after the Cold War. The document states that, although military power continues to be of significance, the economy, politics, technology, and information play a more important role in the development of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, pp. 142-3.

state. Concern is also expressed about the unipolar balance of power that was developing in a world dominated by the United States, as well as the introduction of concepts such as 'humanitarian intervention' used to circumvent legal limitations imposed by the United Nations.<sup>16</sup>

### *Military Doctrine 2000*

A more peaceful view of the international scene is also reflected in the new military doctrine, with factors such as a friendlier diplomacy and nuclear deterrence lessening fears of possible military aggression against Russia. The 2000 doctrine adopts the 1993 definition of warfare, identifying 'armed conflict' as its key characteristic. However, this variation incorporates some non-military concepts. According to the 'holistic' approach, all human activities connected to conflict can be interpreted as a goal of warfare. Additionally, the methods employed can vary, including the extensive use of indirect, non-close forms and methods of operation and other non-traditional means.<sup>17</sup> This doctrine references both indirect and non-traditional forms of warfare, and it is the Russian Federation's first Military Doctrine to identify information warfare as a threat. After overcoming a period of post-Soviet instability, Russia's security approach begins to exhibit a concern with the threat of global armed forces prepared for a conventional war. During the 1990s, Russian security forces had lost much of their capabilities, were unable to operate globally and the country's security depended on unconventional means such as nuclear weapons.<sup>18</sup>

### *Concept of National Security 2000*

This document exhibits a less positive tone regarding the international community due to NATO's adoption of a new strategy which sanctioned military development outside the territory of the alliance. It criticises 'attempts to create a structure of international relations dominated by developed Western countries, seeking unilateral solutions on key issues of world politics by circumventing the foundations of international law' and states that 'some states are intensifying their attempts to weaken Russia politically, economically, militarily and otherwise'.<sup>19</sup>

Although it does not explicitly avow a direct rivalry with the West, the document establishes the Russian interest in reinforcing its position as a centre of global influence. One of its most

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<sup>16</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation, 2000*, <<https://www.bits.de/EURA/natsecconc.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2022]. <sup>17</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, p. 108.

<sup>19</sup> onsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, p. 67; President of the Russian Federation, *Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation, 2000*.

relevant aspects relates to the use of nuclear weapons. While the 1997 document sanctions their use against existential threats to the country, the Concept of 2000 establishes that all means, including nuclear, will be used against an external aggressor. Russia's sense of insecurity, with armed forces far less capable than those of the Euro-Atlantic countries, accounts for its reliance upon its nuclear capabilities to maintain its security.

Additionally, growing concerns are also exhibited regarding mass media and the informational sphere. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the first Russian Information Security Doctrine. The doctrine states: 'There is a growing threat to national security in the field of information. The struggle of several countries to dominate the global information space and expel Russia from the external and internal information market poses a danger, as does the elaboration by several States of a concept of information wars that provides for the creation of dangerous media that influence the information spheres of other countries of the world'.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Foreign Policy Concept 2008***

The content of this document was influenced by Russia's focus on domestic policy at the time. Firstly, it calls for a reassessment Russia's role in the international arena with the aim of increasing its overall capabilities. Although it emphasises the danger posed by a unipolar world due to states conducting actions condemned by the United Nations (in clear reference to the United States), the document dismisses the possibility of a full-scale war. However, it criticises NATO's growing influence in Ukraine and Georgia. One of the most interesting aspects of the document is that it is the first to remark upon the increasingly blurred lines between the domestic and international spheres: 'The differences between internal and external means of ensuring national interests and security are gradually disappearing'.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010***

This military doctrine formulates two lists, one concerning external dangers and the other about internal dangers. NATO is considered to be the main external danger whose expansion as a political bloc approaching the borders of the Russian Federation poses a security threat. Here, it is relevant to note the significance of Russian vocabulary, as NATO is considered a military danger and not a military threat. In the Russian military lexicon, a military danger is a situation which under certain conditions could become a military threat whose main characteristic is immediacy.<sup>22</sup> This doctrine reveals that the global ideological confrontation is weakening due to growing multipolarity, as well as the weakening economic, political, and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 2008, <<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>22</sup> Keir Giles, 'The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010', *NATO Research Review*, February 2010.

military influence of some states. In other words, weaker states that are less ideologically opposed to each other tend to experience reduced rivalry. Regarding the non-military aspect, the document identifies the integration of the use of military and non-military means as a characteristic of contemporary military conflicts. The document also refers to information warfare at various points. Although briefly, it is identified as a feature of modern military conflicts employed to achieve political objectives without the use of military force or creating favourable international opinion regarding armed actions. It is also identified as a tool used by the Russian Federation to contain and prevent military conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

## Main theorists 2000 – 2010

### *Lieutenant General Sergei Bogdanov*

Bogdanov, a member of the Staff's Centre for Strategic Military Studies who would become an influential theorist the following decade, authored an article in 2003 about the form that war would take in the future. Heavily influenced by Slipchenko, he predicts that it would take a 'non-contact' form and involve the use of precision weapons. In this respect, it would be essential to have the leverage of information over the enemy.

In 2009, he co-authored a study with Colonel Viktor Gorbunov regarding armed conflict in the twenty-first century, in which he identifies various novelties of modern warfare, such as the extensive use of weapons based on modern technologies, a significant reduction of time opportunity in war, the frequent use of special forces, and the growing importance of space and information. According to the study, these characteristics could lead to the creation of a new type of military conflict called 'Non-Conventional Wars'. This new form of conflict would employ non-military means in relation to which the armed forces would have a secondary role, or even no role at all. This type of conflict would be the new form of confrontation between countries due to the unsuitability of a large-scale war considering the nuclear capabilities of the Western countries. They stress the growing importance of information and explain that it is not the form of violence that differentiates war from other activities, but its intensity, duration, and result.

Relying upon Sun Tzu, Bogdanov and Gorbunov explain that military operations need not have a role in war: 'Violence does not necessarily imply the use of all forms of military power. A war can be won, and the desired results achieved without developing military operations, an opportunity whose realisation has grown immensely due to recent technological innovations.'<sup>24</sup> According to these authors, violence exceeds the use of weapons. They refer to

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<sup>23</sup>Security Council of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2010, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20110504070127/http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/33.html>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>24</sup>V. N. Bogdanov and S. A. Gorbunov, 'Armed Confrontation in the 21st Century', *Military Thought*, 18 (2009).

the internal weakening of states employing organised measures to intensify local tensions and ethnic conflicts which can be achieved through informational and psychological means, not military ones. The authors also refer to past geopolitical scenarios: 'Fill the state with debts that drain all its resources, hinder its economic development, surround it with hostile satellite states, prepare a scenario that favors an armed intervention and avoids any foreign aid'.<sup>25</sup> During the period of post-Soviet economic transition influenced by the West, the abrupt transformation generated a serious crisis in the country which, according to these authors, was a form of warfare used by the West to keep the country weak.<sup>26</sup>

### *General Makhmut Gareyev*

Gareyev's view of what 'war' means has changed significantly since 2005. According to his recent theories, states have sought new ways to achieve their political objectives over their adversaries due to the existence of nuclear weapons. Although these non-military means have been present throughout history, their ability to grow in proportion to military means is a recent development, owing its success to technological progress. He also notes that these non-military means are 'permeable', i.e., present in all aspects of conflict: diplomatic, economic, or military. Recognizing them such as is critical not only to the preservation of national spiritual values, but also national security.<sup>27</sup> This change is due to the Colour Revolutions which had a momentous effect on Russian thought and, as will be addressed later, fundamentally changed its international approach.

## **2010-2022: The Blurring Line between War and Peace**

During the last decade, Russia has cemented its status as an assertive actor in the international arena, primarily due to its sense of threat which has evolved into a sense of paranoia amongst the Kremlin's defenders. The strategic need for countries within the Russian sphere of influence to place the greatest possible distance between the Russian and Euro-Atlantic territories has led the Russians to adopt a more aggressive doctrine to contain the growing Western influence on its neighbours. In this respect, Ukraine is the most apt example. The events of 2014 triggered alarms in the Kremlin. This 'strategic fear' is the origin of these aggressive Russian actions which have culminated in open war on Ukrainian territory. In this section, I will demonstrate how non-military means are the preceding stage to an armed confrontation framed within a context of 'latent' conflict.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*.

<sup>27</sup> Makhmut A. Gareyev, 'O kharaktere i oblike vooruzhennoy borby budushchego' [On the nature and form of the armed struggle of the future], *Armeyskiy Sbornik* 4 (2005).

## National Security Documents 2010 – 2021

### *Foreign Policy Concept 2013*

The 2013 document does not stray too far from its 2008 predecessor. It similarly notes Russia's negative attitude towards NATO's presence on its borders, although it identifies a shared interest in maintaining peace and fighting common threats such as piracy and terrorism. Under a new section entitled 'Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation in the Modern World', policymakers highlight the profound changes that the global geopolitical landscape was experiencing due to the international fiscal crisis. These changes created a moment of transition in international relations that 'will increase its complexity and unpredictability'.<sup>28</sup>

This section also addresses the idea that the reduced risk of large-scale war instigated changes in the balance of military power between states. It advances that a state's pursuit of new military capabilities signifies a weakening in the global security architecture. This point is of particular importance: 'Economic, legal, scientific, environmental, demographic and information technology factors become as important to countries in influencing world politics as military power. Of greater relevance are the issues related to sustainable development, spiritual and intellectual education of the population. A key factor of international stability is the economic interdependence of states'.<sup>29</sup> In relation to the growing importance of non-military means in conflict between states, the document is also the first to refer to the term 'soft' power defined as 'exerting political pressure on sovereign states, interfering in their internal affairs, destabilising their political situation and manipulating public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, this is the first document to combine the concept of non-military capabilities with security in international relations.

### *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014*

This document relates a considerably more pessimistic view of the state of international relations. Unlike the 2010 doctrine which attests to a weakening ideological confrontation between Russia and the West, the 2014 document remarks upon an increasing global competitiveness, particularly in relation to rivalries between different models of development and their values.<sup>31</sup> In this doctrine, the growing importance of non-military means in Russian thought is palpable. One of its most original aspects concerns deterrence. Nuclear deterrence

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 2013, <[https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186)> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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is considered to be insufficient to ensure the security of the country, and it is stipulated that it must be combined with non-nuclear deterrence comprised of high-precision, long-range weapons. However, such non-nuclear deterrence also includes non-military measures.

General Baluyevsky, one of the doctrine's authors, endorses a political-military, techno-scientific approach in defence of national interests. The document states that military risks and threats are being replaced by threats in the field of information, including at the domestic level. The likelihood of a full-scale war is reduced, however military threats facing the Russian Federation increase. In this regard, the document identifies two categories: 'External Military Risks' and 'Internal Military Risks'.<sup>32</sup>The opening passage of 'External Military Risks' concerns NATO, but its later points are of particular interest to this study, specifically its reference to the use of information technologies to achieve political-military objectives, as well as the destabilisation of neighbouring countries to establish regimes hostile to the Russian Federation.

Clearly, these points are made in reference to the conflict in Ukraine. In the section entitled 'Internal Military Risks', the 'activities that endanger the information structure of the Russian Federation' and the 'subversive information against the population, especially those directed at young people who seek to undermine the historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions related to the defense of the Motherland' are noteworthy. The most perceptible change to Russian military strategy which can be identified in this document is that made to the definition of 'non-military' means which is treated in the section entitled 'Characteristics of Modern Military Conflict'. The new definition is as follows: '[T]he integrated use of military, political, economic, information and other measures of non-military characteristic through the widespread use of popular protests and special operations forces'.<sup>33</sup>

### ***National Security Strategy 2015***

This document deals more specifically with the terms developed above, referencing the events that occurred in Ukraine in 2014 as an 'unconstitutional coup d'état that has generated a serious rupture in Ukrainian society and the creation of an armed conflict'. In addition to this, it holds the United States and the European Union as responsible for these events. Far-right ideology is also mentioned, an argument that Russia has employed on several occasions to criticise the incumbent government in Kyiv. Among the priorities listed in the document are the improvement in the quality of life of citizens of the Russian Federation,

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<sup>32</sup> Security Council of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2014, <<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

national defence, public security, economic growth, scientific, technological, and educational development, public health, and the protection of national values.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, policymakers highlight the importance of Russian spiritual values and emphasise their patriotic importance. The document also refers to Russia's role in the international context, specifically its coalescence as a world power and the discontent that this produces in the West, particularly in the United States. Indirectly, the document accuses Western states of toppling legitimate political regimes and creating new zones of instability, as well as placing responsibility upon their policies for the creation of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State. However, this strategy reveals that Russia was willing to improve its relations with NATO on the condition that the organisation respects Russian interests.<sup>35</sup>

#### National Security Strategy 2021

In this document, the term 'economic growth' used in 2015 is replaced with 'economic security'. It is clearly stated that Russia seeks greater state control over its economy, with the proposed strategy being to increase control over foreign investment in tactically selected sectors in the country, reduce dependence upon imports, especially at the technological level, and reduce its dependency on the dollar in economic activity abroad. The hostile presence of NATO on the Russian border is once again remarked upon as the United States is accused of deploying missiles on European territory. NATO has denied this deployment. Unlike aforesaid documents, there is no mention made of an effort to establish relations with the West. The vocabulary used in relation to China indicates a cooling of relations and the value given to India as a strategic partner increases. The only bloc with which closer ties are sought is the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, no desire is exhibited for relations on an equal footing with other nations or blocs, demonstrating Russia's intent to pursue an independent and autonomous path.<sup>36</sup>

The document adopts clear position on the growing importance of non-military means. Four pages are dedicated to the subject. The word 'values' appears 13 times in the 2015 document, but up to 25 times in the 2021 edition. It specifies that Russian values are under attack by the US and its allies, as well as by multinational companies, non-governmental, religious, and extremist organisations. These attacks are conducted through an 'informative and psychological impact on the individual, the group and the collective consciousness promoting values contrary to the traditions and beliefs of the Russian population'. This is

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<sup>34</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*, 2015, <<http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*, 2021, <<http://scrf.gov.ru/media/files/file/l4wGRPqJvETSkUTYmhepzRochb1j1jqh.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2022]

understood to be a threat to the Russian Federation, as it incites internal conflicts and thus weakens the state.

It can be argued that the Russian government is now behaving reactively by responding to ongoing geopolitical changes rather than following a pre-established strategy. However, the 2021 document is a good indicator of how the Kremlin arrived at its current, extreme position. Its histrionic tone, especially with reference to culture, demonstrates great concern for a possible social outbreak that would lead to mass protests which bring down the government, as took place in Ukraine or Georgia. The Russian government seeks to delegitimise the West by aligning the government with Russian values, creating a narrative of Russia and the Russians in unity against their enemies. This effort to defend these very abstract values is a mode by which to direct attention away from the growing authoritarianism of the government and the country's material conditions affected by sanctions and economic stagnation.

## Theoretical evolution 2010 – 2021

### *Colonel Chekinov and Lieutenant General Bogdanov*

In 2010, Colonel Chekinov and General Bogdanov collaborated on a theoretical study of Russian military science entitled 'Asymmetric Actions to Maintain Russia's Military Security', which states that military security could not be separated from politics, economics, or information. The latter is especially relevant since they claim that information can achieve strategic objectives by itself and 'to prevent aggression by any country (or coalition of countries) and maintain the military security of the Russian Federation, asymmetric measures of a systemic and comprehensive nature must be taken by combining political, diplomatic, informational, economic, military and other efforts'.<sup>37</sup>

In other articles, the authors refer to the rivalry between states resulting from geopolitical and economic motives. To achieve victory in this rivalry, it is essential to end the enemy's will to fight which has to be achieved through non-military means. Chekinov and Bogdanov make reference to the fall of the Soviet Union to support their argument, claiming that the American intelligence services had perfected techniques for psychological manipulation which affected both individuals and state institutions, and were used to promote the Colour Revolutions which took place in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to observe that assertions these authors made in 2011 were echoed in the national security documents subsequently issued by the Russian Federation, which claim that Russian institutions and the country's population are under attack by non-violent means directly undermining its moral values and social cohesion.

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<sup>37</sup> S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, 'Asymmetrical Actions to Maintain Russian Military Security', *Military Thought*, 18, 1 (2010), pp. 1–11, <<https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21945815>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>38</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*.

In December 2013, Chekinov and Bogdanov published an article entitled 'Nature and Content of the New Generation War'. Western analysts perceived it as a blueprint of the annexation of Crimea which would take place several months later. The authors argue that the Arab Spring marked the beginning of a new military era: governments were overthrown without foreign military intervention and solely through social mobilisation. The role of information and psychological warfare was the basis of victory, with the deployment of military forces conducted only after achieving political and military objectives. This strategy of 'Indirect Action' whose main resource is information warfare reduces the capabilities of the enemy and limits its ability to maneuver; when this approach is used in combination with sensationalist denunciations, the public image of the attacked country is thoroughly stained. Deception is an especially important part of this strategy, and its success involves feeding false data, directive orders and intentions to the political and military leaders of the attacked country. Overall, this is achieved via the coordinated actions of diplomats, the media, and government, military, and intelligence agencies.<sup>39</sup>

These actions begin months before the start of the 'unconventional war'. In this new phase, following the aforementioned 'information poisoning,' the attacker extorts, bribes, intimidates, and manipulates the rival's officers in order to alter or restrict their functions. Additionally, undercover agents are employed to encourage subversive activities, such as civil disobedience or the commission of illegal acts. All this is combined with the use of long-range weapons such as missiles or long-range artillery, which would achieve the desired objectives before the deployment of ground troops. Non-military means reduce or nullify the military response by the aggressor.<sup>40</sup> In 2015, Chekinov and Bogdanov authored another article, in this instance based on the Clausewitzian idea of war that identifies the use of weapons as its basic attribute which has remained immovable, so that, despite the growing importance of non-military means, the essence of war, i.e., armed confrontation, remains unchanged. The article also highlights the key role of information warfare as 'the starting point of every action of what is now called the new type of war' and identifies psychological and informational actions as the basis for achieving victory.<sup>41</sup>

In 2016, the authors explain that the preceding decade had created a new type of conflict, the 'wars of Controlled Chaos', a term first coined by President Vladimir Putin in 2012. They attribute responsibility for the development of this type of war to the actions of the United States, whose 'informational, economic and military superiority had undermined international security'. In addition, they criticise the Military Encyclopedia's definition of war

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<sup>39</sup> S. G. Chekinov, and S. A. Bogdanov., 'Nature and Content of the New Generation War', *Military Thought*, 22, 4 (2013), pp. 12–23, <<https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/43183952>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>40</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> S.G. Chekinov, and S. A. Bogdanov, 'A Forecast for the Wars of the Future. Meditations on What They Will Be Like', *Military Thought*, 24, 4 (2015), pp. 90–98, <<https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/46295532>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

for 'overlooking the drastic changes that occurred in recent decades in state activity (politics, economy, and the military strategic situation). The expansion of new ways of employing not only the armed forces, but also all the structures of the state military organization, the new methods of conflict emerging, the transformation of the armed conflict, were mainly due to the active use of non-military methods'.<sup>42</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov argue that the emergence of 'controlled chaos' has changed the traditional nature of warfare to the extent that modern military strategy has to use and be prepared to combat non-military means.<sup>43</sup>

### *Valeri Gerasimov*

As Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Gerasimov is one of the most notable figures in Russian strategic thinking. In 2013, Gerasimov had already referred to 'the blurring of differences between the state of peace and war' due to the increasing use of non-military means, specifically their efficiency and ability to produce effects like those of a real war. For example, he refers to the Arab Spring and explains that such revolts can be the model of war in the twenty-first century, creating a 'permanent operational terrain' in enemy territory by exploiting the subversive potential of the population through information tools. These 'non-military measures' and 'military measures' would be used in a 4:1 ratio.<sup>44</sup>

In 2014, Gerasimov first employed the term 'Adaptive Approach to the Use of Force' to describe a Western policy of intervention in developing countries which are not favourably inclined to or do not pursue Western policies. Adaptive force involves the use of non-military means to force a regime change, and if this not achieved, there follows an escalation to military force. Again, Gerasimov refers to the growing importance of non-military means such as economics, politics, and diplomacy, as well as other covert measures such as the use of NGOs to criticise or damage Russian interests in Syria, Ukraine, or the Arctic.<sup>45</sup>

In his annual speech to the Russian Academy of Military Sciences in 2016, Gerasimov placed special emphasis on the Syrian war. In regard to military means, he highlighted the significant impact that the development of technology has had on armed conflicts, allowing for the large-scale use of high-precision and long-distance weapons from sea, air, and space, which echoes Slipchenko theory.<sup>46</sup> Much of the speech concerns the importance of non-military means. Gerasimov explains that non-military means enabled the creation of opposition to the

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<sup>42</sup> S. G. Chekinov, and S. A. Bogdanov, 'Military Strategy: Looking to the Future', *Military Thought*, 25, 4, (2016), pp. 24–38, <<https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/48304775>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War*, p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> Valeri. V. Gerasimov, 'On the Role of the Military Force in Contemporary Conflicts', *III Moscow Conference on International Security*, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Valeri. V. Gerasimov, 'On the Syrian Experience', *VPK*, 9 (624) 2016, <<https://vpk-news.ru/articles/29579>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

government, leading to an armed conflict in which weapons and foreign support were provided to the opposition. Furthermore, he stressed the profound impact that information technologies have on populations, especially the great capacity of the Internet to alter national consciousnesses. He also claimed that classic combat operations no longer exist.

Syria is a good example of how the use of military means was seen as an effective response to the use of non-military means. In Russia, its intervention in Syria is considered to be a success: it helped the pro-Russian Syrian government to stay in power and strove to acquire legitimacy on an ideological level by claiming to fight jihadism. On a military level, it demonstrated that Russia had recovered part of its military and technological capacity, succeeding in carrying out an expeditionary campaign abroad. However, as observed in the war in Ukraine, these capabilities are more tricky than they seemed. The spread of political opposition that eventually led to revolution in Syria cemented the idea in Russian doctrine that non-military means can be violent, as they are generators of violence.

In 2017, Gerasimov noted that the question was not settled, arguing that ‘non-military means have received an unprecedented technological development, acquiring a dangerous and in some cases, violent nature.’<sup>47</sup> We have already noted this lack of consensus between policymakers in Russian debate. Although it was not asserted that the essence of war had changed, it was conceded that the growing importance of non-military means had been significant enough to disrupt the classic definition of war. In 2019, Gerasimov gave a speech which offered insights regarding the future direction of Russian strategic thinking. He began by referring to aggressive US policy and the country’s use of high-tech weaponry, ‘Colour Revolutions’, and soft power to undermine the sovereignty of countries which do not have strong relations with Washington. He argued that this occurred in Iraq, Libya, and Ukraine, and was taking place in Venezuela. According to Gerasimov, this new Pentagon strategy is called the ‘Trojan Horse’ and is concerned with ‘the active use of the fifth column’s protest potential and the World Trade Organization to attack and weaken important targets’ to respond to these threats, and that the General Staff has been collaborating with military theorists to develop the Active Defense Strategy.<sup>48</sup>

This strategy is an integrated response to counter both military and non-military threats. In this respect, Gerasimov makes the Russian military vision very clear: ‘We consider all other non-military measures that affect the course and outcome of a war, provide, and create conditions for the effective use of military force.’<sup>49</sup> Although Gerasimov did not refer to specific countermeasures against Western non-military means, he suggested that Russia can be

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<sup>47</sup> Valeri V. Gerasimov, ‘Mir na granyakh voiny’ [World on the Brink of War], *VPK*, 10 (674) 2017, <<https://vpk-news.ru/articles/35591>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>48</sup> Valeri V. Gerasimov, ‘Vektory Razvitiya Voennoi Strategii’ [Military Strategy Development Vectors], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 4 March 2019, <<http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

expected to focus on bolstering internal security and increasing state control of the media, the economy, and political organisations. However, he specifies that the Armed Forces have a 'decisive role'.<sup>50</sup> The outbreak of war in Ukraine has seen Gerasimov's proposals become reality. Through the 'Foreign Agents Law', media outlets which did not adhere to the official narrative were shut down, such as Novaya Gazeta and Meduza. There has also been a restriction of access to social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. This is all part of the Russian government's effort to control the narrative of the war in Ukraine, and the media plays an important role in this regard.<sup>51</sup>

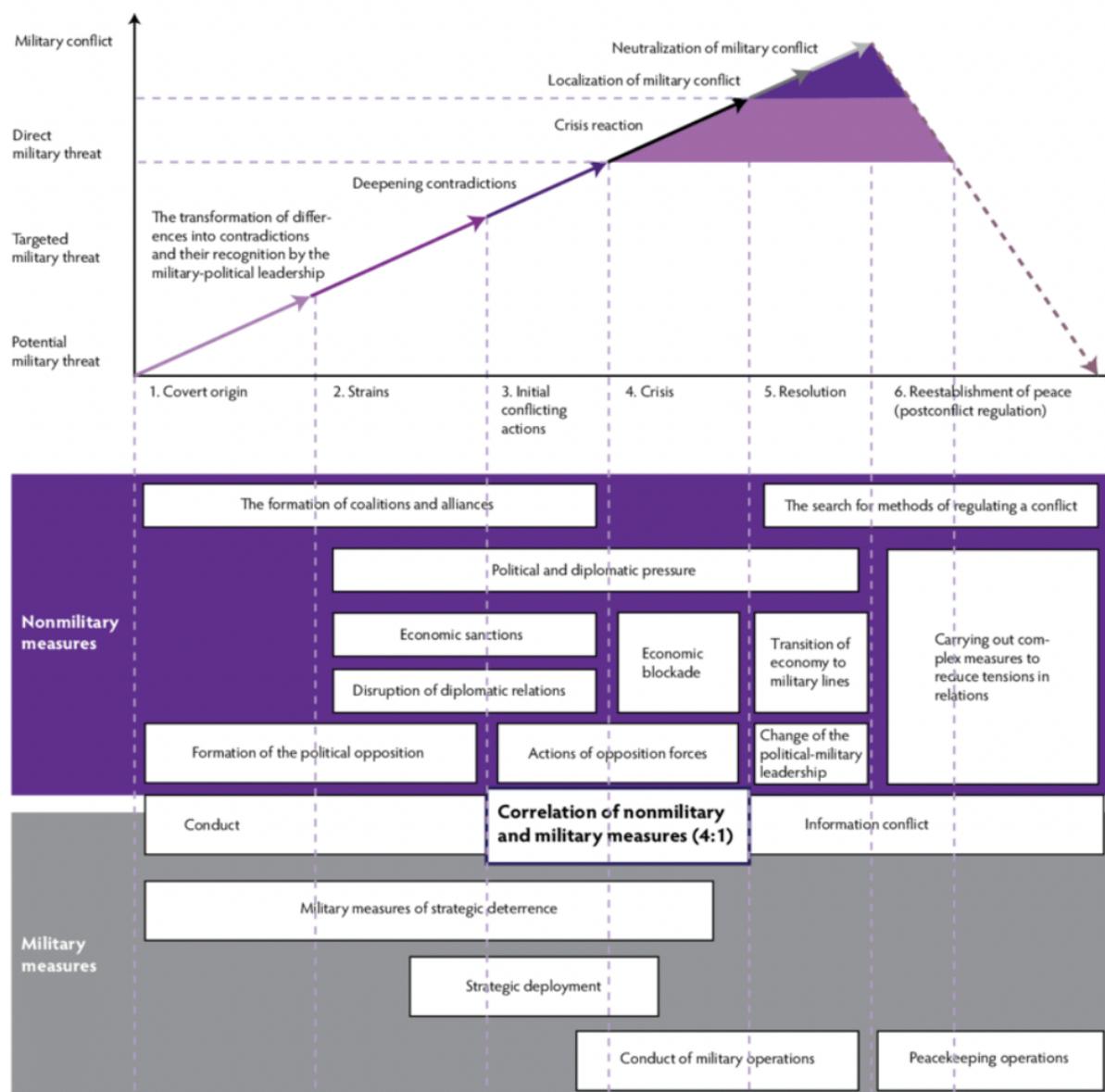
Concerning the economy, Gerasimov's proposals also seem to have come to fruition. In the face of major Western sanctions and economic difficulties generated by the military effort, the Russian government has significantly increased its control of the country's economy. Previously, the economic elites were already entirely dependent on the Kremlin, but the war in Ukraine has allowed the Kremlin to further expand its control over most of the Russian market. This is evidenced by the nationalisation of companies and price-fixing in some sectors. For the moment, the Russian state has managed to protect its economy, although the long-term sustainability of this system remains to be seen.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Maya Vinokour, 'Russia's Media Is Now Totally in Putin's Hands', *Foreign Policy*, 5 April 2022, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/05/russia-media-independence-putin/>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

<sup>52</sup> Maximillian Hess, 'What Will Russia's Post-Invasion Economy Look Like?', *Al Jazeera*, 31 March 2022, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/31/russias-post-invasion-political-economy>> [accessed 27 May 2022].



1. Graphic made by Valeri Gerasimov and translated by Charles Bartles<sup>53</sup>. Published in 2013, it helps us to understand how Russian policymakers view conflict at present. As we can see, there are several phases in the conflict and only few of them are part of an open, armed conflict. Military and non-military measures are active during all phases of the conflict in a ratio of 4:1. In other words, in order to have the same effect, non-military means must be four times as prevalent as military means. Military and non-military means are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

<sup>53</sup> Charles K. Bartles, 'Getting Gerasimov Right', *Military Review*, 96 (2016), p. 35.

## Conclusions

As I have demonstrated in this article by examining the statements and research of Russian military figures and theoreticians respectively, non-military means have profoundly transformed Russian strategic thinking from the Soviet period to the present, becoming one of the most important elements of the Russian Federation's security considerations. This allows us to understand how these changes have altered the Kremlin's modus operandi, even leading to the outbreak of full-scale war. During the Soviet era, the lack of advanced information technology and the rigidity of the communist system rendered non-military means a marginal consideration of Russian strategy. Following the collapse of the USSR, the significance afforded to non-military means underwent an uninterrupted growth. To substantiate their theories, Russian thinkers have repeatedly referred to military interventions made by the United States or political instability in countries near Russia. Between the 1990s and 2010s, the former Yugoslavia and Iraq were the primary examples referred to as evidence of America's use of military means, whilst Russia's neighbouring countries, especially Ukraine, are perceived as cases in which non-military means were employed against Russians interests.

After decreasing in significance during the 1990s, non-military means have since come to occupy great importance in articles and speeches issued by influential Russian figures such as General Gerasimov, Gareyev, Chekinov and Bogdanov. The growing significance of these means has been accompanied by a deterioration of relations between Russia and Euro-Atlantic countries, as attested to by the aforementioned documents issued during the 1990s. In consideration of those circumstances which did not involve the use of non-military means, relations with NATO were much friendlier. Non-military means, including the use of the media, are perceived as a major threat in Russia, indicating a great fear of internal insurrection against the incumbent political regime, such as that which took place in Ukraine.

This concern resulted in the Russian government's increased control of its media and society, as well as its tenuous relations with Western countries. The latter — according to the Moscow viewpoint — attack the Russian Federation daily and attempt to seize control of Russia's former sphere of influence in order to reduce the country's defense capabilities. This dual threat that poses dangers both internally and externally, combining military and non-military tools, accounts for Russia's actions and its growing aggression in the international sphere. In the West, non-military means are perceived as tools by which to avoid direct conflict, whilst in Russia they are an element of conflict itself. It was taken for granted that 'hybrid warfare' was the new mode to wage war, and that the public would not witness open conflict. However, current developments demonstrate the errors of this way of thinking, and the growing importance of non-military means allows us to understand that these means can be as threatening as a missile barrage in Russia's eyes.

The current war in Ukraine is undeniable evidence that Russia perceives non-military means as a serious threat to its security. Russia's actions are a military response to what it understood to be the use of non-military means against it. Ukraine did not pose a military threat to Russia in the long term, but Euromaidan and the pro-Western governments that emerged from it did: firstly, this threat appeared in the non-military form of civilian protests along the same lines as the Ukrainian ones, threatening to bring down the Russian government. Secondly, a free Ukraine could have become a military threat as a country in the West's orbit which, in Russia's view, would eventually be incorporated into security organisations such as NATO. In the present war, we can perceive the ways in which the Kremlin employs the tools in its possession which have been most reliable — i.e. military means — against an intangible (i.e. non-military threat) which is perceived to be a serious danger to its security.

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