UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Russia's Grand Strategy and Military Power in the 21st Century

Understanding Russia's Military Revival & Unveiling the so-called Russian Gibridnaya Voyna (Political confrontation) and New-Generation Warfare (Hybrid Warfare)

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Abstract

This thesis describes the intersection between the Russian Grand Strategy and its use of the military power to fulfill it, both in terms of military hardware (traditional material capabilities) and military software (Strategic thinking). For many observers of Russian actions, it seems that very straightforward goals drive Russia's use of military power, a "paradigm shift" since the Ukrainian events of 2014, such as imperialism, expansion, aggressivity, and bellicosity towards the West. Nevertheless, there is a severe gap between the dominant western perception of Russian actions, and the true leitmotif of Russian activities, which is, as argued in the thesis, the overpowering desire to achieve the ends of Russian Grand Strategy, ends that are not based on the ideas mentioned above by mainstream observers. Since Russia uses of military power is a hot topic of international security, often perceived by the West as threats, but grounded on misguided assumptions, it seems of prime importance to discuss the Russian Grand Strategy in order to unveil and understand these actions contextually to avoid spiraling tensions. Moreover, it is crucial to comprehend the concept of Grand Strategy and its application to the circumstances of the Federation of Russia, because, while it explains perspicaciously the behavior of the country, the field of study is underdeveloped by the academia. Therefore, this leads the thesis to examine the concept of Grand Strategy, its form in Russia, and its link with the use of military power. The dissertation, to achieve this, draws its own theoretical framework and methods to be fully adapted to the Russian Grand Strategy. Then, the analysis, based on the fall of the USSR in 1991 to the current year of 2020, is divided into four main parts: the ends, the strategic environment, the means and the ways of Russian Grand Strategy. The paper will then reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this Grand Strategy. Afterwards, the thesis will conclude by answering its research question, concerning the link between Russian Grand Strategy and military power. Finally, the document will open perspective on the future of the country's possible next military interventions and Grand Strategy.

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"Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."

Winston Churchill, 1 October 1939, BBC Broadcast, London.

I. Introduction

In 2014, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Philip Breedlove described Russia's involvement in Ukraine as "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare" (Breedlove 2014). Indeed, Russian troops managed to take control of Crimea without firing a shot, something that Sun Tzu would call the "acme of skill", the subduing of an enemy without any fighting (Thornton 2015).

In 2015, the Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu, reported to the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, President Vladimir Putin, these exact words: "Mr. President, acting on your decision, since the 30th, we have been carrying out missions to strike ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other terrorist groups present on Syrian territory. We have conducted strikes against 112 targets" (Shoigu 2015). Indeed, Russia's air campaign over Syria was launched on 30 September 2015, followed by operations on the ground from the Spetsnaz, Russian special forces. This campaign was aimed (we use the past tense here as the principal military part is supposedly over since 2016) to save their Syrian ally, the president Bachar Al-Assad. This external military intervention is extremely remarkable because, firstly, by fulfilling its strategic objective of keeping the autocrat in power and pushing rebel groups to the Syrian desert borders, it is a military success. Secondly, the campaign was the first Russian military intervention outside the borders of the former Union since the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989.

What is very interesting about these two events is that only ten years before, such an account of Russian military activities would appear like nothing but fiction, because during much of the 1990s and 2000s, the Russian armed forces had been left to fall into a state of serious disrepair (Renz 2018: 10). As Russia entered the new millennium, it appeared clear that it did so with "its capacity to project power beyond its borders vastly reduced and its ability to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty severely tested" (Rumer and Wallander 2003: 61). By the middle of the 2000s, many believed, both in Russia and in the West, that the ongoing neglect of the Russian armed forces had pushed them close to irreversible ruin (Renz 2018: 2). Given that their service personnel was by now "impoverished, demoralized and largely ineffective" (Barany 2005: 33) and the forces

"woefully inadequate to address the country's security threats", it seemed clear that Russia no longer casts the shadow of global military power (Golts and Putnam 2004: 121).

Nevertheless, as we perceived in the decade 2010s, Russia has experienced a remarkable military and strategic revival. First, in terms of physical capabilities. The operation in Syria demonstrated that many of the shortcomings, which had led to a humiliating defeat in the First Chechen War, had been decisively overcome. Russia had now acquired the capability required to launch military operations far beyond its immediate neighborhood (Gorenburg 2016). As such, Russia's air operations over Syria represented "the most spectacular military-political event of our time" (Pukhov 2016: 2). Second, in terms of military strategy. Moscow surprised the world with the success of the Crimea operation, through an extreme restraint in the application of any physical violence, the use of "Little, green and polite" special operations soldiers (Nikolsky 2015: 125), combined with an information campaign and other non-physical tools (Renz 2018: 11). Until Crimea, it was widely assumed that Russian military strategists were unable to move beyond Cold War thinking on large-scale interstate warfare (Ibid 12). The approach in Crimea, which later became known as "hybrid warfare", suggested that profound advances had been made in Moscow's strategic thinking, via the skillful match of appropriate means to the conflict's ends (Ibid 12).

Hence, Russia's military interventions took most countries by surprise (House of Lords 2015: 6), and "created a shockwave in the European security system" (Morozov 2015: 26). Not only did they show that the country's military capabilities had dramatically improved, but they also demonstrated that Moscow was now confident and willing to use military force to pursue its interests on a global level, irrespective of strong condemnation by the West (Renz 2018: 13). It created a turning point in post-Cold War global security because, for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a militarily resurgent Russia was seen as a threat not only to its neighbors but also to the West (Ibid, 13).

Therefore, there is nowadays a sense in western military strategists and academia that the Kremlin's actions are the result of a relatively sudden and dramatic change in foreign policy—a "paradigm shift"—which signified a "seismic change in Russia's role in the world", thanks to a revived military (Rutland 2014). Questions were being asked by many observers and officials in the West regarding the purpose of these actions. Many believe that the only

explanation for the Kremlin's efforts to strengthen the country's military capabilities is the intention to engage in further aggressive action (Renz 2018). Indeed, the main strategic reasons for this revival are very often explained in terms of rivalries with the West, expansionism, and belligerence. Many believed that "Russia's military buildup is a harbinger of neo-imperial expansion", where the annexation of Crimea was merely a first stroke of the brush on a vast canvas (Ramani 2016). As former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta put it, "Putin's main interest is to try and restore the old Soviet Union. I mean, that is what drives him" (CSIS 2016). Fears are also expressed in NATO territory, where the Baltic States felt particularly threatened by Moscow. As such, the British Defense Secretary, Michael Fallon, believed that there was a "clear and present danger" that the Baltic States would be Moscow's next target (Farmer 2015). Globally, Moscow is perceived as "aiming to undermine the liberal international order and Western unity" as the former secretary-general of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, wrote in spring 2016 (Rasmussen 2016), or as "the biggest threat to global security of today" as the Polish Prime Minister Antoni Macierewicz called Russia in 2016 (Sharkov 2016).

Moreover, concerns were raised about the innovations in Russian strategic thought regarding the development of the country of a hybrid's approach to warfare, which the West was already unable to stand up against (Renz 2018: 14). To quote Chuck Hagel, Moscow was developing "capabilities that appear designed to counter traditional western military advantages" (Hagel 2014). As a UK House of Commons Defense Committee report asserted, the "new and less conventional military techniques" Russia had developed "represent the most immediate threat to its NATO neighbors and the other NATO Member States" (House of Commons Defense Committee 2014).

Hence, Russia's military revival, both in terms of strategic thinking, physical and material buildup, and enhanced tactical and doctrinaire warfare approach, is a very current topic in IR circles, as well as in the military ones, and seems very pertinent for an adequate analysis in order to make Moscow's objectives and strategies more transparent. Nevertheless, rather than supporting mainstream arguments of Russia's actions in terms of aggressivity, expansionism, or imperialism, there is a concept that seems to fit particularly well in the context of these actions, often under-looked, which is Grand Strategy.

Problematization of the subject and Presenting the research question and sub-questions

Nevertheless, analyzing Russia's Grand Strategyia, due to lack of consensus among experts, scholars, and practitioners regarding the concept, is not a straightforward exercise. Indeed, mainstream observers of Russia's international policy may be divided into two categories: skeptics and alarmists.

The first view Russia as weak and unable to form a Grand strategy. They do not believe that Russia's leadership is capable of—and interested in—designing a Grand strategy or a coherent long-term plan with appropriate institutional, material, and intellectual support (Ibid). Indeed, for them, inherent Russian "advantages", such as numerical mass, or geographic and climatic conditions, have meant that Russian leaders have not had to develop coherent strategic plans (Luttwak 1983: 15). In the same vein, some scholars develop this aspect even further, pointing to a traditional "Tolstoyan rejection" of strategy: strategic planning was futile since it came down to luck, and the Russian leadership had too little control over events (Moran 1999: 65). Furthermore, a subgroup of skeptics thinks that Russia cannot have a strategy since the country's leadership is irrational and foolish. These skeptics argue that Russia possesses more a "Strange strategy" than a Grand one (Applebaum 2018); or that Russia's Grand strategy is "neither Grand, nor strategic, nor sustainable", because the country's practice of patronage and corruption reveals the continuing ineffectiveness of the state, and the author even suggests that "whether Russia will survive as a Great power in the 21st century is an open question" (Wallander 2007: 140).

The second groups warn that the Kremlin is capable of formulating a Grand Strategy, but it is mainly militarist, aggressive, and challenging towards the West and its position in the world (Tsygankov 2011: 29). For this group, Russia's successes have not come without a price and are concerned over what they view as Russia's unilateral and confrontational style (Tsygankov 2011: 30). This second group insists that Russia is increasingly capable of formulating a coherent Grand strategy, but such a strategy is anti-democratic and anti-West in its main orientations (Cohen 2007; Bugajski 2009). Indeed, several Western observers insist that Russians are longing for a Soviet restoration and developing an essential Stalinist outlook that will lead to further warnings about external enemies and possibly even another cycle of state-organized violence (Lucas 2009; Kramer 2010). These alarmists argue that Russia, that is Neo-Soviet and KGB-controlled, must be economically isolated and expelled from Western

institutions, but they worry that it is already too late for isolation to work (Tsygankov 2011: 30).

As a result, the debate regarding Russia's Grand Strategiya and its purpose shows us that Russia's actions in the international arena are mainly polarised, perceived as either black or white, either minimized or demonized. Adopting one of the two sides for the thesis, however, would be highly detrimental, as it means dismissing interesting leads on one side or the other. Indeed, the views of alarmists and skeptics have significant echoes throughout contemporary commentary on Russia and make many relevant points about Russian politics (Monaghan 2013: 1226). However, theses stances reveal myths and oversimplifications and assumptions of Russia as a monolithic "black box", and they rarely seek to come to grips with the central tenets of Grand Strategy (Ibid).

Hence, a quote from one of the world's most excellent diplomats is very interesting for the study of Russian Foreign Policy, even today, as it explains the view of the thesis regarding Russia's capacities and capabilities:

"Russia is never as strong as we fear and never as weak as we hope".

—Klemens von Metternich, Congress of Vienna, 1815

This quote allows us to catch a glimpse of a third alternative to this inadequate debate between alarmists and skepticists. A "greyer" picture emerged, namely Russia with a Grand Strategy adapted to context and capabilities, neither too shy nor too aggressive, neither too benevolent nor too bellicose, with strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. Indeed, the thesis's stance is based on the fact that the reactions of the West regarding Russians' actions of alarmist or skepticist nature, or perceived as aggressive, are problematic because they are constituted on misguided assumptions. Regarding the timing, purpose, and scope of Russia's military revival, namely the famous "paradigm shift", the desire for an expansionist and aggressive foreign policy and the notion of rivalry with the West, as well as the assumption that Moscow finds a new war-winning formula of modern wars of our time, are misguided. Indeed, they fail to take into account the historical and international context of the military revival, which did not occur in a vacuum (Renz 2018). Nevertheless, the aim of the thesis is not to defend the Russian Federation heart and soul; it is adequate to some extent to perceive improvements in Russia's military capabilities and Moscow's growing confidence in using armed force as posing challenges to its neighbors and to the West. However, the precise

nature of these challenges is not as straightforward as often implied (Renz 2018). Hence, the purpose of the thesis is to provide this context, through a specific framework of Grand Strategy that particularly well explains Moscow's actions and perceptions.

It is decided to take this specific angle, because a contextualized analysis of Moscow's reasons for strengthening its armed forces is not only of interest as an exercise of academic inquiry but also has substantial policy relevance (Renz 2018: 15). Following the annexation of Crimea, it has become a widely accepted fact that a lack of capacity to understand political developments in contemporary Russia caused the West to "sleepwalk" into the current crisis (Monaghan 2016: 26). A contextualized study of Russia's military revival contributes to a better understanding of the Kremlin's thinking and actions, which can ensure that any potential future actions will come as less of a surprise (Renz 2018: 15). It is of prime importance because if policies adopted by the West vis-à-vis the Kremlin are insufficiently informed by known motivations driving Russian behavior, they could fail and inadvertently lead to spiraling tensions (Ibid).

Therefore, the research question of the thesis is the following*: What is the Russian Grand Strategy in the 21st century, and what are its key implications that need to be acknowledged by Western policymakers and strategists?*

The analysis will be shaped by a four-leveled analytical framework, inspired and selected from prominent authors on Russia's military and strategic domains, such as Bettina Renz (2018) and Ofer Fridman (2019). After answering these four sub-questions in separate chapters of the analysis, the thesis will be able to conclude the research question. The following four sub-questions have, thus, been made:

- First, what are the ends of the Russian Grand Strategy in the 21st century?
- Second, what was Russia's strategic environment after the collapse of the USSR?
- Third, are the prioritization and developments of Russian military capabilities, both in terms of hardware (physical military capabilities) and software (the conceptual products of military thought), the means to reach and balance the ends of the Russian Grand Strategy?

- Fourth, are the Kremlin's external military interventions, as well as the use of non-military means from Moscow's strategic thinking, the ways of implementing and coordinating the Russian Grand Strategy?

Structure of the dissertation

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. After this introduction, the second chapter covers a literature review of the relevant theoretical field for the subject. The third chapter outlines the thesis's analytical strategy, regarding the selected theoretical framework, as well as the paper's research purpose and design, and finally discusses the methods. The fourth chapter is the analytical part of the thesis, divided into four main sections (ends, strategic environment, means, and ways of Russian Grand Strategy), answering each of the sub-questions enumerated above. The fifth part is a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of this Grand Strategy. Next is the conclusion, where the thesis answers the research question, and the final one is about the prospects of intervention and the future of Russia from the current situation.

II. Literature Review

This chapter first aims to place the thesis regarding the relevant academic field. The thesis' position, and then its theoretical framework in the next chapter, outline the central concept of "Grand Strategy".

It is, indeed, useful to know how to place oneself on the debate concerning the concept of Grand Strategy, which, despite its increasing popularity in academia, is a "slippery" (Brands 2014), "fuzzy" (Miller 2016), and "jumble" (Milevski 2016) concept. There is substantial, ongoing discussion in the existing literature about how the term should be defined (Silove 2018: 28), and there is no agreement on a universal definition (Balzacq et al. 2019).

Hence, the dissertation will first explain the debate of practitioners and scholars over the domains of Grand Strategy. Then in the analytical strategy, we will introduce our selected theoretical framework of Grand Strategy and the methods chosen for the analysis.

1. Origins of Grand Strategy

Foremost, it is imperative to distinguish Strategy and Grand Strategy, which are very often confused. The reason why the two terms are very confusing together comes from the ancient understanding of strategy. Before the 20th century, the military power, in the perceptions of leaders as well as in reality, was the only available means to provide a state with power and strength in the international arena (Martell 2015: 23). The other sources of power (economic, diplomatic, and informational) existed in one form or another; however, the institutions for the accumulation and application of these types of power were relatively underdeveloped and minuscule compared to the advancement and strength of the state's military institutions (Ibid). Therefore, strategy was defined simply as "the art of military command, of projecting and directing a campaign", and was synonymous with Grand strategy when the state's primary purpose was to project and direct military force against internal and external threats (Mead Earle 1971). Thereby, ancient theorists and practitioners can be considered as "Grand strategists" of their time, such as Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Clausewitz, because they focused primarily on the military dimension of state, at a time military power was the centrally anchoring type of state Power (Martell 2015: 24). Hence, *Art of War, History of the Peloponnesian War, or Vom Kriege (On War)* did not explain Grand

strategy as we understand the concept nowadays. Thus, for most of its history, the language of Grand strategy was inseparable from the one of strategy and war, and only recently, Grand strategy has expanded boldly beyond the confines of the conduct of war and the use of the military (Ibid).

Grand Strategy emerged as a distinct concept in the early phases of World War II, when American and British thinkers began to think about strategy in more holistic terms as the war unfolded (Sargeaunt and West 1941). They saw that strategy, which had become too narrowly defined militarily needed to look beyond the end of military victory and employ means beyond armed services (Ibid). Moreover, the economic base of war and its crucial role in determining long-term strategic outcomes were clear and recognized, much more so than in World War I, when states did not anticipate the protracted struggle that it would become (Martell 2015). Therefore, economic power shifted to the center of strategy as did social power or the societal base for war. Indeed, it moved as well as the civilian population base not only supplied the labor, military recruits, technological capabilities, and political support on the home front, but also became a direct part of the fighting itself as strategic bombing and other military strategies designated civilian populations as primary targets (Sargeaunt and West 1941). In sum, at the opening of World War II, the modern industrialized state had a broader range of capabilities that relied more closely on society, rather than the only focus on war (Martell 2015).

Therefore, the first scholars to think of Grand Strategy as a product of diversified set of power resources were H.A. Sargeaunt, Geoffrey West, and the founder of modern Grand strategy, Edward Mead Earle (Sargeaunt and West 1941; Mead Earle 1971). On the one side, Sargeaunt and West's book defines a state's Grand strategy "as the highest type of strategy", and as a product of the state, its society, and political values (Gove 1981: 2348). Therefore, the state and society set the parameters for the possible Grand strategies that can be pursued (Martell 2015). On the other side, Earle distinguishes the historically narrow definition of strategy as the art of military command and the projecting and directing of campaigns and the broader definition that is more relevant to the problems faced at present by the industrialized state (Ekbladh 2011). We can acknowledge nowadays that strategy is the "science and art of using all the forces of a nation to execute the approved plans as effectively as possible during peace or war", describing the political, economic, and military means that policymakers use to

accomplish the state's broad objectives (Mead Earle 1971). As a consequence, Grand strategy acquired the meaning it has today, which primarily expresses the highest level of strategy where all types of national power are mobilized to achieve the state's highest political ends (Martell 2015).

2. The theoretical "Universe" of Grand Strategy: Classicist versus Polyvalent interpretations

Due to lack of identified consensus in the meaning of Grand strategy, attributed to its "popular and widespread use and misuse" (Milevski 2016: 127), work on Grand strategy coalesces around two conceding formulations that run in parallel silos, the Classicist and the polyvalent interpretations (Balzacq et al. 2019), which we will now describe.

A. <u>The classicist approach</u>

Advocates of the Classicist tradition of Grand strategy, in the words of Robert Art, "concentrate primarily on how the military instrument should be employed to achieve a nation's goals" (Art 2003: 2). Classicists employ a "periodized" nineteenth-century usage of the concept, preoccupied with military issues, and their understanding of Grand strategy specifies a logic—the preparation for and fighting of wars—and a substance—military capabilities and how they are employed in war (Balzacq et al. 2019: 7). One of the most prominent authors of the classicist approach, Barry Posen, explains that Grand strategy's core purpose is to address "direct, imminent, and plausible military threats by other nation states" (Posen 2014: 3). War (or, less dramatically, conflict) structures the logic of Grand strategy, and "Grand strategy is ultimately about fighting" (Ibid 1). In his defense of the argument that Grand strategy concentrates on national security—narrowly conceived as sovereignty, territorial integrity, power position, and safety—Posen refers to it as a "key component of a state's overall foreign policy" (Ibid 2). In the words of Barry Posen, efforts to explore the non-military bases of Grand strategy are problematic because they "dilute the most important purpose of Grand strategy, which is to address the fact that the state exists in a world where war is possible" (Ibid 7). A Grand strategy, therefore, "enumerates and prioritizes threats and potential military remedies to threats". The purpose of this study of Grand strategy is to subject "military power to the discipline of political science" (Balzacq et al. 2019).

Nevertheless, this Grand Strategy approach differs little from what is characterized as contemporary military strategy, and an exclusive focus on military force appears inconsistent with the contemporary landscape of world politics—a point reinforced by academics, policymakers, and the military itself (Brands 2014: 3).

B. The polyvalent approach

The second approach of Grand Strategy rejects the narrow Classicist formulation. William Martel, for example, suggests that "Grand strategy is not and never has been simply about war or the conduct of war—in fact, war often represents a failure of Grand strategy" (Martell 2015: 4). According to this approach, strategy is submerged into Grand strategy, inverting its nineteenth-century Classicist usage (James 1805). Thus, proponents of the polyvalent approach recognize the role of military capabilities but assume that "Grand strategy controls military strategy, which is one of its elements", henceforth including diplomatic, economic, societal, and technological instruments (Collins 1973: 15). Military force is just one of a constellation of different kinds of instruments (Balzacq et al. 2019).

Therefore, the formulation of a Grand strategy, the configuration of its instruments, and subsequent selection of policies and tactics correspond to the nature of a state's interests and the threats they face; the pursuit of security is therefore explicitly subject to the effective marshaling of a variety of instruments that a Grand strategy is meant to rank, balance, and coordinate (Balzacq et al. 2019: 72). Proponents of the polyvalent tradition, therefore, generally believe that a state must employ various instruments, and permutations and combinations of policies, to realize its goals. Paul Kennedy cogently expresses this view when he states that "the crux of Grand strategy lies in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests" (Kennedy 1991: 5). Peter Feaver concurs to it when suggesting that "Grand strategy refers to the collection of plans and policies that comprise the state's deliberate effort to harness political, military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state's national interest" (Feaver 2008).

This approach embraced a more holistic understanding of Grand strategy, where, "a Grand strategy represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources and

policies" (Brands 2014: 3). Furthermore, the concept is "the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy, the conceptual center of gravity—and thus its military policy, its diplomacy, and other subsidiary components of foreign policy" (Ibid 4). Alternatively, it can be perceived as a blueprint or guiding logic for a nation's policies across many areas (Brooks and Wolhforth 2016: 75). In contrast to Posen, the scope is, therefore, broader and the timeframe longer (Balzacq et al. 2019).

Therefore, this approach has two main implications. First, different states, with different institutional arrangements, resources, and geopolitical circumstances, will use these tools for different purposes and in different proportions (Popescu 2018). Second, over time, they will adjust Grand strategies according to the tools available, evolving interests, and the threats posed by and opportunities offered in their regional and global security environments (Ibid). Thus, states will be influenced by domestic and international factors in different ways (Ibid), where Grand Strategy is a "discipline of trade-offs" and "ruthless prioritization" in the provision of the most effective edge against vital threats to a country's national interests (Brands 2014: 4).

After reviewing the various stances of the debate on Grand Strategy, we will look at the Analytical Strategy of the thesis, with our selected theoretical Framework of Grand Strategy, our research design, and lastly, the methods sampled to study Russian Grand Strategy

III. Analytical Strategy: Theoretical Framework and Methods

1. Theoretical framework - the thesis's "theorization" of Grand Strategy: Grand Strategy as a problem-solving tool

In the light of the two different interpretations of Grand Strategy (classicist and polyvalent), coupled with the debate on Russia's Grand Strategy, I have decided to choose a theoretical framework for our analysis that merges both interpretations. A pluralistic approach is preferred in the dissertation because one should understand Grand strategy as a polythetic concept (Balzacq et al. 2019: 9). Indeed, as Avery Goldstein suggests, Grand strategy may not be the kind of phenomenon that is cut out "for a distinct theoretical literature" (Goldstein 2005).

The idea here is to follow a course of action, which first develops an integrated account of strategy, including military and non-military instruments into a single strategy, and secondly, to rehabilitate the concept of Grand Strategy to promote "more mature understanding of strategy, politics, and policy" (Milevski 2016: 152).

The reasons for this "hybrid" homemade approach are multiple. First, using a single definition of what a Grand strategy is, which defines a character of national interest, remains heavily contested. Hence to create consensus regarding this work, a theory mixing both the elements of the two will allow the thesis to be more comprehensive, with a broader formulation of Grand strategy that will not ignore essential elements of the country. Second, one should treat the concept of Grand Strategy as "an empirical concept", not as a direct theorized concept, and the relevance of either approach is contingent, dependent on direct observations rather than employing either version a priori (Balzacq et al. 2019: 9). Thus, states may utilize one or the other for a variety of historical and contextual reasons (Ibid). Third, focusing on a unique approach can be misleading because the exercise of defining the substance and contours of the concept of Grand Strategy is "subjective" (Brands 2014: 3). Thus, one western observer can perceive Russian Grand Strategy as totally classicist, while a non-western one can see it as more polyvalent.

Especially for Russia, a mixed approach is necessary because one can perceive the Russian Grand Strategy in both terms, whereas selecting only one will create a black box regarding the concept. In the case of Russia, one can perceive a preponderant classicist Grand Strategy approach, with the primacy of the military power to achieve the ends of the country's

Grand Strategy. Nevertheless, there are some components of the polyvalent approach, with the use of all available means, even non-military ones, that balance the means to reach the ends of the strategic goals.

Thus, for our created framework, the dissertation will merge both classicist and polyvalent understandings of Grand Strategy to create a hybrid theoretical universe of the concept for the appropriate study of Russia's Grand Strategy. This is because there are no universal recipes and theoretical principles in the "soup" of Grand Strategy. What works in one case may well not work in another. In various strengths, Grand strategy consists of leadership, vision, intuition, process, adaptation, and the impact of a nation's particular and idiosyncratic development and geographic position, but in no particular order or mixture (Murray and Grimsley 2007: 8). Furthermore, the paper will integrate a structured instrumental way of thinking of Grand Strategy, inspired by the works of William Martel and its book *"Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice"* (2015), and of Arthur Lykke and its article *"Defining Military Strategy"* (1989). Indeed, in practice, Grand strategy provides a framework of organizing principles that is useful to help policymakers and society make coherent choices about the conduct of foreign policy (Martell 2015: 33). Grand Strategy can be deconstructed through the model of Lykke, grouping *"*ends*"* (objective), *"*means*"* (instruments of national power), and *"*ways*"* (course of action) of Grand Strategy. For Lykke, Grand Strategy is a coherent expression of a process that identifies the ends, ways, and means designed to achieve a particular goal (Lykke 1989). Finally, the thesis will add a new variable to this model, namely the "strategic environment" (history and context of the Kremlin's Grand Strategy), added between the paragraphs between ends and means, because it is of utmost importance to approach Grand Strategy in relation to a historical narrative of the country studied. These will create a very explicit model, which is Grand Strategy=E+S+M+W.

Therefore, these components will help us adopt a general framework of the concept of Grand Strategy in order to reveal the characteristics of the Russia Grand Strategyia and hence to answer our research question.

A Hybrid classicist-polyvalent concept and the Model: Grand Strategy = E+S+M+W

- The Ends: Definition and Articulation of a State's Grand Strategy

The first step in achieving an effective Grand strategy is to clearly define and articulate its principles and objectives, which may take the form of written documents or policy statements, speeches, or merely the clear expression in thought of the state's dominant policymakers or Grand strategists (Ibid 37).

First, the ends should be a coherent statement of national purpose of what the state seeks to achieve in Foreign Policy. The statement does not necessarily have to be written in a document or articulated by a person at a particular time, but it does have to be clear and reducible to a set of guidelines concrete enough to provide real guidance and signals to implementers to explain what is expected to them (Ibid 33).

Second, the ends need to articulate "the most vital priorities of the state", related to the highest security threats (Ibid). The matters it entails sit at the top of the hierarchy of principles that govern what policymakers will seek to achieve in foreign policy (Luttwak 2011: 181). Hence, Grand Strategy provides a broad background and context for all actions and policies pursued by the state (Ibid).

Third, the ends operate on a global scale and possess a long-term time horizon. Global-scale means that the Grand Strategy should encompass all aspects of the international system, and not merely one part of it (Martell 2015: 34). Long-term time horizon expresses the fact that Grand Strategy is supposed to be sustainable and stable against shifting political fads and passing interests. It is a statement of the nation's long-term strategy for governing the conduct of its foreign policy (Ibid). Kennedy provides a strong statement about the long-term nature of Grand strategy when he states that Grand strategy is "about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries" (Kennedy 1991: 4).

Moreover, Grand strategy may be as concerned with avoiding war as with fighting it, although there are times when there is no alternative to conflict (Martell 2015). Thus, one should not assume that Grand strategy is only a matter of war; some of the greatest successes of Grand strategy have been non-fought wars, the most obvious of which was the Cold War (Gaddis 2006).

Furthermore, what distinguishes states who have attempted to develop and execute a Grand strategy is their focus on acting beyond the demands of the present. In other words, they have taken a longer view than merely reacting to the events of the day, and they did not concentrate on a unique aspect of the problem (Murray, 2011 2). Those who develop a successful Grand strategy never lose sight of the long-term goal, whatever that may be, but are willing to adapt to the difficulties of the present in reaching towards the future (Ibid 3). Notwithstanding, those who have been most successful at this practice have also recognized that the "future is not foreseeable" and consequently have been willing to adapt to political, economic, and military conditions as they are rather than what they wish them to be (Ibid 4). Hence, states maintained a vision focused on the possibilities of the future, while adapting to the realities of the present (Ibid).

- The Strategic Environment: the importance of historical context in the emergence of a State's Grand Strategy

The second important characteristic in crafting a Grand Strategy is to take into account the strategic environment of a particular state and its reflection in the country's Grand Strategy.

Foremost, Grand Strategy is a concept involving Great states and Great states only. Indeed, no small states and few medium-size states possess the ability to crafting a Grand strategy (Murray 2011: 1). This is the primary variable that needs to be taken into account while studying a state's Grand Strategy.

Second, the historical context and experience, geography, and culture of a specific country are essential factors to understand its Grand Strategy. They exercised a massive, but often unseen, influence over the making of national Grand Strategy. History is essential to any understanding of the present; only the past can clarify and elucidate the factors, trends, political and economic frameworks that have made the present and will undoubtedly drive the future (Murray 2011: 6). Thus, simply thinking about developing a concept of Grand strategy demands not only a deep understanding of the past but also a comprehensive and realistic understanding of the present (Ibid). Regarding culture, individuals and their particular abilities to upset every seemingly rational calculation represent a factor that statesmen rarely seem to command (Murray 2011: 9). This factor is particularly so because what appears rational to the

leaders of one national group inevitably reflects their own cultural biases (Ibid). Hence, one must think of Grand strategy in terms of an idiosyncratic process rather than a specific, clearly thought-through approach to the world (Ibid).

Third, Grand Strategy must rest on an assessment and understanding of not only one's opponents but also of oneself (Tzu ≈5th century BC: 84). There is rarely clarity in the effective casting of a Grand strategy because, by nature, it exists in an environment of constant change, where chance and the unexpected are inherent (Gaddis 1992). The Weltanschauungen (worldviews) of statesmen and military leaders alike—a significant determinant in the formation of any Grand strategy—will come under constant assault from the ever-changing environment within which they work (Murray 2011: 8). One does not make an effective Grand strategy entirely as one would like but instead according to the circumstances in which a national policy finds itself (Ibid).

- The Means: Prioritization of the Tools and Balance of Means and Ends of a State's Grand Strategy

The third primary step in creating an effective Grand strategy is the selection and prioritization of its means and the adequate allocation of resources through the right balance between means and ends.

The selection and prioritization of means are based on the motivation to reach the ends of the state's Grand Strategy. A central question for this function is how to "choose among the most important and doable goals", while avoiding the problems of dissipating "energy and resources" on "worthwhile efforts, only to see none of them succeed" (Schwenninger 2003: 20). Prioritization provides a conceptual road map that helps guide a society as it balances threats with the resources that it is willing and able to mobilize (Martell 2015: 35). Moreover, there is a prioritization of regions and issues that affect various states and parts of the globe (Ibid). The key to Grand strategy is to have a geostrategic framework that helps policymakers navigate the political terrain of a world where challenges are not always marked by the actions of clear adversaries (Ibid). Therefore, Grand strategy is the framework within which all actions of the state are taken, under some cartography of Grand strategy, as a "necessary simplification that allows us to see where we are, and where we may be going" (Gaddis 1991: 102).

Balancing means and ends expresses the idea that the means should not be too costly to avoid making the ends politically self-defeating (Martell 2015: 36). This classic means-ends balance is of central prominence as policymakers struggle daily to articulate and implement the state's Grand strategy in the face of what are severe economic and political constraints (Ibid). Otherwise, in case of failure of balance, one state would be endangered by overreach, which is an all-too-common consequence when states miscalculate what their Grand strategy calls for or when policymakers find that the society is unwilling to support that strategy (Ibid). As Liddell Hart warns, "a state which expends its strength to the point of exhaustion bankrupts its Grand strategy" (1967: 349). In principle, the state's overall policies must ensure that its actions are guided cautiously by the conditions and outcomes it seeks to achieve (Martell 2015: 36). In fact, what defines the qualities of a Grand Strategy is its "balance" and its coherence. Grand Strategy must be coherent to be efficient; however, incoherence does not show that there is no existence of Grand Strategy, but rather the case of a "flawed Grand Strategy" as it was the case for the George W. Bush administration (Brands 2014: 9). The same argument holds for the quality of balance, where the notion explains that means need to be efficiently allocated depending on the end(s), derived from the basic Clausewitzian idea of using no more and no less than the amount of force needed to achieve objective(s) (Clausewitz 1834). Nevertheless, the use of excessive or inadequate force makes a strategy a bad one, not a not-strategy (Silove 2018: 48).

- The Ways: Implementations of a State's Grand Strategy and its courses of action

The final step is the proper implementation of a state's Grand Strategy with first the coordination of all the means and second, the integration and encompassment of all national instruments of state powers.

Coordinating the actions of the state among and between different types of national power means that one variety should be conducted without working at cross-purposes to another (Ibid). Diplomatic initiatives should not jeopardize military operations to give an example. For instance, Otto von Bismarck saw strategy as a "classic illustration of the effective coordination of force and statecraft for the attainment of the state's political aims" (Craig and Gilbert 1960: 326).

Integrating the different types of national power available to the state is perhaps the most challenging task to achieve in Grand Strategy (Martell 2015: 37). Policymakers must ensure that they are not merely avoiding the negative consequence of working at cross-purposes but are accomplishing positive results by using the elements of power to put the strategy into practice (Ibid). Therefore, the objective is to ensure that these elements of power become force multipliers for each other, through the right "cocktail", the right combination of means. Indeed, Grand Strategy is holistic in the sense that it is concerned with, in Liddell Hart's terms, "all the resources" of a state (Liddell Hart 1967: 322). Thus, Grand Strategy regroups "all the elements, both military and non-military" (Kennedy 1991: 5). Numerous definitions of Grand strategy supported the notion that Grand strategy is concerned with the military, diplomatic, and economic spheres of statecraft (Silove 2018).

2. Methods: a Grand methodology for Grand Strategy

This research involved a qualitative rather than a quantitative stance, even if the latter will be tackled in some sections of the analysis. "Qualitative research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers" (Bryman 2012: 380). Qualitative research will be useful for the case of the Russian Grand Strategy because Grand Strategy is not a real object or phenomenon, something that exists independently of the mind of the observer (Silove 2019: 31). A qualitative posture will be relevant for describing, interpreting, contextualizing, and gaining in-depth insight into the specific Russia's Grand Strategy. Nevertheless, in this subjective area, one can approach the concept as a construct that depicts "a reality", without claiming to depict "the reality", in order to be applied post hoc to interpret states' behavior (Jackson 2011). Even if most scholars apprehend Grand Strategy as semantics, focusing only on the question of "what is the definition of the concept", the thesis will focus on an ontological approach, thus, involving an empirical analysis of the concept. Indeed, if the concept is not intimately related to an empirical analysis, then there is nothing to which one can anchor the concept (Goertz 2006: 5). Hence, how one should discern a construct empirically? The thesis will try to avoid scholars' failures, which are the ongoing confusion about how to define the term, the dissociated nature of the literature on Grand strategy, and the apparent insolubility of fundamental questions about the existence of Grand strategy

(Silove 2019: 34). It is only when the object or phenomenon to which the term refers is identified that the pathways towards resolving these problems become clearer (Ibid).

Using Grand Strategy as a practical problem-solving methodology means applying a structure to the problem's context. Hence, it is decided to use a pluralistic methodology. The methods of the thesis will be heterogenous, because each section (ends, strategic environment, means, and ways) possesses its own appropriate methodology, the most suitable for its characteristics. However, a common methodological thread is respected, a specific data selection and collection framework for the Study of Grand Strategy, which is inspired by the methodological framework of Nina Silove (2019), consisting of three elements for the study of Grand Strategy:

1. Grand plans are the detailed product of the deliberate efforts of individuals to translate a state's interests into specific long-term goals, establish orders of priority between those goals, and consider all spheres of statecraft (military, diplomatic, and economy) in the process of identifying how to achieve them. Given their level of detail, Grand plans are likely to be—but are not necessarily—set down in written documents (Silove 2019). Hence, in Russia's case, this will be, for example, military doctrines, foreign policy documents, and more.
2. Grand principles are overarching ideas that are consciously held by individuals about the long-term goals that the state should prioritize and the military, diplomatic, and economic means that ought to be mobilized in pursuit of those goals. They tend to be expressed in single words or short phrases (Silove 2019). Thus, this data will be concerning statements of the leadership of Russia, as Putin, Medvedev, ministries of defense of Foreign Affairs, etc.
3. Grand behavior is the long-term pattern in a state's distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources to support the ends. In this context, the ends that receive the most significant relative resources can be deemed to be priorities (Silove 2019). Therefore, this will be constituted of non-material sources, such as reforms, military interventions, and other activities.

Analyzing the Ends of Russia's Grand Strategy

To analyze the ends of Russia's Grand Strategy, we relied mainly on thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an adequate method to understand people's views and opinions based on their knowledge, experience and values. Thematic analysis is based on qualitative data, and it allows much flexibility in data interpretation and in sorting them into broad themes. In our case, the data will concern with Grand principles of the Russian leadership (as explained by Silove), as well as their perceptions on Russia and the rest world. These Grand principles stem from understandings of the individuals, and can be traced through statements from the leadership, self-perception, and their affiliated emotions. This section of the analysis will be the more about the State's psychology and the cognitive functioning of the individuals. Hence, the broad themes that will emerge from this method are the ends of Russia's Grand Strategy. They will appear from the coding of the main subjects enumerated by influential Russian individuals, thus enabling the generation of central themes and their definitions.

The thesis deliberately decided not to involve Grand plans (primary strategy documents) in this section, even though they seem particularly suitable at first to understand the ends. Indeed, they only explain very little about the main psychological drivers of the country's Grand Strategy, that are more implicit and in the perceptions of the leadership. However, with thematic analysis, the thesis risks missing nuances in the data, because people's views can be subjective.

Analyzing the Strategic Environment of Russia's Grand Strategy

In order to analyze the strategic environment, the second section will base its method on historical analysis. Historical analysis examines evidence to understand the past (Bricknell 2011). Hence, the thesis will examine the environment that saw the birth of the Russian Federation, from 1991 to 1999, with the arrival of Vladimir Putin as president. The historical analysis will be based on a variety of data, from secondary and academic sources to key thinkers, to establish cause and effect between Russia's strategic environment in the 1990s, and the current Grand Strategyia.

Referring to the historical analysis as a methodological choice is justified by the fact that Grand Strategy is a concept that needs to be reflexive about the past to formulate an appropriate answer to the challenges of the present and the futur. Hence, it is believed in the

thesis that it is essential to understand some events of Russia's recent past to highlight the preferences and choices of the leadership concerning their Grand Strategy. Nevertheless, one should take into account that history cannot represent a fully accurate picture of the past; there is no historical truth, and partiality is always part of the representation of the past.

Analyzing the Means of Russia's Grand Strategy

For our third section, the thesis will use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data to observe the means. Indeed, quantitative data will be used regarding the hardware elements of the military power, such as the increase of military expenditures, for instance; and qualitative data will help grasp the complexity of the software elements of this power, the primary means of Russian Grand Strategy. Hence, this section will derive from Grand plans, the detailed product of the deliberate efforts of individuals to translate a state's interests into specific long-term goals.

The method of observation is supported by the fact that numerous explicit documents were developed to improve the military power in order to achieve the State's Grand Strategy, both in terms of hardware, such as the military modernization of 2008 and its affiliated military doctrines; and in terms of software, through the refinement of the strategic military thinking and the work of Russian military scholars.

Analyzing the Ways of Russia's Grand Strategy

Finally, a method of interpretation is selected to analyze the ways, drawing inferences from the collected facts by linking the results of this part to the other section of the analysis. Therefore, the ways will be explained in terms of their relationship with the ends of Russia's Grand Strategy, as well as the utilization of specific means to achieve the Grand Strategic's goals.

Consequently, this segment of the analysis will be primarily positioned on Grand behavior, the long-term pattern in a state's distribution and employment of its means to achieve its ends, in order to justify how the 'ways' can be described empirically. Nevertheless, it is not as rigorous as quantitative research, because State behavior, which derived from human ones, is challenging and not as straightforward to fully portray. Nonetheless, in the ways, there are some facts (for instance, a military intervention) that can be easily linked to specific goals and contexts of a particular State's Grand Strategy.

Therefore, this Grand methodology will attempt to answer our research question meticulously, in a synergistic and congruous manner for each section. Notwithstanding, the thesis acknowledges that in the study of a foreign country, where the writer does not fully master the language, one could not have access to the entire variety of data available in a country where the alphabet is in Cyrillic, different than the Latin one used in the West.

IV. Analysis of Russian Grand Strategiya

"The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century".

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, 25 April 2005, Annual Kremlin speech to the Nation, Moscow.

1. The ends of Russia's Grand Strategy: Definition of Russia's Grand Strategic highest goals

The first step to understanding current Russian behavior in the 21st century is to analyze the different strategic goals that the Russian Grand Strategy promotes. It is of significant importance to enumerate them and to fathom their subtleties and complexities because the ends of Russian Grand Strategiya reflect the country's intentions and highlight its use of various means and ways to fulfill them. These ends consist mainly of three orientations: first, the quest of Russia for "derzhavnost", the Russian Great Power Status and its affiliated and seen as legitimate sphere of influence; second, the need for sovereignty, internal control and regime stability of the Federation; and finally the search for Multipolarism and some Great Power Multilateralism. Hence, the thesis will here answer the first sub-question of the analysis: What are the ends of the Russian Grand Strategy in the 21st century, in terms of its definition?

A. "Derzhavnost": the Russian Great Power Status and Sphere of Influence

The first motivation shared among Russia's elite is for the country to be recognized as a Great power (Petro 2018). As Iver Neumann has written, "from contact during and following Peter the Great's reign and finally during the Soviet period, Russia has tried to be recognized by the leading European powers as their equal" (2008: 128). Furthermore, for some forty years during the Cold War, it enjoyed global superpower status (Renz 2018: 20). As a result of the country's history, strongly influenced by geography and geopolitics, this quest for recognition produced the understanding that Russia's destiny is to be a Great power, and self-perception as a Great power has been a constant feature in the country's identity (Ibid). In order to understand the centrality of Great power status in foreign policy, an

awareness of how the concept in Russia is understood is important. Derzhavnost translates as "Greatpowerness" and originates in the word derzhava (Ibid). Derzhavnost is "the belief in the primacy and greatness of the Russian State raised almost to the level of a secular religion" (Merry 2016: 29). Thus, the concept links the past to the present and symbolizes a strong state (Ibid). "Derzhavnost" should be understood as the characteristics of a country with political, economic, military, and spiritual power in the world, as well as the ability to influence and apply pressure in international relations (Orlov 2006).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not change the country's quest for Great powerness when Russia emerged as a newly independent country characterized by weak statehood, a struggling economy, and disheveled armed forces (Renz 2018: 20). As many observers noted, in the years following the end of the Cold War, "Russia was not a superpower; indeed, it was questionable whether it was a Great power. Nevertheless, to ordinary people, as well as to politicians, it was unthinkable that Russia could be anything less than this" (Light 1996: 229). In contrast to Russia's views on its place in the world, in the West and elsewhere, there was no automatic assumption that it would inherit the Soviet Union's global power status (Renz 2018: 28). As a result, during the 1990s, Moscow's ongoing quest to maintain its Great power status based on its historical self-perception was largely sidelined in Western debates (Clunan 2009). If the issue of status was addressed, discussions focused on whether the country could still be regarded as a Great power, and if so, on what grounds (Neumann 1996). Although for Russia itself, accepting the loss of Great power status was never an option during the post-Soviet years (Neumann 2008: 129), Western observers only started to pay attention to the significance of Moscow's self-perception as such a power during the first decade of the 2000s (Smith 2016). Therefore, there has always been a strong contradiction between the way others see Russia and how Russia perceives itself.

Hence, Great power status signified restoration of Russia's prestige through implementing conditions in the country worth defending and where the State would serve the nation. A strong and effective military, whose major purpose would be to defend the motherland, is a central condition to achieve this vision (Allensworth 1998: 51). What Russians desire is a return to the Great power status enjoyed by the Soviet Union (Clark 2019: 231). Great powerness is the most desired outcome sought by the Russian Grand Strategy (Monaghan 2017). This desire is the basis of the Russian government's public support and

legitimacy. It has become part of Russian nationalism, drives societal mobilization, and gives coherence to policy (Ibid).

Moreover, according to Russia, a Great power has great responsibilities. Thus, 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). In the region, Russia can be seen pursuing a "Monroe Doctrine" or a Yalta 2:0 in the post-Soviet space, via a privileged position of influence in the foreign and domestic affairs of the countries under Russia's sphere, while denying other Great powers from pursuing interests and influence within Russia's exclusive sphere of influence (Person 2019: 8). However, 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, nor the direct political subordination (Ibid).

Just as Russia had expected that it would automatically inherit the Soviet Union's Great power status, it was also assumed that the influence over the former Soviet region was given (Renz 2018: 28). Nevertheless, as it turned out (unexpectedly for Russia), neither its neighbors nor the West shared this expectation. As the newly independent states developed their own foreign and security policies, they cooperated with Russia when it suited them, but also kept an open mind to other options. The West believed that, as sovereign states, Russia's neighbors were free to pursue their interests (Renz and Smith 2016: 17). Given that Russia does not have a strong reserve of historically close allies, which added to its feeling of insecurity and the perceived need for a buffer zone, having a "sphere of influence" is particularly significant (Ibid 16). Hence, in order to preserves it, Russia relies mostly on the military power, a vital but as well the only possible means in its understanding to ensure its dominance and privileged position in the region.

B. Sovereignty, Internal Control and Regime Stability of the Rossiïskaïa Federatsiïa

The defense of territorial jurisdiction and sovereignty to conduct its internal and external affairs with no outside interference has been central to Russian foreign policy, as is the case for most states, throughout its history (Renz 2018: 26). Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which presented Russia with a serious crisis of statehood and identity, the importance of maintaining the country's sovereignty has emerged as a key

principle and become, as Viatcheslav Morozov has written, “the top priority in the Russian foreign policy agenda” (2010: 2).

To outside observers, Russia’s ongoing concern about sovereignty might appear surprising. Indeed, international attention has tended to focus on problems about sovereignty of other former Soviet States given Russian efforts to control them, as well as the fact that no one is currently questioning Russia’s status as a sovereign state with exclusive jurisdiction over its territory or political process (Renz 2018: 24). Notwithstanding, in order to apprehend the centrality of sovereignty in Russian foreign policy discourse, it is important to understand the complexity of the Kremlin’s perception of what “true” sovereignty denotes, why it thinks it is threatened, and what policies it has adopted to counter these perceived threats (Ibid). What is particular regarding Russia is that the country continues to adhere to a “traditional” Westphalian reading of sovereignty. An aspect of Westphalian sovereignty particularly important to Russia is the principle of balance of power, meaning to prevent any one state from seeking hegemony in the international system (Jackson 1999: 441). Indeed, Russia played an important role in maintaining a balance of power in Europe during the Cold War and the rivalry and bipolar contest with the United States (Renz 2018: 25). In the post-Soviet years, Moscow’s strong concerns about what it sees as a unipolar world order dominated by the United States was already apparent during Yeltsin’s first term as president (Ibid). Moscow came to understand that its loss of Great power status meant that it no longer had the influence to shape developments of global importance. As Charles Ziegler put it, “the problem from Moscow’s perspective is that Washington expects Russia to subordinate itself to the US-dominated international hierarchy that emerged after 1991. Russian leaders vehemently reject the implication that they should accept a subordinate international status within this new order” (2012: 412).

Furthermore, Russia’s view on sovereignty is characterized by a distinctly intertwined nature of its internal and external dimensions. The Kremlin believes that sovereignty to conduct its internal affairs with no outside interference can only be preserved if it can also pursue an independent foreign policy abroad (Renz 2018: 28). Russian policy shows a “close linkage between the recentralizing project domestically, and the reassertion of Russia’s position as a Great power on the international scene” (Ziegler 2012: 401). Russia has long regarded international adherence to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of

other states, which is central to the "traditional" Westphalian view of sovereignty, where it is the key to protecting its freedom of action at home. Since the end of the Cold War, a general shift in views of security from a state-centered focus to a more human-centered interpretation meant that this principle as an absolute has come into question. In cases where states themselves present a threat to their citizens, state sovereignty is no longer seen as a constant barrier to outside intervention to enforce compliance with humanitarian norms (Thomas and Tow 2002: 180). This view was enshrined as a new principle in international law, the Responsibility to Protect, by the UN in 2005 (Bellamy 2009). Russia has supported interventions with a humanitarian remit in certain cases (Averre and Davies 2015: 823). However, the belief that the West is using such norms as a pretext to get rid of inconvenient regimes and to spread its influence has become engrained and is seen as a serious threat to Russia's sovereignty. US and NATO-led interventions leading to regime change in Serbia in 1999 (that we will see more in detail in the next chapter), Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011 were seen as evidence of the West interference through "humanitarian interventions". The Kremlin's belief in the West's intent to expand its power by interfering in the internal affairs of other states has also informed its suspicions over Western support of the "color revolutions" in the CIS region and, ultimately, over civil society projects in Russia itself that are operating with outside funding (Averre and Davies 2015: 826). Thus, these events were interpreted as a part of a wider plan to expand the West's influence, and as such as a threat to Russian sovereignty.

Furthermore, it is important to note that "Westphalian" sovereignty, at least as Russia subscribes to it, sees sovereignty as an absolute right of Great powers that do not necessarily accord the same right to lesser powers within their sphere of influence (Deyermond 2016: 958). This inequality explains Moscow's seemingly contradictory readiness to pursue its "near abroad" policy, which has left "Russia open to charges of hypocrisy and double standards", as Graeme Herd has remarked (2010: 26).

C. "Great Power Multilateralism" and the Quest for Multipolarism

Based on Russia's history and the importance its leaders have traditionally attached to a strong military, Western observers have often viewed it as an actor that prioritizes the maximization of its power at the expense of existing institutions (Tsygankov 2009: 51). Recent developments in Russian foreign policy, and especially the operations in Ukraine and Syria, have led to renewed fears that the country is yet again preparing to go unilaterally and militarily in its quest for Great power status (Renz 2018: 29). Nevertheless, such an interpretation of Russian foreign policy risks being one-dimensional, because it neglects the vital role multilateralism has historically played in the country's international politics (Ibid 31).

The 19th century Congress of Vienna is a period of history that is often referred to in Russia today as an example of the best way to ensure international security. Indeed, it is perceived as a model, where "the Russian worldview is analogous perhaps to the Concert of Europe" (Renz 2018: 29). Indeed, in an article discussing Russian foreign policy from a historical perspective in 2016, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov outlined that Russia had never been "fighting against someone but for the resolution of all issues in an equal and mutually respectful manner as the only reliable basis for a long-term improvement in international relations" (2016).

Therefore, this understanding of multilateralism remains heavily linked to nineteenth-century ideas about cooperation in Europe and, as such, to Russia's self-perception as a Great power (Renz 2018, 30). As some classified Russian Grand Strategy as classical due to its use of military power, in the same vein, one can categorize Russian multilateralism as classical as "Great power multilateralism involving leading states that may or may not take into consideration the concerns and wishes of smaller states" (Rowe and Torjesen 2009: 2). In the sense that multilateralism is seen as an activity between Great powers, it is closely related to the idea of multipolarity. In the Russian context, both concepts are often used interchangeably or in overlapping ways (Tsygankov 2009).

This understanding of multilateralism has shaped Russia's involvement in multilateral security cooperation throughout the post-Soviet years. As multilateralism is seen exclusively in the context of multipolarity, cooperation has often been informal and with specific partners when joint security interests demanded it (Rowe and Torjesen 2009: 2). The Kremlin's

support of the US-led global war on terrorism is an example of such informal cooperation (Renz 2018: 31). However, Russia has also engaged in multilateral security cooperation within the framework of permanent structures. Russian contributions to UN efforts to deal with "new" security challenges, such as natural or human-made disasters, have been numerous and prosperous. Russia's most sizeable contribution to UN peacekeeping was in the Balkans from the 1990s to 2003 (Ibid 33). This cooperation was, in many ways, successful. However, as a result of tensions with NATO over Operation Allied Force, Russia's subsequent involvement in "traditional" peacekeeping has been limited. There has been a particular reluctance to engage in operations led by Western institutions, and by NATO in particular, because the loss of independence of Russian troops within such a framework was not deemed acceptable (Adomeit 2009: 102).

Multilateralism and cooperation, including in the security realm, is extremely important to Russia, because accurate Great power recognition can only be achieved within the framework of integration with other leading powers (Renz 2018: 33), but, in a multipolar world order. Instead of the traditional narrative of some western observers arguing that Russia is more and more aggressive, resurgent, bellicose, and expansionist, the country can be seen as pursuing a "Great-power multilateralism", where decisions are the prerogative of leading states (Ibid 30). Nevertheless, Moscow's views on multilateralism differ significantly from those in the West, creating, therefore, misperceptions between West and East. In fact, Moscow does not perceive multilateralism as a "horizontal tool" that gives an equal say to big and small powers alike (Ibid 33) but understand it as "vertical", between Great powers only. Nevertheless, in multilateral settings, where Russia does not feel like it is on an equal footing with other Great powers, this can lead to conflict and validates the belief held by some in the West that Moscow is seeking to maximize its power at the expense of international institutions (Ibid 34).

2. The Strategic environment of the birth of contemporary Russia

To understand 21st century Russian Grand Strategy, one should look at the recent birth of the Federation, after the collapse of the USSR. Before going into details regarding the Russian Grand Strategy and its use of military and non-military means in contemporary time, it is useful first to acknowledge the situation of the country after the break-up. It seems very distant and irrelevant. Nevertheless, the situation, both in terms of military deliquescence and state's psychological trauma, is beneficial to explain the current stance of Russia regarding its military revival as well as its pursuit of strategic interests. Indeed, two main elements emerged in the aftermath of the collapse: first, the impossibility to fulfill the ends of Russia Grand Strategy in the 1990s, both coming from the international arena as well as from the deliquescence of the military power; and second, the changing nature of warfare in the Russian perception, from traditional warfare to a more asymmetric composition, that led to the current Hybrid posture of the Russian forces. Thus, this section will answer the second sub-question of the research question: What was Russia's strategic environment after the collapse of the USSR?

A. The decline of military power, dissonance with the West and strategic vagrancy in the 1990s

Although the country's nuclear deterrent was always maintained, it soon became clear that strong nuclear capabilities were insufficient for coping with the military challenges of the post-Cold War security environment as well as for upholding Russia's status as a Great power (Renz 2018: 35), one of Russia's main ends as explained in the previous chapter.

This decline of military power was illustrated first in the chaos in decision-making and contingency, which drew Russia into a variety of military conflicts during the early 1990s (Ibid 78). Russian military involvement in the "near abroad"—first in the ethnic conflict in Transnistria (Moldova), then in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia) and finally in Tajikistan—started almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ibid 76). It is important to bear in mind that these Russian military operations were not the result of a clear strategic vision, but were "driven by events on the ground" (Allison 2013: 122). Russian troops still stationed there came under fire from local paramilitary forces. As a result, Russian soldiers became a party to several conflicts by default, and the line between official policy

and the initiative of local military commanders was difficult to distinguish, as it was the case for Russia's initial involvement in Transnistria where "there is no definite evidence to suggest that Russian military units received direct orders from Moscow" (Davis 2015: 90). As Pavel Baev noted, by 1993, the situation had come to the point where the Kremlin had no choice but to "adjust its course according to the military realities" (1996: 35).

These interventions were the result of chaos in decision-making because, in the immediate period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was as unprepared as the other newly independent states, militarily, doctrinally and politically, to deal with the multitude of security challenges created by the rapid disintegration of the former superpower (Renz 2018: 78). This unpreparedness led to the serious "muddle and disorganization" of early Russian military operations (Baev 1996: 35). The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation was not created until May 1992, which meant that command and control over troops located within and outside Russian territory were weak (Hopf 2005: 230). There was no clear guidance on policy towards the CIS from the Foreign Ministry, and coordination between both ministries was minimal (Renz 2018: 78). Hence, this led to incoherence in decision-making and implementation.

Regarding the internal situation, this chaos and incoherence were well illustrated in the two infamous wars in Chechnya, where Russia's unreformed armed forces performed woefully when deployed to deal with the ethnic conflicts in the country's Caucasus and suffered humiliating failures (Ibid 35).

Secondly, what reinforces this idea of decline of military power was the Yugoslavian War, and Kosovo War of 1999, first dissonance with the West. Indeed, as a Great power, Russia believed that its responsibilities extended beyond its immediate neighborhood. As such, it had the duty to contribute to security and stability on an international level in cooperation with other major powers (Headley 2003: 210). As discussed in the previous chapter concerning the ends of Russian Grand Strategy, even when Russia was severely weakened in the early 1990s, the idea that the country could be anything but a Great power was inconceivable. Hence, Moscow expected to possess an equal voice in multilateral decision-making on questions of international security—an expectation that, in the eyes of the Russian leadership, was bitterly disappointed (Renz 2018: 82). In fact, in February 1994, NATO already created outrage in Russian diplomatic and political circles, when the alliance

had issued an ultimatum and threatened airstrikes on Bosnian Serb positions following an attack on a marketplace in Sarajevo without consulting Russia (Ibid 83). This perception of Russia as sidelined by the West and not accepting a 21st century as a Pax Americana lead to the first serious dissonance in East-West relations in the post-Soviet years (Headley 2003). During NATO's Operation Allied Force (OAF) in Kosovo in 1999, the Kremlin, although vehemently opposed to it, was unable to prevent NATO's airstrikes against Serbia, which reinforced concerns over the country's international status and painfully highlighted its limited influence in shaping global affairs (Averre 2009: 580). Even if Russia wished to support Serbia, given the weakness of Russia's armed forces, unilateral military action in support of Milosevic was not within the realm of possibilities at the time (Renz 2018: 83). In a very timid manner, a few hundred Russian peacekeepers were deployed from Bosnia to seize Pristina airport in June 1999. The impact of this on the conduct of OAF was negligible. Nevertheless, the action sent a signal, within the constraints of Russian military power at the time, that the Kremlin was not prepared to stand by and accept its complete exclusion from the resolution of the conflict (Ibid).

Moreover, military decline, preventing Moscow from shaping international events at the time of the Kosovo War, also heightened concerns over the country's sovereignty. NATO's ability to pursue OAF without a UN Security Council resolution in which Russia is included, and despite strong Russian opposition, suggested that the West had a degree of sovereignty in foreign policymaking that Russia lacked (Ibid 84). The fact that OAF was directed against a Russian ally was significant in this respect. Lacking the military power required to assist its ally put into question the country's foreign policy sovereignty. It also stoked fears that, unless its military weaknesses were dealt with, Moscow would not be able to prevent future potential intrusions by the West into its more direct sphere of influence, the CIS (Allison 2013: 44). The OAF's intervention lead to Russian perception that the West disregarded international laws and Westphalian norms and confirmed the alliance's "aggressive character" to many in the country (Baranovsky 2000: 115).

Thus, Russia realized that the country could not fulfill its Grand Strategy through the remnants of the Red Army. Indeed, creating modern and efficient armed forces was a monumental task that would have been difficult to achieve, even under the most favorable circumstances (Renz 2018: 36). Russia inherited around 2.8 million servicemen from the

Soviet armed forces, and also took possession of large quantities of tanks, aircraft and other military equipment (Ibid). Although the quantity of material and personnel assets Russia had at its disposal for the basis of a new national military force was impressive, much of this legacy was not suitable for the early post-Cold War conflicts, such as ethnic conflicts, peace operations, separatism, and insurgencies, that Russia was engaged in (Ibid). Moreover, for geopolitical reasons, most of the best-equipped Soviet units and facilities, such as anti-aircraft units and airfields, had been stationed on the western and southern peripheries of the Soviet Union and were transferred to the national militaries of other former Soviet republics (Ibid). Having lost many vital assets of the formerly integrated Soviet military structure, then-Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev noted that Russia had inherited nothing more than "ruins and debris" (Allison 1993: 28).

Furthermore, the Russian economy was in serious trouble throughout the 1990s, culminating in the devaluation of the ruble in 1998 (Renz 2018: 37). The military, which had enjoyed a prime position in the Soviet Union, where the pursuit of military might was a central driver of the economy, was particularly hardly hit when it lost this privileged position after the end of the Cold War (Zatsepin 2012: 116). The defense budget decreased from around 10 percent of GDP in the Soviet era to 4.6 percent in 1992 and around 3 percent in 1998, meaning a loss from an estimated US$344 billion in 1988 to around US$19 billion per year in 1998 (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2015). The decrease further diverted scarce funds from efforts to transform the remnants of the former Soviet military into a more modern armed force (Allison 1993: 34). A significant consequence of the lack of funding during the 1990s was the degradation of the image of military service as a profession owing to steadily worsening service conditions. Salaries paid to Russian officers until the mid-2000s were far from competitive, and poor living standards and the lack of adequate housing for military personnel were major concerns (Renz 2018: 38). This downgrading devalued the prestige and desirability of military careers during Soviet times and led to serious difficulties regarding the retention and recruitment of professional military personnel (Ibid). Inevitably, a lack of pride in their profession and a feeling of humiliation among military personnel further degraded the armed forces' effectiveness and capabilities (Golts 2004).

Therefore, the decade 1990 was marked by an internal humiliation—the first war in Chechnya—and an external humiliation—the NATO strikes in the former Yugoslavia, coupled

with the strategic vagrancy in the former Soviet republics. The 1990s were experienced as a geopolitical downgrading, causing a real shock for Russia (Averre 2009). What is very important to point out in the 1990s strategic environment is the inability to prevent NATO's strikes in Serbia, as well as the bad management of troops in Chechnya and the CIS. These showed Russia's major weaknesses to fulfill its Grand Strategy (Renz 2018). The expectation that, as the heir of the Soviet Union's nuclear deterrent and main beneficiary of the former superpower's material military might, Russia would automatically keep its international status as a global military power did not come to pass (Ibid 35). In fact, when the Russian armed forces were created in 1992, it quickly emerged that the Soviet legacy was more of a curse than a blessing (Ibid).

The Russian armed forces experienced their "time of trouble" throughout the 1990s, due to the combination of reasons outlined above. Nevertheless, these reasons did not include the conscious decision on the part of the political leadership to give up on the aspirations of being a global military actor, or the belief that a strong military was no longer necessary (Ibid). Russian political power has always been characterized by a very high concentration and a strong representation of the military in the ruling class (Gomart 2015: 30). For the elites as for the people, state prestige is directly associated with armed forces, as it was and is the case in the Imperial, Soviet, or finally in the present era. Furthermore, military objectives take precedence over all others (Golts and Putnam 2004). In fact, there exists in Russia a founding militarism forged by Spatio-temporal hinges (throughout the Patriotic War against Napoleon in 1812, Crimea War in 1855 or Operation Barbarossa in 1941 against Nazi Germany) which do not cease to replay in Russian perceptions, with constant fear of the encirclement and invasion, in particular from the West (Poe 2006). Therefore, all the perceived feelings of humiliation and downgrading from Chechnya, Yugoslavia, or ethnic conflicts in the CIS created the emerging necessity of having a more assertive military power to defend Russia's interests. More, they clearly defined the ends of the country's Grand Strategy.

Regarding Russia's early military interventions, no matter how chaotic and unplanned they were, they managed to set the path for the country's future role in the CIS region (Renz 2018: 79). Indeed, the belief in Russia's privileged position in the "near abroad" has been a constant feature in Russian foreign policy throughout the post-Soviet years and was reconfirmed in the 2014 military doctrine (Sinovets and Renz 2015). In Moscow's opinions

on the use of military force across the territory of the CIS was that Russia had a special role as the guarantor of security in the region (Page 1994: 800). The view that CIS territory remained Russia's zone of special interest and responsibility has been an unwavering factor in the country's foreign policy since the early 1990s, owing to historical legacies (Renz 2018: 77). In all conflicts concerned, Russian military action was instrumental in the cessation of the "hot" phase of the civil wars. Indeed, Russia took the chance of maintaining a lasting military presence in these countries, not only to obtain an important foothold in strategically significant "outposts", such as the Caucasus; but as well to possess a powerful lever of political influence (Ibid 79). As such, this view has influenced the desire for a national military revival in order to reinforce its positions.

Concerning the relationship with the West, the Kremlin's failure to influence events diplomatically underlined that the country's Great power status could not be maintained without strong military forces (Ibid). Hence, the Kosovo War made Russia more assertive in pursuing objectives that did not coincide with Western interests. It confirmed to the Kremlin that "Russia has to rely on military strength, rather than on illusions about justice and good intentions in international relations" (Baranovsky 2000: 124—5). As a result of dissonant views over the nature of Russia's position in the post-Cold War international system, the crisis ultimately led to the first serious breakdown in relations (Renz 2018: 85). The tensions over Kosovo, as far as Moscow was concerned, were caused by the West's refusal to give Russia a say in the resolution of the conflict, which, as a Great power, it thought it deserved. The feeling of being sidelined led to a more confrontational approach towards the West, still present today (Ibid). The ability to pursue an independent foreign policy and to shape events of international significance, even if this leads to conflict with the West in certain cases, is required if Russia is to gain Great power recognition. Moreover, in the Kremlin's eyes, what it saw as NATO's flagrant violation of international law and flimsy justification for aggressive military action, invalidated any Western legal and moral criticisms of its own conduct (Ibid). In this sense, as Russia saw it, Kosovo made the use of force "less unjustifiable". As Baranovsky explained, "NATO has set a precedent, and Russia should not hesitate if it considers the resort to military means necessary" (2000: 124).

B. Russian understanding of the new nature of warfare: Moving from traditional to asymmetrical

"We lost World War III without a shot being fired".

Dimitri Iazov, Soviet Minister of Defense, November 19, 1990, when the treaty to reduce conventional forces in Europe was signed.

Throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s, it was widely assumed that the Russian military could never adapt to new warfare challenges, because of the inability of its conservative leadership to move on from Cold War thinking on war (i.e., conventional-interstate warfare with large armies) (Renz 2014: 64). The Soviet army had been a mass mobilization military based on conscription that was configured and trained predominantly for high-intensity warfare in the European theatre (Bluth 1998: 75). The first Chechen War starting in 1994 demonstrated sadly that the lack of guidelines and doctrines on how to deal with operations at the lower end of the conflict spectrum was a problem. Rather than basing the operation on an approach tailored to the circumstances of this insurgency, the military leadership "seemed to react on instinct and poor intelligence, lashing out with bare hands, rather than a mailed fist" (Hodgson 2003: 68). In what can be considered to be a line "in the annals of gross misstatements", then-Defense Minister Grachev boasted at the outset of the war that the Russian armed forces would take Grozny in two hours, evidently assuming that numerical and technological superiority over the opponent was enough to guarantee swift victory (Ibid). Moreover, for many Russian scholars and military, the West, during the Cold War, was able to master a new form of warfare that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Indeed, some of them (that the thesis will describe below) argued that the "main cause of the geopolitical catastrophe of 1991 was a defeat in the subversive and informational war, which lasted for 48 years" (Panarin 2010: 10).

Therefore, Russia lacked innovations and doctrinal adjustments in military strategy in the decade 1990 (Trenin and Malashenko 2004: 103). Nevertheless, Russian strategists began to look into Russian theories concerning new types of warfare from the Cold War in order to adapt to the new security environment, both to adjust to 21st century new types of conflicts as well as to counter a subversive western threat to the country. This retrospective that the Russian military did to be more competitive is the primary source of the currently popular

"Hybrid Warfare" that many scholars debate. Nevertheless, one should understand that Hybrid Warfare is a western concept, from the work of Frank Hoffman and the US military. In contrast, "Russian Hybrid Warfare" is based on the concepts of Gibridnaya Voyna (Political confrontation) and New-Generation Warfare (Asymmetrical Warfare). The two elements are the results of the refinement of the military strategy that we will see in the next chapter.

The origins of the concepts are very dense and vibrant compared to Western Hybrid Warfare. We can trace this first idea of new type of warfare back to the late 1960s and early 1970s thanks to the work of Evgeny Messner and his concept of "Subversion-War" (MyatezheVoyna). This idea is followed by the work of modern theories of Subversion from Aleksander Dugin's net-centric war and Igor Panarin's information war. Although these three theories were conceptualized independently of each other, they share many aspects and assumptions, all of which eventually shaped the current Russian conceptualization of Gibridnaya Voyna and New-Generation Warfare (Fridman 2019: 76).

The Theory of Subversion-War (MyatezheVoyna)

"It is easier to degrade a state, rather than conquer it by arms".
Evgeny Messner, from *Myatezh: Imya Tret'yey Vsemirnoy [Subversion: the name of the third worldwide war]*, 1960.

Evgeny Messner was an Imperial Russian émigré officer whose books were prohibited in the USSR because of his strong anti-Communist views. After the Cold War, however, his works became increasingly popular, taking a more central place within the Russian school of military thinking (Vladimirov 2013: 97). Nonetheless, Messner's works have remained mostly unknown to the Western reader, and it is vital to introduce the man, his concepts, and his views on the phenomenon of war in the twentieth century to catch the full spectrum of Russian Hybridity (Fridman 2019: 50). However, it is crucial to avoid ideological obstacles when reading Messner. The reader has to recognize the strong ideological views that informed his writing. Messner held very conservative, conspirationist, and anti-communist views, and he was critical of the social and political developments of the first part of the twentieth century (Ibid 51).

Messner's main contribution of Messner is his understanding that future warfare will be driven by attempts to weaken an enemy's political will by influencing the minds of its population (Messner 1959: 71). With this in mind, Messner developed his concept of Myatezhe Voyna (subversion-war) to refer to any activity intended to erode an adversary's socio-cultural and military cohesion; an action that is more related to the definition of subversion than war (Messner 1960). The purpose is to undermine an adversary's political legitimacy, through a "subversive" type of warfare, using "psychological tools to conquer the mind and soul of a targeted nation's people" (Ibid 43). One should not think about the destruction of an enemy's manpower or the physical capture of an enemy's territory, but the conquest of an enemy's spirit and the instauration of confusion and discomfiture in his mind, through propaganda and agitation (Ibid 95). Hence, Messner describes the increasing role of the psychological dimension, which allows the states involved in war to manipulate the psyche of each other's population (Ibid 97). According to him, this change in warfare is an outcome of the "nationalization of war", not in the sense that war has been shaped by the national characteristics of the involved states but that in contemporary wars, every single member of a given population (i.e., the nation) would be actively involved in the war effort (Messner 1959). Furthermore, he argued that the future war would be waged not on the front line, but on the whole surface of the territories of both adversaries, because behind the military front will appear political, social, economic fronts (Messner 1960, 43).

Messner's understanding derives from the Cold War and the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (Fridman 2019: 63). Trying to conceptualize this new situation during a clash of ideologies, on the one hand, and the possibility of mutually assured destruction on the other, Messner argued that Trotsky's description of the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as "neither war nor peace" could be said to apply globally after 1945 and the conference of Potsdam (Messner 1971: 12). The USA and the USSR will fight in "psychonuclear" strategy, thus, not by splitting hydrogen atoms, but by splitting the enemy's population, their spirit and psyche (Ibid 14). In other words, as a direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was unthinkable, both sides would fight each other in the psychological, rather than physical, dimension of war. According to him, the context of the Cold War, combined with the nationalization of war and the rise of the

psychological dimension in war, made these "neither war nor peace" types of confrontations the most common way to achieve political goals today (Fridman 2019: 66).

Aleksandr Dugin: The Theory of Net-Centric War

The second leading influential theorist, Dugin, is a Russian political scientist, geopolitical philosopher, religious historian, strong anti-westernist, and Slavophil. He started publishing his work in the 1980s (Ibid 77). One should notice that he is highly controversial, and the author should be read carefully. He has established himself as a prolific author, publishing one book nearly every year, as well as hundreds of articles, and he served as the head of the Department of Sociology of International Relations of the Lomonosov Moscow State University from 2009 to 2014, as well as senior advisory positions in the Russian political establishment (Darczewska 2014: 14).

His concept, net-centric warfare, is originally a product of US military thought, and it first appeared in the late 1990s in the publications of the US Navy (Wogaman 1998). The main idea of net-centric warfare in its original form is to enhance the effectiveness of military units on the battlefield by increasing the efficiency of the collection, aggregation, analysis, and communication of valuable and relevant data from a large number of sensors (Ibid). "Empowered by knowledge, derived from a shared awareness of the battle space and a shared understanding of commanders' intent, forces will be able to self-synchronize, operate with a small footprint, and be more effective when operating autonomously" (Alberts and al. 2001: 88).

Nonetheless, Dugin reconceptualized it in a much broader way. In contrast to simply adapting net-centric warfare concepts to military operations in order to enhance the effectiveness of deployed forces, Dugin claimed that net-centric warfare resulted from a much broader transformation, as a "network itself is a fundamental and absolute phenomenon, a development of which alters the political, economic, social, and cultural picture of the world" (Dugin 2008: 2). In this view, an analysis of the net-centric war should not be restricted to the only military realm (Dugin 2015: 241).

The first characteristic distinguishing "postmodern" net-centric wars from traditional wars is the "area" over which war is waged. According to Dugin, this area is not a physical territory with strictly defined borders. It is a virtual dimension created and represented by a

network of interconnected informational trends, as "in net-centric wars, an occupation or annexation of territory is not required, because an establishment of control over a network will be enough, as it intends to control mass media, financial instruments, access to technologies, political and cultural elites" (Dugin 2008: 5). Hence, net-centric warfare is when a political actor tries (not necessarily by military means) to undermine an adversary's network and at the same time protect its own from the adversary's encroachment (Fridman 2019: 80).

The second distinctive characteristic of net-centric war, according to Dugin, is how this "network" can be controlled, or, in other words, how such a war can be fought. Since the primary defining factor of a network is information, and as the amount of accessible information is continuously increasing, the main goal involved in a net-centric war is not to control the information itself but to rule and manipulate its nature (Dugin 2008: 5). By controlling how and which information is created, aggregated, and shared, "the experts of network strategies can give even to very negative and dangerous information an opposite character, making it harmless or fading its impact" (Ibid). The central role of net-centric war regards how information is aggregated, deciphered, interpreted, structured, distributed, and presented to enhance one's control over its network, while simultaneously undermining the control of one's adversary in an attempt to achieve specific political aims (Ibid 6).

In sum, the purpose of net-centric warfare is to influence networks of people, instructions, foundations, organizations, and so on that intuitively promote a particular set of ideas in an attempt to achieve political goals (Dugin 2015: 250).

Igor Panarin: The Theory of Information Warfare

The third proponent, Panarin, holds a higher doctoral degree in political science and a Ph.D. in psychology; he is a full member of the Military Academy of Science of the Russian Federation, as well as holding numerous senior advisory and coordinating positions in the Russian political system (Fridman 2019: 85). Panarin, throughout his books, focuses mostly on the psychological facets of warfare in general, and information warfare in particular (Ibid). In Panarin's words, information war is: "A type of confrontation between parties, represented by the use of special political, economic, diplomatic, military and other methods based on different ways and means that influence the informational environment of the opposing party while protecting their environment, in order to achieve clearly defined goals" (Panarin 2015:

20). He argues that "the stability of the political system of any country has relied on how quickly and completely the political elites receive information (for instance about danger), and how quickly they respond to it. Hence, political activity, by definition, is an informational struggle over the control of the minds of the elites and other social groups" (Panarin 2006: 165). When an information war is waged by one state against another, Panarin explains that it "aims to interrupt the balance of power and achieve superiority in the global informational dimension" by targeting "the decision-making processes of the adversary" via the manipulation of international and domestic public opinion (Panarin 2010: 24).

To summarize, information warfare is primarily intended to subvert an adversary's political power by targeting the minds of the political elite and the general population to affect public opinion and thus influence the opposing side's political decision-making process via controlling and manipulating the informational trends (Ibid 25)

Towards a new Russian Art of War: Embryonic Russian "Hybrid Warfare" and categorization of subversive threat

Messner, Dugin, and Panarin's ideas are ideologically informed by their opposition to the West. We can say that the essence of Messner's subversion war, of Dugin's net-centric warfare and Panarin's information warfare, is based on a narrative of Western aggression against Russia (Fridman 2015: 90). Moreover, as Dugin and Panarin argue, the struggle between the political elites of the West and Russia did not end in 1991. Since the subversion/ net-centric/information war continues to be "the major tool of contemporary world politics, and the dominant way to achieve political and economic power in the 21st century", Russia, according to them, continues to be targeted by Western political actors in the informational and psychological spheres (Panarin 2015; Dugin 2015). Thus, both praise Vladimir Putin to counteract the Western psychological/informational war being waged against Russia (Fridman 2019: 92).

Furthermore, the authors suggest, in order to avoid repeating the Soviet Union's defeat to "form a new political elite—passionate and capable of an adequate response to the global challenges of the 21st century" (Panarin 2006: 244). The strategic purpose of such an elite should be "the formation of a positive global public opinion of Russia and the creation of

favorable conditions for the prosperity and development of the individual, society and the State, and to achieve its national and economic interests in the international arena" (Ibid).

Thereby, their ideological theorizations find popular support within the Russian academic community, as well as military circles, used to explain the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the West, claiming that Russia has to defend itself against the psychological/informational offensive being waged against it by the West (Kovalev and Malkov 2015). This idea of resilience leads to the refinement of the strategic military thinking, creating thus a Russian Art of Hybrid Warfare, through the Gibridnaya Voyna and New-Generation Warfare that the thesis will explore later.

What is essential in this section is to acknowledge that the new Russian military strategic posture is based overall on the fact that it is easier to achieve political goals by undermining the political authority of the adversary by manipulating political elites and generating political dissent, separatism, and social problems, rather than by waging classic wars and military operations (Fridman 2019).

3. The Means of Russia's Grand Strategy: Prioritize and balance the military power

The third step to grasp Russian actions in the 21st century is to scrutinize the articulation of the current Russian Grand Strategy, as well as the prioritization of the means selected to achieve its ends and finally the right balance between those means and those ends. Thus, this chapter will be divided into three main parts: first, the thesis will focus briefly on the catalyzer of the articulation of the country's Grand Strategy starting with Vladimir Putin's Russian leadership, creating a strategic consensus regarding what Russia needs and the definitive articulation and direction of the current Russian Grand Strategy; then second, on the prioritization of specific means to reach the Grand Strategic's ends, which is the military power and the reasons why; and third, to examine the right balance and proportionality between means and ends, through the modernization reforms of 2008 and the refinement of Russian Art of War, with the Rise of Gibridnaya Voyna and New-Generation Warfare. In the next sections, we will try to answer the third sub-question of the thesis, which is: are the prioritization and developments of Russian military capabilities, both in terms of hardware (physical military capabilities) and software (the conceptual products of military thought), the means to reach and balance the ends of the Russian Grand Strategy?

A. Putin's entrance, the time for the Strategic consensus: Articulation of Russian Grand Strategy

When Putin rose to political prominence in the autumn of 1999, efforts to turn the Russian military back to its former glory took a central place in his agenda from the beginning. The 1990s marked a watershed in Russian views on its defense requirements (Renz 2018: 84). It was the beginning of the military revival as a critical element in the restoration of what Putin called "the country's prestige and leading role in the world" (Putin 2000). Thus, by the beginning of the 2000s, Russia had begun to recover and make progress towards establishing a coherent policy regarding its Grand Strategy under the aegis of President Vladimir Putin, the central figure of Russian executive with four mandates. Since his arrival, the president has established a strategic consensus in the Russian political class regarding the country's Grand Strategy. Indeed, this consensus included the agreement on the needs of Russia to achieve its desired Grand Strategic's ends. This consensus assumed that Russia must be "pragmatic" in devoting its scarce resources to these objectives. The

debate about these ends has not been challenged since 1999, only the mechanisms on how to reach them have.

The value of establishing the Russian Grand Strategy through a pragmatic (nezatratnyi) way has not changed since the arrival of Putin (Tsygankov 2011: 31). Looking in our framework of Grand Strategy, we can perceive a coherent statement of national purpose and the accurate enumeration of the highest political ends. Even during the exchange of presidency leadership between Vladimir Putin and Dimitri Medvedev during four years in 2008, it was still possible to see the broad political consensus unchanged, although, Medvedev's style is "softer" than Putin's one, with an emphasis on the importance of improving relations with the West and establishing a good rapport with Obama (Ibid).

Therefore, restoring Russia's power has been a clearly stated goal of Putin's tenure from the very beginning (Staun 2015: 35). Moreover, throughout his presidency, Putin has stressed Russia's need to protect its sovereignty; for instance, in his annual State of the Nation speech in 2014 or 2020. In these speeches, he asserted that "true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival" (Putin 2014).

Now that we have the strategic consensus of the Russian elites regarding the necessity to fulfill the ends of the country's Grand Strategy, it is time to analyze how Russian power decided to achieve them, through prioritization and balancing of the selected means to the ends.

B. Prioritization of the means: the primacy of military power and the need to update the forces

Logically, the reason for Russia's recent military revival needs to be understood in light of the country's Grand Strategy ends. Even if military power is not the only factor on which a country's status in the international system is based, military power has always been an essential characteristic and symbol to fulfill the Grand strategic ends of Russia (Renz 2018: 21).

A strong military has been an essential ingredient in the country's quest for Great powerness and international status recognition, especially during periods when it could not compete with other global powers in other areas (Ibid). It was the military might that made the Tsarist Empire, and during the Cold War, it was the Soviet Union's ability to project military

power on a global level that elevated the country to the position of one of the world's two superpowers (Ibid). As Russia's conventional military disintegrated throughout the 1990s due to lack of funds and systematic reforms, as well the country's international image as a global power did. Therefore, the Russian leadership under Putin's presidency decided to change the military's fortunes. The rapidly improving economic situation helped this, and because the new president made military-related matters a real priority from the outset (Ibid 22). Putin's vision of Russia as a Great power strengthened his resolve not only to declare this a priority but to ensure that this priority would be met (Ibid). Given that a powerful military has always been seen as a necessity in this respect, the recent military revival is not a surprise (Ibid 23). For Russia, military power has always been the means of choice for bridging the gap between its self-perception as a Great power and what it viewed as the reluctance of other global powers to grant it this status (Ibid).

Furthermore, like most states, Russia perceives a strong military as an absolute requirement for the preservation of sovereignty on the most fundamental level (Ziegler 2012). Having the capacity to defend a state's territorial integrity has, historically, been viewed as an essential requirement for ensuring sovereignty (Rudolph 2005: 7). The feeling of vulnerability, in Russia's case, has been aggravated throughout the country's history by its size, long borders, and geopolitical position (Suny 2007: 35). Not surprisingly, all Russian military doctrines issued since the end of the Cold War list the defense of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as the first task of the armed forces (Renz 2018: 25). In Putin's view, military power is fundamental to the country's sovereignty, as he noted in 2006: "we need armed forces able to simultaneously fight in global, regional and—if necessary—also in several local conflicts. We need armed forces that guarantee Russia's security and territorial integrity no matter what the scenario" (Putin 2006).

Concerning multilateralism and multipolarism, and according to the Kremlin, it became increasingly clear that a weak military curtailed its freedom of international action as a side-effect of the loss of Great power status. From the 2000s, strengthening Russia's military power became a priority as this seemed indispensable to protect the country's sovereignty from acting as an independent pole in international politics, whose voice could not be ignored (Renz 2018: 25). As Putin summed it up in 2012: "the principles of international law are being degraded and eroded. Under these circumstances, Russia cannot

fall back on diplomatic and economic methods alone to settle contradiction and resolve conflict. Our country faces the task of developing its military potential as part of a deterrence strategy and at a sufficient level" (Putin 2012). Recent displays of the country's revived military power have had as one of their main objectives to force "partners" to listen to Russia's arguments (Renz 2018).

In addition, Russia decided to prioritize the necessity of the refinement of its military thinking due to three main explanations, which leads to the emergence and the usefulness of Gibridnaya Voyna for Russia's strategy. The first one is the contemporary geopolitical environment (Fridman 2019: 135). On the one hand, "a direct military threat to the Russian Federation from the US and NATO member states in the near-future is unlikely" (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2012: 26). On the other hand, the different trends that have been occurring since the end of the Cold War, such as globalization, the increasing interdependence of national financial and economic systems, and the information revolution, caused "fundamental changes in the employment of political, economic, and indirect actions, as well as in the usage of non-military means, for resolving contemporary interstate contradictions" (Ibid, 18).Nowadays, non-military actions are the most preferable tool in interstate confrontations, especially when the confrontation is between nuclear powers fearful of the danger of escalation once direct military actions have been used (Fridman 2019: 136). Therefore, in order to take into consideration the contemporary realities, Russia has defined and implemented a military strategy of indirect actions as the state strategy (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2011: 13).

The second explanation, starting from the works of Messner, Dugin, and Panarin, is the belief in Russia that the country has been threatened by the US, and the West in general, since the 1980s. The Kremlin's increasing concern is due to events from the perestroika, as well as the "color revolutions", Arab Spring and Maidan movement, or US-funded social and political movements (Bartles 2016: 36). Thus, this confirms Moscow's will to secure internal order and regime stability, one ends of its Grand Strategy. Furthermore, the West did not stop its non-military, indirect offensive against Russia in the post-Cold War period, which justifies the use of indirect action. Indeed, for the first time in 2014, the military doctrine included in its section on domestic military dangers the notion of external threats to "the information space and the internal sphere". Specifically, it referred to the danger of "the informational

influence over the population aimed at undermining spiritual and patriotic traditions" (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014). The doctrine repeatedly affirmed the need to strengthen state policies aimed at countering such outside influence into Russia's domestic affairs (Sinovets and Renz 2015: 2).

The third reason is that indirect action strategy could be pretty useful for Russia. Indeed, "the employment of asymmetric actions frequently allows a weak adversary to achieve political victory" (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2010: 17), thus fitting well for Russia which represents the weaker side in its struggle against a more powerful West, and particularly the United States, according to the Russian perception. Hence, these asymmetric activities will serve to compensate for Russia's weaknesses (Ibid), as it allowed Russia to overcome shortcomings in its conventional military power and "to negate the significant advantage held by the US and its NATO allies in terms of conventional military force, mostly in the technological realm" (Thornton 2015: 44).

This prioritization of military power can be perceived in the Russian military doctrines of 1993, 2000, 2010, and 2014. The doctrines' particular focus was adjusted to reflect changes in the international security environment and in response to events perceived as significant to Russia's national security and interests (Renz 2018: 100). The first military doctrine adopted by the Russian Federation that supplanted the last Soviet military doctrine, the doctrine of 1993, reflected a positive view of international relations, in a time of relatively low tension with the West in the immediate post-Cold War period. Nevertheless, this quickly changed and grew increasingly pessimistic in subsequent versions (Ibid). "Traditional" threat perceptions arose again from growing tensions with the West and NATO eastward enlargement in particular (Ibid, 101). Hence, the encroachment of NATO into what Russia perceives as its legitimate sphere of influence in the former Soviet region has been a particular concern as a potential military danger was enacted in the 2000 doctrine (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2000). The 2010 and 2014 doctrines are reflections of deteriorating relations with the West and, following the annexation of Crimea, explicitly named NATO expansion and the movement of NATO military infrastructure closer to Russia's border as the top main external military danger to Russian security (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010/2014).

C. Balance of means and ends: Resources flow to hardware and software

As the military power was the primary mean selected by Russia to provide its Great-power status, the protection of its sovereignty, and a multipolar world order, the country, in consequence, allocated to some extent resources to this power to adapt and strengthen it. This is the period that some military observers called explicitly the military modernization of 2008 (generally regarding the increase of resources towards military physical capabilities) and implicitly the refinement of the Russian Art of War, through strategic military software such as Gibridnaya Voyna and New-Generation warfare strategies. Those reforms were the main answers to the weaknesses of Russia after the fall of the USSR.

Military Modernization of 2008

To overcome the many problems of the Russian military conventional capabilities regarding its situation in the 1990s and its interaction with a more powerful West, the Russian armed forces started to recover when a systematic program of military modernization was announced in 2008 (Renz 2018: 35). This modernization comes from the ambition for parity in conventional military power, already stated in the 2000 military doctrine, which explicitly reoriented priorities away from the focus on small-war scenarios towards the need for the creation of Russian conventional forces with global reach (Ibid 40). This desire came from Operation Allied Force over Serbia in 1999, which "marked a watershed in Russia's assessment of its military requirements and defense priorities" (Arbatov 2000: 9).

The modernization was enabled when Russia's financial resources grew in 2000, thus pursuing ever more assertive means to achieve its ends (Person 2019: 8). After a traumatic decade of economic contraction in the 1990s, the 2000s witnessed a period of significant economic growth in Russia. Indeed, only the global financial crisis of 2008-9 and the collapse of oil prices and post-Crimea sanctions in 2014 curtailed Russian economic growth in the Putin era (World Bank, GDP per capita 2019). Between 2000 and 2013, Russian GDP per capita increased by nearly nine times (Ibid). Hence, the Russian defense budget increased from its low point of US$19 billion in 1998 to around US$58 billion by 2008, growing to more than US$90 billion by 2015. Thus, the share of military expenditure in the percentage of Russian GDP increased from 3.6 percent in 2005 to 5.4 percent in 2015 (World Bank, Military

expenditures 2019). Thereby, Russia ranks third in the world today in terms of military spending, after the United States and China.

The most common explanation for Russia's economic expansion is Vladimir Putin's steady hand on Russia, providing the stabilization that fuelled Russia's economic growth (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008: 68). This is coupled with a strong political will from Putin to overcome all the difficulties that faced the Russian army in order to be able to articulate the Russian Grand Strategy. For instance, in a speech to the country's top military commanders in late November 2000, Putin summarized its Security Council meetings', emphasizing the urgent need for modernization in the areas of financial efficiency, discipline, combat readiness, and available technology. He pointed out that the Russian armed forces were not sufficiently prepared "to neutralize and rebuff any armed conflict and aggression" that could come from "all strategic directions" (Putin 2000). Moreover, he rightfully points the necessity to exercise the adequate balance between this mean, the modernization of the army forces, and the ends of the Grand Strategy, where, although the need for military reform was urgent, it could not come at any cost and the country "should not just plan what we need, but plan to proceed from what we can afford" (Ibid). The argument behind the idea of Putin here is not to make the same mistake as the USSR did, which was to adopt military policies not sustainable, hence ultimately contributing o the country's demise (Snyder 1988: 107).

Although the idea was to create a more resilient conventional army, the reforms were driven as well by the perceived need to improve capabilities required to deal with local conflicts and lower-intensity missions in the aftermath of the war in Georgia (that we will see in the next chapter), as well as an upgrade in mobility and rapid reaction (Bukkvoll 2011: 697). Indeed, the short war with Georgia in August 2008 catalyzed the announcement of extensive military modernization in the autumn of the same year. In this war, the Russian military had achieved strategic victory in merely five days, but its operational performance was again severely criticized both in Russia and abroad. In particular, there was widespread agreement that it still showed significant shortcomings in coordination, command, and control, as well as a lack of technology and weaponry fit for the twenty-first century (Bukkvoll 2009). Hence, the modernization was dual; on the one hand, it was realized to strengthen "traditional capabilities", on the other, the modernization wanted to provide Russian army forces with the capabilities to realize asymmetrical operations.

In terms of what was truly improved, the program sought to make the Russian military more useable by increasing its overall efficiency and cost-effectiveness: streamlining central command bodies; decreasing the size of the officer corps, which had made the Russian military particularly top-heavy; cutting the number of military units in favor of a smaller number with permanent readiness status (Renz 2018: 42). The rationale for this change was to increase the army's flexibility in creating more deployable units, simplifying the chain of command, and enabling better coordination between the different services during operations (Ibid). Additionally, the country sought to drive up the recruitment of professional soldiers in order to lessen reliance on conscription (Sinovets and Renz 2015: 5). Thus, although Russia is still remote from the move to an entirely professional military, the number of professional service personnel in the Russian armed forces increased from about 174,000 in 2011 to more than 300,000 in 2015 (Lavrov 2015). Furthermore, the image problem of the military profession was also tackled with improvements to the financial rewards and welfare of soldiers, since these were essential if the process of modernization was to succeed, in order to leave servicemen with a new sense of purpose and pride in their profession (Giles 2016: 16). Finally, a centrally important element of the modernization program was the update of weapons and equipment to move from a figure of 10 percent of hardware classed as "modern" in 2008 to 30 percent by the end of 2015 and to 70 percent by 2020 (Renz,2018: 50). Indeed, new equipment delivered as part of the state armaments program to 2020 has undoubtedly made the Russian military more modern and more capable. Advances were made mainly in the realm of upgrading the strategic rocket forces, the country's air defense system, and sizeable deliveries of new fixed-wing and rotary aircraft to the air force (Cooper 2016: 52). Furthermore, increased funding meant that large-scale exercises, which had not taken place for almost two decades after the end of the Cold War, were reintroduced in 2009 (Trenin, 2016: 24). Since 2011, inter-service exercises involving up to 150,000 men have been held regularly, preparing all the armed services for joint and combined combat operations for the first time (Norberg 2015).

Therefore, underpinned by significant financial resources and political will to enforce its implementation, the program resulted in substantial improvements in conventional military capabilities. The achievement of these 2008 reforms has turned the Russian military into a force that is unrecognizable compared to the demoralized and underfunded organization it had

developed into during the 1990s (Renz 2018: 42). These were demonstrated to the world during the military operation in Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent intervention in Syria, changing the international image of the Russian armed forces almost overnight and leading to a debate about Russia's military revival (Trenin 2016). Therefore, it is clear that Russia's resources necessary to pursue the "ends" of Grand strategy have immensely increased since 2000.

Refinement of Russian Art of War: the Rise of Gibridnaya Voyna and New-Generation Warfare

Russian military hardware has developed well since the fall of the USSR and the modernization program of 2008. Plus, this modernization demonstrates that the military tool was selected as the primary means for completing the ends of Grand Strategy. However, military material capabilities are only one facet, if not the second facet of the military power, given the way to accomplish contemporary warfare.

Adjusting guidelines and doctrines to improve the Russian armed forces' preparedness to deal with scenarios other than large-scale and conventional interstate wars have been an essential aspect of the reforms program. The Russian military thinking had to move from the "outdated" Cold War fighting of "traditional" interstate warfare, on the one hand, and move towards innovative thinking on the fighting of "new" wars and insurgencies, on the other (Renz 2018: 96). Therefore, Russian military thinking Staff had to take into account pioneering work. However, the military Staff did not have to look very far because all the strategic work had been prepared beforehand. As explained earlier, with the roots of the Russian understanding of the changing nature of war, through Messner, Dugin or Panarin and the idea of the primacy of the non-military means used militarily in the context of conflicts. Indeed, Russian military thinking stood out for its strength in "theorizing innovative concepts", forward-looking and "outside the box" thinking, and the ability to formulate "creative visions of ways to achieve victory" in future wars (Adamsky 2010: 53). Since the mid-1990s, Russian conceptualization of war as a socio-political phenomenon has been shaped by the defeat of the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Fridman 2019: 134). In their analyses of the Cold War and the causes of the Soviet defeat, Russian strategists and political scientists have emphasized two main aspects of new conflicts: (1) the aim to break the spirit

of the adversary's nation by a gradual erosion of its culture, values, and self-esteem without escalating a given conflict to a direct physical military confrontation; and (2) an emphasis on political, informational (propaganda) and economic instruments, rather than on physical military force (Chekinov 2010: 25). Therefore, Russian thinking on asymmetric and "indirect" approaches to warfare, which some observers saw as an innovation in Crimea, as demonstrated earlier is deeply rooted in Russian military tradition.

As a result, the Russian military Strategic thinking, similar to the modernization program, has refined itself to be more efficient and flexible in the new environment of the 21st century to overcome the weaknesses of the Russian army in the 1990s. Practically speaking, the military thinking reform was done under the auspices of the work from three Russian officers, firstly Colonel Sergey Chekinov and Lieutenant General Sergey Bogdanov, both from the highly influential Centre for Military and Strategic Studies of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces; and secondly, General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General staff (Fridman 2019: 129). Since the late 2000s, their publications on the changing nature of contemporary conflicts have played a vital role in shaping the views of the Russian military establishment in general (Ibid).

- Chekinov and Bogdanov's Categorization of Conflicts in the 21st century

Chekinov and Bogdanov draw the new stance of the Russian military thinking from two conclusions. The first one, related to "war", is that the terms of victory are changing. The principle of achieving the military-political goals of wars and armed conflicts with minimum human and material losses comes to dominate the military theory and practice of advanced states (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2010: 17). Hence, according to the two Russian officers, "war" nowadays includes non-military actions based on the kinds of non-violent methods that would usually precede the beginning of military activities (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2012: 23). This can be led through information and psychological operations in order "to substantially weaken the enemy's military capabilities by non-violent methods that target its information processes, thus misleading and demoralizing its population and members of its armed forces" (Chekinov 2010: 25). Chekinov and Bogdanov's second conclusion regarding the non-military means and methods that have been used in contemporary conflicts is related to what they define as "political confrontation" (Fridman 2019: 131). Based on an analysis of

the geopolitical transformations that have taken place since the Cold War, they argue that there is no real need to conduct large-scale wars. Indeed, wars are not expected because of the threat of catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, on the one hand, and on the other, because new ways and means of achieving political and strategic objectives by conducting local wars and conflicts have been found; by political, economic and informational pressure; and by subversive actions inside the adversary state (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2017: 35). Thus, they established in Russian military strategic thinking two possible cases of conflicts, which are useful to understand the role of non-military means and methods (Ibid 36). According to Chekinov and Bogdanov, though non-military means and methods can feature in both of these two scenarios—"war" and "political confrontation"—there is a clear distinction between them. In the former, they are intended to soften the enemy before large-scale military operations, whereas, in the latter, they are envisaged being a substitute for military deployment (Fridman 2019: 132). It was this first scenario that the pair conceptualized as New-Generation Warfare and the second as the Gibridnaya Voyna (Ibid).

- New-Generation Warfare (Voyna Novogo Pokoleniya)

In 2013, the pair published one of their most widely read articles, entitled "The Nature and the Content of the New-Generation War", in which they introduced their concept of New-Generation War (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2013). The authors emphasized that non-military methods and activities, especially information—psychological operations, are integral parts of New-generation Warfare. Hence, the information-psychological struggle will take a leading role, directed to achieve superiority in the sphere of command and control, as well as to suppress the morale of the military personnel and the population of the adversary, in order to create the required preconditions for achieving victory (Ibid 18). Therefore, these actions are intended to soften the enemy as a preparatory stage before a war, as "New-Generation War is an international armed conflict planned ahead of time by the offensive side" (Ibid 19).

- Russian Political Confrontation (Gibridnaya Voyna)

The term refers to "an element of interstate confrontation intended to realize the national interests of the state by extensive use of indirect actions while maintaining the armed forces as a deterrent" (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2017: 39). Gibridnaya Voyna is the

"achievement of the intended aims by non-violent means without the use of military force" (Gareev 2013). While Russian military thought does not consider Gibridnaya Voyna a form of war, Chekinov and Bogdanov accord it a very special role in the formulation of strategy (Fridman 2019). In their views, Gibridnaya Voyna is the "creation of external controlling mechanisms, an infiltration of subversive and destructive concepts, projects and programs, a formation of an agency of influence and promoting its representatives to power" (Ibid). The primary purpose of this type of confrontation is to avoid the traditional battlefield and destroy the adversary via a hybrid of ideological, informational, financial, political, and economical methods that dismantle the socio-cultural fabric of society, leading to its internal collapse (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2012: 15). The Goals of Gibridnaya Voyna can be a full or partial disintegration of the adversary state, a significant alternation of the direction of its internal or foreign policy, a replacement of the state's leadership with a loyal regime, an establishment of foreign ideological and finance-economical control over the state, its chaotization and subordination to the dictats of the victorious state(s) (Ibid 16).

- The "Gerasimov Doctrine": the continuation of the integration of the new thinking

In 2013, a new doctrine regarding the Russian army was produced, led by Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. It advocates "the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military means, supplemented by civil disorder among the local population and concealed armed forces" (Gerasimov 2013). The kinetic realm, purely military, finds itself marginalized to the background in favor of the new primacy of the non-kinetic domain in order to disrupt and weaken a potential opponent, through non-military means, such as cyber-attacks, trolling, or disinformation (Ibid). Therefore, information now has "primacy in operations" (SRATCOM COE 2015: 3). As Jānis Bērzinš, a leading specialist on Russian military strategy, explains, the doctrine's focus switched from direct destruction to direct influence, from a war with weapons to information or psychological warfare. The new main battle space is in the mind, through the reduction of the necessity for deploying hard military power to the minimum necessary, and making the opponent's military and civil population support the attacker to the detriment of their government and country (Bērzinš 2014). Gerasimov believes that these new methods are typical of twenty-first-century warfare and more significant to achieve strategic

goals than military means because they can reduce the fighting potential of an enemy by creating social upheaval and promoting a climate of collapse without the overt use of violence (Gerasimov 2013: 3). The main objective is to reduce the necessity for deploying hard military power to the minimum necessary, making the opponent's military and civil population support the attacker to the detriment of their government and country (Bērziņš 2014). Nevertheless, identifying Gerasimov as the origin of Russian Hybrid Warfare thinking, as he is often perceived in the West, where the General is "the face of the hybrid approach" (Snegovaya 2015), is selective and ignores how it fits into broader developments in Russian military thinking (Renz 2018: 99). Indeed, as explained before, Gerasimov's ideas are not as "new" as often asserted (Person 2017: 2). Hence, the article was more a clear continuation of "revolutionary" thinking on the future (Ibid).

Hence, these conceptualizations of non-military means in general, and Gibridnaya Voyna in particular, clearly resemble many of the ideas proposed by Messner, Dugin, and Panarin (Fridman 2019). Furthermore, they believe that, in confrontations between states, the center of gravity has been visibly shifting towards non-military means due to the "increasing danger of mutual destruction" (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2011: 8). To summarize, whereas non-military (i.e., economic, diplomatic, financial, information, cyber) means and methods are employed in both cases, in New-Generation Warfare, these methods are intended to prepare the ground for subsequent military actions. At the same time, in Gibridnaya Voyna they are used for a stand-alone, non-violent political confrontation (Fridman 2019: 137). By drawing this conceptual distinction, Chekinov and Bogdanov accept and promote Gibridnaya Voyna as a legitimate phenomenon in interstate confrontations (Ibid). Chekinov and Bogdanov, coupled with the work of Gerasimov, who ultimately represent the general course of contemporary Russian military thought, have promoted and institutionalized the idea that the West, and especially the United States, has been trying to subvert and undermine Russia by employing different non-military means and methods (i.e., Gibridnaya Voyna) and that Russia, therefore, should seek to do the same (Ibid).

4. The Ways of Russian Grand Strategy: Integration, coordination, and encompassment of all instruments of national power into realities

The thesis will turn its attention to an overview of the "ways" of Russian Grand strategy—the policies has Moscow has implemented in order to achieve its objectives. The first section of this chapter will analyze the recent military interventions of the Kremlin because they are the right example of integration of the military power in the Grand Strategy. The second section will develop the concept of asymmetrical balancing, which explains the coordination of conventional military power, and military use of non-military means. Therefore, this chapter will try to answer our fourth and last sub-question, which is: are the Kremlin's external military interventions, as well as the use of non-military means from Moscow's strategic thinking, the ways of implementing and coordinating the Russian Grand Strategy?

A. Russian military interventions in the 21st century: the confidence of Moscow in the use of force

The military interventions of Russia abroad consist of three primary operations, the five-day war in Georgia in 2008, the events in Ukraine in 2014, and the intervention in the Syrian conflict in 2015.

Five-day war in Georgia, 2008, the experimentation of the new Russian military power

Many Western observers interpreted the 2008 events in Georgia with the typical mainstream vocabulary that sticks to Russian behavior. Georgia was seen as the evidence of a renewed Russian imperialism; another popular interpretation was that Russia was fighting a proxy war against the West, acting as "aggressively unilaterally" (Shearman and Sussex 2009: 252), or even with the intention on instigating a New Cold War (Rich 2009: 241).

Nevertheless, these perceptions completely missed the goal of Russia Grand Strategy in this conventional military intervention. Indeed, what was unique in this case was the distinctly international dimension that took place in these events. Indeed, the intervention reflected the convergence of several distinct but interlinked threats to Russian interests that Moscow had consistently articulated in the post-bipolar security environment (Shearman and

Sussex 2009: 270). Hence, Russian military actions did not come out of the blue but were the result of a specific confluence of circumstances.

First, the context of North Caucasus, in terms of geography, as well as the ongoing instability, meant that the region was as strategically important to Moscow as ever (Renz 2018: 86). Russia's relationship with Georgia had never been easy, but following Mikheil Saakashvili's election as president in 2004, attitudes had turned increasingly bitter on both sides. Hence, when the shelling of the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali by Georgian artillery and the death of civilians and Russian peacekeepers took place, this gave Moscow a reason to intervene (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009: 307). Russia's core justification for the use of military force was self-defense. Given that hostilities were initiated by Georgia, Russia had some legitimate ground on which to base this argument. Self-defense was also acknowledged in the "Tagliavini report", the findings by a fact-finding mission established by the European Union (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission 2009).

Second, insecurity and self-defense do not explain the scale of Russia's response and why military actions extended significantly into undisputed Georgian territory. Indeed, Great power status and spheres of influence played important factors. Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, which like subsequent "color revolutions", was interpreted by the Kremlin as a tool used by the West to extend its power, Russia saw Georgia as an important locale for potential intrusion into its perceived sphere of influence. When regional relations between Russia and Georgia deteriorated, Saakashvili, former president of Georgia, pursued an openly pro-Western foreign policy, including close bilateral relations with the United States and the long-term goal of joining NATO (Renz 2018: 87). Furthermore, in 2006, Georgia had withdrawn from the CIS Council of Defense Ministers, announcing that, as a future member of NATO, it could not be part of two rival military alliances simultaneously (Kramer 2008: 7). During the summit in Bucharest in April 2008, the alliance officials welcomed Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO and stated officially that both States would become members of the alliance in the future (NATO 2008). These developments suggested to Russia that the country could possibly leave its "sphere of influence" was a distinct possibility and created Russian fears over the West's "intrusion" into Georgia. The prospect of "losing" Georgia was unacceptable to Russia, because of strategic and security interests in the region, including in the realm of energy. Thus, Putin stated that NATO

enlargement would be viewed as a "direct threat" to the security of Russia (Putin 2008). In this sense, Russia's Grand Strategic ends factored into the decision to use force in this case (Shearman and Sussex 2009). Hence, the August 2008 war made Georgia's membership in NATO in the future unlikely. As such, weakening Georgia was "not just a goal but an instrument for Russia in the pursuit of higher-order foreign policy objectives" (Allison 2008: 1165).

The War in Georgia, just like the one in Kosovo, confirmed the ongoing dissonance in Russian and Western views on the nature of their relationship. Although the war in Georgia was consistent with the interests and ambitions Russia had articulated for many years, it was met with surprise in the West (Renz 2018: 87). This was because, since 2000, Russia had been open to security cooperation with the West, including with NATO (Ibid). The cooperation included participation in the efforts to deal with "new security challenges" in a multilateral setting. Indeed, following the 9/11 attacks, Russia pledged moral and material support to the US in the Global War on Terrorism. It did not withdraw its cooperation even in moments of extreme tension, such as the start of the Iraq War in 2003, which the Kremlin vehemently opposed (Ibid). Nevertheless, regarding Moscow's approach to the West, it proves that conflict and cooperation are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, support was rendered, because security interests coincided, in some kind of Great power multilateralism, given Russia's struggle with terrorism for many years (Ibid 88). Hence, Russia's reassertion of its status by military means, in this case, inevitably caused tensions and challenged cooperation with the West. However, for the Kremlin, tensions were not only a price worth paying but instrumental in Russia's quest to gain respect as a Great power that could pursue an independent foreign policy (Ibid).

In short, there is a case to be made that the 2008 war was about balancing against NATO as much as it was a political dispute between Moscow and Tbilisi (Person 2019: 9).

The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014, Paragon of the confidence and asymmetric balancing

Although the Russian Federation's actions in Ukraine were not a military offensive against a Western state, the annexation of Crimea was interpreted as a threat to the West. Russian military actions in Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea, in particular, have been interpreted as a "paradigm shift" in Moscow's foreign policy and as evidence of a "seismic

change in Russia's role in the world" (Rutland 2014). The assessment of these actions as a dramatic and sudden turnaround was based on the fact that, for the first time since the creation of the Russian Federation, the country grabbed a piece of another sovereign state's territory (Renz 2018: 88). This seemed to suggest a qualitative change in the Kremlin's perceptions of its historical rights and responsibilities in the "near abroad" from more indirect forms of domination to an expansionist vision (Ibid). Nevertheless, even if these actions were illegal and unjustifiable, again, these actions did not occur in a vacuum, and the use of force was the result of a combination of factors, namely status concerns, strategic interests, insecurity, historical ties and domestic developments (Averre and Davis 2015) to satisfy the ends of the country's Grand Strategy. The assumption that the acquisition of territory was Russia's first motivation for the use of military force, in this case, represents a limited explanation of the war in Ukraine (Renz 2018: 89). Developments leading to the annexation of Crimea indicate that Russian actions were again the result of continued interests and threat perceptions that had driven Moscow's Grand Strategy.

Firstly, as was the case in Georgia in 2008, regional status concerns were significant (Ibid). Indeed, fears in Russia over its waning influence over Ukraine date back to the Orange Revolution in 2004 (Ibid 90). Although the situation was "regularized" in the eye of Moscow when Ukraine elected Viktor Yanukovich, a Russian friendly politician, as president in 2010, the fear was still very present in the Russian elite, with the prospect of a Ukraine's membership in NATO that would come back at some point (Ibid). Nonetheless, Ukraine did not completely close the door to the West, with the possibility of an association agreement (AA) on trade with the EU. However, Yanukovich, in autumn 2013, decided to abandon signing the agreement due to Moscow pressure. Demonstrations in Kyiv followed and quickly turned into requests that Yanukovich quit. Certainly, due to the brutal suppression of demonstrators, the protests gathered momentum and lasted for months. Negotiations in February 2014, which included Yanukovich and Ukrainian opposition leaders, as well as official representatives from EU countries and Russia, failed to solve the crisis (Charap and Colton 2017: 114). Thus, Yanukovich fled the country and was replaced by a Western-oriented government that put the EU AA back on the table (Ibid 118). This outcome aggravated Moscow's fears that it was in danger of losing Ukraine as part of its "sphere of influence". As a large country located in the westernmost part of Russia's "near abroad", Ukraine is of

particular strategic importance, forming a buffer against NATO territory in Europe's north and east (Renz 2018: 90). Furthermore, Ukraine's status as a transit state for Russian gas heading to lucrative Western markets is also significant. Moreover, access to Crimea is non-negotiable in the Kremlin's eyes, because the Sevastopol naval base is central for power projection in the Black Sea region and beyond (Ibid). Therefore, a few days after the escape of Yanukovich, Russian military operations in Crimea commenced. Through the annexation of Crimea, Russia was able to deprive any future Ukrainian government of the opportunity to revoke the status of the Russian naval base.

Secondly, international status concerns heightened Russia's preparedness to opt for military action. Moscow acted on the assumption that political developments in Ukraine over the past decade had been steered, or at least heavily encouraged, by the West in its efforts to expand its influence into Russia's orbit in the CIS region (Ibid). Hence, the EU's offer of an association agreement and discussions in NATO of the possibility of a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine following the Orange Revolution were interpreted as evidence of this (Ibid). The Maidan protest was thus seen as a tool in the West's strategic contest against Russia in the CIS region (Allison 2013: 133). In February 2014 when the US and other Western governments officially welcomed the new Ukrainian government a few days after the change in power had occurred, Moscow was convinced that it had yet again become the victim of a "Western plot", this time "to install a loyal government in Kyiv that would move Ukraine towards the EU and even NATO" (Charap and Colton 2017: 126). The importance of international status concerns in Russia's decision to use military force in Ukraine was confirmed by Putin's heavy emphasis on the West's responsibility regarding the events in his "Crimea speech" in March 2014 (Putin 2014). Furthermore, the protection of Russians was not a reason for the operation, but a rhetorical device, in this case, to garner support among domestic audiences (Biersack and O'Lear 2014: 252). Indeed, claims about the need to protect "ethnic Russians" was a central plank in official justifications for Moscow's actions in Ukraine (Allison 2014: 1282). These claims offer Eastern Ukraine with the republic of Luhansk and Donetsk as an important lever of influence and control over Ukraine (Pifer 2017). Finally, the annexation of Crimea, which dramatically improved Putin's approval ratings, also served to "harnessing populism for domestic regime consolidation" (Allison 2014: 1291).

Hence, we can affirm that the Kremlin's actions, although inexcusable, are incredibly similar to the previous military intervention of Moscow in a former Soviet republic, namely Georgia. Indeed, it is very clear that the same pattern appears in 2014, where Moscow believed the ends of its Grand Strategiya were threatened. Therefore, there is nothing new about Russian actions in Ukraine, not a sudden desire to expansionism nor a "paradigm shift" in Russian strategic objectives. There are only two novelties to these actions. First, it was the Kremlin's strong confidence to use military power to defend its Grand Strategy, as it was the case to a lesser extent in Georgia and as it was not the case in the Kosovo war of 1999, where the same ends were threatened, but Moscow could not react due to its many military weaknesses. The second novelty in these events is the transparent use of newly available means and ways to make war, echoing the strategy of New-Generation Warfare. Through the use of asymmetric means, Moscow achieved a solid strategic victory. We will see more of it in detail in the second part of this section, concerning the novelty of military means of Russia.

The Syrian Intervention of 2015, New Capabilities Meaning New Opportunities

In 2015, the Russian intervention in Syria represented the final nail in the coffin of relations between Russia and the West. Again, Russia's intervention came as a surprise to the West because it was the first time that the country launched a sizeable and unilateral out-of-area operation (Renz 2018: 91). Furthermore, the operation has been interpreted by many commentaries as an act of aggressive confrontation aimed against the West. Indeed, in the eyes of some observers, Moscow's "unanticipated military foray into Syria has transformed the civil war there into a proxy US—Russian conflict and has raised the stakes in the ongoing standoff between Moscow and Washington" (Stent 2016: 106). Worst, for some, Russia's involvement in Syria has set the world on a "dangerous collision course", raising the risk of escalating tensions with the US that could lead to a Third World War (Dejevsky 2017). Nevertheless, although different from the two interventions in former USSR territories, Moscow's decision to use force in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime was determined by once again a specific confluence of factors, namely the ends of Russian Grand Strategiya.

First, the choice of Syria as the locale of Russia's first military foray beyond the former Soviet region was not accidental. It can be explained by Moscow's material and

strategic interests in the country that come from the long relationship with Syria, dating back to the Soviet Era. Indeed, the intervention was the result of the Federation desire to retain its main bases in Syria, i.e., the Mediterranean naval base at Tartus, as well as the Hmeimim Air Base in the Latakia region, coupled with keeping revenue income as Syria's major arms supplier. Indeed, Syria mainly receives Russian military equipment, and there was 78% of all arms trade from Russia to Syria during 2007–2011 (Bagdonas 2012: 65). Moreover, Russia considers the Tartus naval base an important component of its material capabilities. The Kremlin's Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2020 recommended "a permanent Russian Navy presence in the Mediterranean" (Delman 2015). The overthrow of the Assad regime (and mainly in the case of a change towards an Islamist or pro-Western regime) is, therefore, a threat to the strategic and military interests of Russia. Indeed, possessing these bases probably depends on pro-Russian regimes (Knight 2015). Thus, the success of Russian intervention has allowed securing long-term leases on its military facilities, as the signing in 2017 of a forty-nine-year lease on Tartus, therefore allowing the durable installation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean for the future (Tsygankov 2018: 307). Finally, protecting Russia's privileged relationship with Syria by preventing any change of regime allows Russia to retain its place in the Middle East, which helped confer Great power status in international politics and the balance of power, in a time when Russia was isolated in the aftermath of Crimea (Allison 2013: 800).

Secondly, insecurity—globally, regionally and domestically—contributed largely in Russia's decision to intervene. Indeed, the growing influence of international terrorism, through radical Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Syrian war caused concerns about insecurity in the Middle East, which in turn, played a role in securing the chronic instability of the North Caucasus, and preventing spillovers given the large Muslim population in Russia (Lo 2015: 322). Indeed, the maintenance of this region in Russia against separatism is essential for the survival of the state, as Putin previously describing the North Caucasus issue in existential terms, when in 2000 he claimed its loss would mean "Russia as a state in its current form would cease to exist" (Hill 2013). The separatist and terrorist threats that face Russia are nothing new. Indeed, the USSR intervenes in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 in order to support the country's communist government against Islamic rebels, as well as the First and Second War of Chechnya (1994–1996 and 1999–2000) against Islamic

Caucasians separatists. As a result, Russia considers Islamist terror groups based in Syria as a national security threat to its own survival (Tsygankov 2018: 301). Indeed, the rise of Sunni jihadists in the Middle East has created the possible return of an "Islamist threat" in Russia and the former Soviet space, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Therme, 2015: 108). Thus, we can notice that Russia is genuinely concerned with pre-empting radicalized Islamists from returning to Russia, where they could generate greater unrest and even pose a terrorist threat (Tsygankov 2018: 310).

Third, international status concerns also influenced Russia's decision to resort to military force, as the Kremlin increasingly felt that the West was sidelining it in multilateral efforts to resolve the crisis (Renz 2018: 93). Like in the run-up to the Kosovo War, Russia insisted that the UN was the best forum for dealing with the regime in question, so major powers in the Security Council could steer the efforts to find a lasting solution that was acceptable to all. In the event, Russia blocked any initiative that involved the forceful weakening of Assad's rule or that made his departure from power a condition. As the humanitarian crisis in Syria gathered pace, and some Western leaders became more vocal in calling for Assad to go, the chances of solving the crisis through the UN became ever more remote (Allison 2013). When the US launched airstrikes, the Kremlin saw this as a failure of multilateralism and as yet more evidence of the West's refusal to give it an equal voice in the solution of international problems, as it was the case back in Kosovo. Nevertheless, by 2015, Russia felt that it had recovered the strength required to stand up against the West. Military intervention allowed Russia to demonstrate that it now had the capabilities to challenge what it saw as the West's monopoly on the use of force on a global level. It also sent a message to the rest of the world that the country's backing was yet again "something truly worth having" (Matthews 2016). As such, the war in Syria brought Russia closer to its goal of Great power recognition (Knight 2015).

Hence, the war in Syria is another example of the complex interplay of cooperation and conflict in Russia's approach to the West (Renz 2018: 93). Rather than in an intent to confront, the airstrikes represented a desire for inclusion, "to break out of the diplomatic isolation and demonstrate that Russia could not be denied its rightful place at the high table of international politics" (Charap and Colton 2017: 163). On the one hand, Moscow's use of the military instrument as ways for enforcing cooperation predictably increased tensions and

fuelled suspicions in the West of Russia's aggressive intentions. On the other hand, it made inevitable its inclusion as a central actor in future multilateral efforts to solve the crisis through diplomacy, as in the peace talks of the International Syria Support Group in autumn 2015, which involved Russia, the US, the EU, China, Iran, and Syria, among others (Baunov 2015). Indeed, playing on the American withdrawal from the Syrian front lines, it quickly established itself as a central player in the peace talks in Geneva. Russian diplomacy was successful in December 2016, when it launched a new format of tripartite dialogue, competitor to the West, the so-called "Astana" format, with Tehran and Ankara.

B. The strategy of asymmetrical balancing, coordination, and encompassment of all instruments of power

This strategy refers to the nod of the asymmetric or "gray zone" methods of New-Generation Warfare and Gibridnaya Voyna that have become an increasingly prominent part of Russia's foreign policy toolkit (Person, 2019). Hence, referring to balancing in the realist tradition, we can conceive asymmetric balancing as a strategy that utilizes a spectrum of tactics that range from soft to hard, though kinetic military operations are rarely used (Ibid). Asymmetric balancing takes place in the military, political, economic, and social realms in order to offset an enemy's military advantage, using a variety of overt and covert measures to exert influence and shape outcomes (Gerasimov 2013). As we explained earlier regarding Russian Hybridity, the purpose of asymmetric balancing is not necessarily military action or territorial conquest but rather to counterbalance an adversary more forcefully while remaining below the level of the hard military open warfare, as Russia successfully did during the last two decades. Moreover, there is nothing new about asymmetry if one regards the long tradition of Russian military strategic thinking. Nevertheless, the way military tools were combined with other tools to reach specific goals was new (Ven Bruusgaard 2014: 85). Indeed, in New-Generation Warfare, as we saw earlier, non-military means and methods are heavily emphasized to weaken and eliminate threats (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2013: 18). However, there is a massive demand for coordination because military software cannot be used without the employment of armed forces, otherwise "the achievement of the New-Generation War aims will be impossible" (Ibid 22). In other words, New-Generation Warfare is not necessarily about non-military means and methods, but rather about the complex

employment of armed forces, which is supported by non-military actions that “create chaos and uncontrollability, demoralizing people and the personnel of the defending military”, thereby offering the aggressor an opportunity “to achieve the desired military-political and economic aims of a military campaign in a concise period and without significant casualties” (Ibid, 20). The main argument here is that whatever we can hear or read about Russian “Hybrid Warfare”, there is no removal of the “hard military power” from modern wars, where conventional capabilities are still strategically perceived as essential. One can perceive the hybrid character of the new Russian military art, with the new proportionality established between the use of military measures and non-military means: from 1 to 4 (Gerasimov 2013). While non-military measures (including information warfare) represent the highest value (4), military measures, including recourse to the armed forces (1) receive an ancillary position. They are used only at specific stages of the conflict, essentially to precipitate a victory in the final phase of a military operation (Ibid).

Therefore, in current wars, a combination of traditional and hybrid methods (gibridnye metody) is a vital characteristic of any armed conflict (Gerasimov 2016). In Ukraine and Syria, since the modernization of the army coupled with the refinement of Russian strategic thinking were completed to some extent, the Russian leadership showed improved abilities to coordinate different instruments of state power, which had been seen as a significant problem in previous Russian military operations (Charap 2016). In Crimea, special operations forces, information operations including state media, elements of cyber warfare, deterrence and coercion through staged military exercises and the use of proxy fighters, were used in a coordinated manner for the successful achievement of objectives (Renz 2018). Nevertheless, there is not only the coordination between military hardwares and software but also between them and other types of instruments of national power in order to maximize the Grand Strategy. The difference between the military power and other types is that the seconds are often used outside a direct conflict, often to disrupt the West in a non-coercive manner. Therefore, the thesis will rapidly go over these different types of power in a table for more clarity and conciseness.

Military power: Covert

- "Maskirovka" tactics:

"Maskirovka" is an old Soviet war fighting principle employed to create deception and plausible deniability of the involvement of forces. This enabled the primary goal of military deception, which is surprise, "Vnezapnost" doctrine in Russian (Glantz 1989). Use of the so-called "Little green men", Russian forces wearing unmarked military uniforms and supplied with Russian weaponry and vehicles, but claimed as Ukrainian domestic self-defense units (Becker and al. 2016: 121).

- Proxies, paramilitaries, kontraktniki and civil militias:

Use of separatist forces in Ukraine recruited as pro-Russian fighters and paid to attack Ukrainian nationalists (Jones, 2014) and use of private military companies mostly in Syria, but increasing nowadays in Libya, Sudan, and Centrafica, such as the Wagner group.

- Intelligence services:

Use of Russian intelligence services, namely the Federal Security Service (FSB), Russian military intelligence (GRU), and the Foreign Intelligence Services (SVR), to coordinate auxiliary forces.

Indeed, Russian security services play a relatively significant role in foreign policy, due to the comparative advantage they bring to a weaker Russian military than to the West, through cheapness and effectiveness (Galeotti 2017).

They can mislead the adversary, shape public opinion, reconnoiter the battle space, disrupt adversary command, and control to impede a timely response, as it was the case in Crimea.

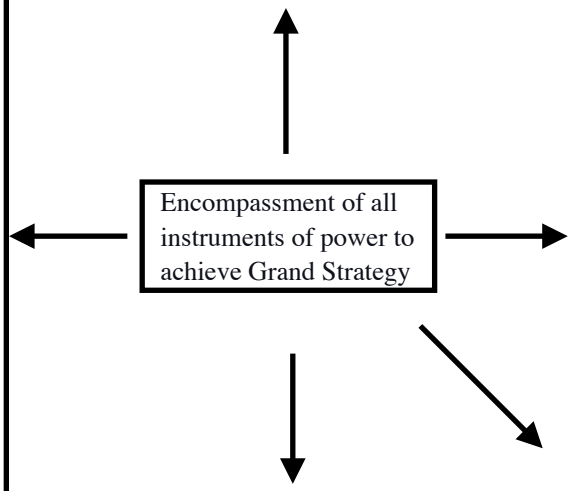
Military power: Overt

- Traditional use of the army:

Intimidation, establishment of logistical "umbilical cord", classical artillery, airstrikes and deployments of units, Counterinsurgency

- Escalation Control Strategy:

Emphasis on the use of mobile interventions, namely Quick-reaction forces, in order to achieve a limited and minimal use of force and to avoid brutality and lack of respect for human life to produce maximum military and diplomatic effects (Fainberg 2017: 7).



Informational power

A tremendous amount of observers argue that Russian media activity focuses both on disinformation and enhancing Russia's image abroad (Person,2019). Indeed, it is supposed to come from the Kremlin-friendly media conglomerates, grouping Russian State media, such as the broadcaster Russia Today, now known as RT (Ibid).

Established in September 2005, RT broadcasts are perceived in several Western countries to possess an agenda designed to embarrass Western states and undermine their proclaimed values in multiple languages worldwide (Seely 2017). Falsified information is meant to confuse target audiences by presenting them with biased information that promotes pro-Russian perspectives about Russian foreign policy goals (Person 2019).

Economics power

Russia's energy and economic assets—comprising oil and gas sales, other trade and investment, embargoes and cutoffs, remittances, and tariffs and currency manipulation—provide necessary weapons in Moscow's hybrid toolkit (Person 2019).

Russia's energy policy is closely aligned with its national security strategy, given the State's high dependency on energy exports for government revenues. Indeed, Russia has 13 percent of the world's known oil reserves and 34 percent of its gas (Arbato and al. 2008). In particular, Russia has regularly manipulated energy chains to exert economic pressure and territorial influence (Person 2019). Russia has shown a proclivity to use energy contracts, proposed pipelines, and supply manipulation to influence post-Soviet countries. For instance, after invading Ukraine, the Russian government quickly seized all Ukrainian energy production and storage facilities. This seizure's purpose was to deprive Kyiv of revenues generated from the transit of energy through the country and, therefore, pressure it into accepting a more pro-Russian disposition (Ibid).

Cyber Power

- Trolling:

Trolls are supposed to post pro-Russian comments and information on social media to obscure or falsify information to engender suspicion and fear (Ibid). They craft and disseminate narratives based on fake news, the release of stolen documents or emails, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns to damage its target's policy (Clark 2019: 235). There is, for instance, in the art of trolling the Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency, a notorious troll farm, according to observers (Ibid 236).

- Hacking:

The hackers are supposed to obtain sensitive pieces of information through hacking such as the actions on the Democratic National Committee and the subsequent leaking of material in the run-up to the US presidential election in November 2016 (Hosenball 2016), as the intention was to distort perceptions among different groups within the country in order to reshape beliefs about how well their interests would be served by the election of Trump or Clinton (Clark 2019: 326).

V. Reflections: Outlining an efficient State's Grand Strategy, unique yet vulnerable

After the detailed review of the contemporary Russian Grand Strategy through its ends, its new strategic environment, the selection of its main mean, as well as the different ways to achieve its objectives, it is now the time to dive into the strengths and weaknesses of this Grand Strategy.

1. Lessons from Putin's Era: Effective articulation, integration, and implementation of a Grand Strategy

In every intervention, Russia showed an increase in the effectiveness of the combined tools employed in the conflict compared to the previous one. Georgia, in 2008, was the first experimentation of combined tools but relied mostly on military power. Russia's political goals in Ukraine in 2014 were achieved without precedent, due to the synergy of all the tools exercised here and the secondary employment of traditional military power in comparison to asymmetric military power. Syria in 2015 was the final demonstration of the Russian military restoration, intervening outside its sphere of influence, relying mostly on hard power due to room for maneuver enabled by the situation there. Hence, Russia has refocused its ability to direct all state tools towards achieving strategic goals effectively (Ven Bruusgaard 2014: 86). Russia's actions, especially in the 2010s, offer lessons of value to any policymaker because they demonstrate the results of processes serving to enhance Russia's ability for strategic coordination (Ibid).

A. Elevated Thinking about Strategy

The Russian warfighting novelties highlighted recent Russian debates regarding strategy, the application of military force under current conditions, and how this element of State power fits in with the other state resources (Ibid). Usually, such debates on strategic thought in a state traditionally take place only within military circles, and civilians have limited access to such matters (Mathers 1995). Nevertheless in Russia, due to the prominence of military power and an increased focus on integrating military and non-military tools to reach political goals, the idea of a Russian Grand Strategy emerged, merging top bureaucrats in both military and civilian circles that now speak similarly of Russian policy goals (Ven

Bruusgaard 2014: 87). Hence, the debate inside the country of a Grand Strategy contributed to comprehensive thinking about the integrated use of state tools to achieve political goals (Ibid). The Putin regime's consolidation over 14 years is likely a contributing factor to the strategic consensus put in place regarding Russia's priorities, be it forced or factual (Ibid). Moreover, the intermeshing of military and paramilitary or state security actors and elites is another contributing factor (Ibid). Therefore, Russian elites are increasingly communicating a coordinated view of the growing anarchy and role of military force in international politics—probably due to the broad concerns in policy circles on what modern conflict looks like (Ibid). Russian debates have flourished, with a focus on determining how best to secure Russian interests in the long term. Hence, these elevated Russian debates on strategy, Grand strategy, and the integration of State tools to reach political goals contrast to the state of the debate in the West—where some scholars claim strategy formulation is a neglected policy area (Strachan 2011).

B. Increased Communication of Strategy

This lively debate is no coincidence; instead, it is the result of clear instructions from the supreme leadership (i.e., President Putin) to formulating long-term strategies for Russia (Cooper 2011). Strategy formulation and strategic planning have almost become a "keynote of Putin's approach to the exercise of state power" (Ibid). Strategies are frequently communicated, conveying Putin's intentions to his bureaucracy and the outside world (Ven Bruusgaard 2014: 88). This process of strategy formulation and coordination led to new levels of cooperation from the Russian bureaucracy. The process of producing an output has increased awareness of strategic goals across the Russian bureaucracy (Ibid). Moreover, a forced focus on the relationship between different policy tools, including military tools, has contributed to a more comprehensive approach among key bureaucrats (Ibid). Finally, the consolidation of power around Putin has also had a disciplining effect within the Russian bureaucracy (Ibid). Regarding its interventions abroad, Russia communicates its goals and intentions, and neither Russian goals, nor priorities were new in its near abroad (Ibid). Alternatively, the formulation of comprehensive strategies has enabled linking and consolidation of modern tools available to the Russian leadership, such as information

technologies, modern military forces, and other levers of influence. This result, combined with an elite-wide, updated view of how modern conflict works (Ibid).

C. Enhanced Tools for Implementation

The last development contributing to this consolidation is a bureaucratic overhaul in the strategic sphere (Ibid). Indeed, the Russian Security Council was elevated bureaucratically in 2009, making it the key (formal) arena for strategic planning and coordination—integrating the military's perspectives and other parts of the Russian bureaucracy. Although little is known of the academic merit and capacities of the Security Council, its authority and visibility in strategic matters highlighted the leadership's focus on the cross-bureaucratic efforts to reach policy goals (Ibid). Moreover, the Security Council's prominence underscored the need to integrate military and other state tools to reach those goals.

Furthermore, Russia established a National Defense Center in 2014, with the explicit goal of coordinating all government agencies engaged in defense of the Russian Federation (e.g., the armed forces, the Interior Ministry, the Federal Security Service, the Emergencies Ministry, and others) with a primus inter pares role for the Russian General Staff (Gerasimov 2014). The intention of this center is straightforward: improve government-wide coordination (Ibid). Putin's preference for "manual control" optimizes this kind of centralized coordination; in a regime where decision-making is as centralized as Putin's Russia, a "comprehensive approach" to using state power may be feasible (Ven Bruusgaard 2014: 89). Therefore, formulating strategic goals, enhancing awareness of such goals within the bureaucracy, and making organizational adjustments for carrying out complex operations with a wide range of tools has and will increase the ability to coordinate effectively (Ibid).

2. Efficient, yet Vulnerable: Weaknesses of Russian Grand Strategy

A. Weaknesses of Military capabilities

Even if the modernization program led to fundamental change, considerably improving Russian military power, there is a general tendency, especially in the West, to overstate the scale and implications of Russia's military posture in absolute terms and its relative standing as a global military power (Renz 2018: 44). Hence, the idea of a Russian military resurgence that has turned the country into a serious global threat within a few years

is exaggerated (Ibid). Indeed, the limited nature in both scope and size of the Crimean and Syrian operations does not allow for the conclusion that modernization efforts over the past few years have equipped the military with new capabilities to the extent that it now poses a real threat to European and transatlantic security (Ibid). They are three main weaknesses of Russian military power: manpower problems, economic stagnation, and lack of proper defense industry and innovation.

The first weakness, the manpower problems, comes from the fact that Russia wants a one-million-man army military power(Presidential Decree 329 2016). Indeed, "Great powers require big armies" (Mearsheimer 2001: 6). Nevertheless, the country has struggled to achieve this level of manpower, and Russia's actual military strength is usually estimated at around 800.00 men (Carlsson et al. 2013: 38). Furthermore, compared to other armed forces of Great powers, even one million do not stand out in front of the US military with around 1.4 million professional soldiers or China's People's Liberation Army with its force of over 2.3 million soldiers (The Military balance 2016: 484). Moreover, there is a high percentage of conscripts in the Russian armed forces, which creates doubt about the quality of Russia's total available military strength, due to lack of skills and experience (Renz 2018: 46). Hence, it has to be kept in mind that the elite troops who carried out the Crimea operation make up less than 1 percent of Russia's overall military strength and are not representative of the Russian armed forces (House of Commons Defense Committee 2014).

The second weakness, economic stagnation, comes from all the financial limitations that constitute severe obstacles to the longer-term goals of the Russian military (Renz 2018: 47). Even with the increase of its budget, Russia's military expenditure of just over US$90 billion in 2015 was less than a sixth of US spending (amounted to over US$595 billion), or less than half of the Chinese budget, which came to over US$214 billion in the same year (Ibid). Moreover, Russia's defense budget in 2015 was only marginally more prominent than that of Saudi Arabia, the world's fourth-largest military spender, or slightly exceeded the combined military expenditure of Germany and Italy (Ibid). Furthermore, Russian is too dependent on the price of oil and was only able to increase its military budget due to the sharp increase in the price of oil from an average of less than US$20 per barrel during the 1990s to almost US$150 by 2008 (Connolly 2015: 6). Hence, the budget increased due to economic optimism and recovery. Nevertheless, if the price falls, then the budget will

follow. An economic downturn can create the same dilemma for Russia as it did with the USSR, which was the "weighing the trade-off between spending on guns and butter" (Bradshaw and Connolly 2016: 156). Hence, Russia's financial means rarely matched its military and Great power ambitions (Renz 2018). Therefore, it is far from clear whether Russia could "afford to continue to strengthen its military capabilities in the face of falling oil and gas export revenues, economic recession, and grown social demands on the federal budget" (Bradshaw and Connolly 2016: 156).

The third weakness, the Russian defense industry's inability to deliver "modern equipment to match the country's long-term military ambitions", refers to the fact that little was done to bring the sector into the twenty-first century because insufficient funds are invested in R&D (Renz and Thornton 2012: 50). Although the Russian defense industry is one of the word's largest arms exports and remained competitive in certain niche products such as combat aircraft and submarines, the technology gap between Russia and Western producers continued to grow (Renz 2018: 49). Many problems occur, such as outdated management practices, a rapidly aging workforce, and an even older manufacturing base (Blank 2012).
This, in turn, creates two main obstacles to military power. First, the lack of procurement of advanced technologies required for intelligence gathering, target identifications and communications, significant for state-on-state warfare scenarios; and second, it created the inability to deliver consistently across all categories of weapons systems, meaning that the country's global power projection capabilities remain limited (Renz 2018).

B. Weaknesses of the Russian Economy and Its International Standing and Diplomacy

In the economic domain, Russia's strength is dwarfed by that of the United States, where the country lacks the size, diversity, and resulting capacity of a Great Power economy (Clark 2019: 232). Russia's gross domestic product has a value of $1.58 trillion, while that of the United States is $20.51 trillion (International Monetary Fund 2019). Moreover, the Russian ruble value has declined due to Western sanctions against Russia—punishment for Moscow's behavior in Ukraine and Syria, and its use of the Novichok nerve agent against double agent Sergei Skripal (Ibid). Hence, within the economic domain, Russia lacks the strength to control situations where it could alter the relative balance of power. The Kremlin may have outmaneuvered its Western rivals in some ways during the crises in Ukraine and

Syria, but Moscow's failure to develop a coherent economic strategy threatens the long-term sustainability of its newly restored status (Lukyanov 2016).

Concerning international standing, even in regions not attracted to Western soft power language—most prominently Central Asia and Belarus—the Kremlin has failed to propose an attractive strategic vision (Tsygankov 2018). Reliance on the traditional tools of buying political support and using coercion against opponents has been successful in some respects, but it is not a long-term solution or a substitute for a coherent modern Grand Strategy philosophy (Ibid).

Moreover, the achievement of its interventions abroad is a double-edged sword. Indeed, it is not a surprise that the display of military power in Crimea and Syria has not resulted in a positive image. Regarding double standards, Russia criticizes the West while lacking consistency, such as its recognition of the independence of Georgia's breakaway provinces but not Kosovo's, and its support of friendly political forces in the former Soviet States, while attacking the United States for funding the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan (Ibid). Thus, this left "Russia open to charges of hypocrisy and double standards" (Herd 2010: 26).

VI. Conclusion: The link between Russian Grand Strategy and the revival of military power

"Anyone who does not regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who wants it restored has no brains".

Vladimir Putin, in *the New York Times,* February 20, 2000

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze *what the Russian Grand Strategy in the 21st century is, and what its key implications that need to be acknowledged by Western policymakers and strategists* are. Russian use of military force since the arrival of Putin have been driven by a combination of interest and cannot be explained by a single motivation, as we saw above in the thesis. They were all launched due to the military power's role as the guarantee of reaching Russian Grand Strategiya ends, such as status concerns, Great powerness, and insecurity. Even if Russia has become more assertive in the pursuit of its interest and its military has also been more powerful and adequate for the achievements of objectives, there is little evidence for a "paradigm shift" in Moscow's views on the utility of the military forces. Indeed, it is not imperial expansion nor the desire to recreate the Soviet Union, nor to be more aggressive towards the West, as is often argued by western observers picturing a "revanchist" Kremlin. The wars in Ukraine and Syria were only possible due to Moscow's increased confidence in using the military in pursuit of its national interest, not least because better capabilities have given it more opportunities to do so (Renz 2018: 111).

Fearing the loss of its "sphere of influence", Moscow abandoned the character of benign security guarantor in the CIS and demonstrated, both in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, that its status in the region was non-negotiable (Ibid 93). Furthermore, not determined by the desire for global domination, the Kremlin's view on the utility of military power on an international level is driven to ensure the country's status as a Great power, while improving its security situation. Finally, intervention beyond former Soviet republics is the legitimate evolution of the use of military power for the Kremlin. In Kosovo, the lack of such power resulted in humiliation and set in motion the process of military modernization. In Syria, a revived military ensured that Russia could not be sidelined in discussions, and its views as a global power had to be taken into account (Ibid 94).

Although Russia's military revival is unlikely to lead to further territorial expansion or an aggressive bid for global domination, the Kremlin's new confidence and assertiveness pose severe challenges to its neighbors and the West. Moscow's preparedness to protect what it sees as its "sphere of influence", required by military force if required, is a threat to the sovereignty of the states in this region (Ibid). Concerning the West, the danger of spiraling tensions and escalation cannot be dismissed, resulting from mutual misunderstandings of intentions (Tsygankov 2016: 295). Hence, one should acknowledge that the nature of reactions and responses of the West made to Russia is likely to influence the course of future events (Renz 2018: 94).

Nevertheless, in the non-military domains, it is beyond doubt that Russia has stepped up its efforts to improve its information warfare capabilities, both in the technological (electronic warfare and cyber operations) and psychological (information/disinformation operations and deception) realms as a foreign policy tool to seek political influence abroad (Kofman and Rojansky 2015). However, regarding "Hybrid warfare", it is hard to disagree that "hybrid war has become a catchall phrase resulting in a misguided attempt to group everything Moscow does under one rubric" (Ibid). Thus, this makes it harder for the West to craft "sensible policies with respect both to the Ukrainian crisis and Russia generally" (Monaghan 2015: 1). What is very important for our thesis is that categorizing every Russian move as hybrid, through its combination of military, diplomatic, economic, and media capabilities to achieve its goals using limited armed engagement, is in fact, a confusion of Hybrid warfare and Grand Strategy (Heinsten and Michlin-Shapir 2016). Hence, the idea that Russian military thinking took an almost complete about-turn and change from Cold War obsolescence to "Hybrid Warfare" wizardry in a matter of just a few years is unrealistic (Renz 2018: 110). Instead, one should understand that Russia's military and doctrinal thinking reflect the challenges arising from the changing security environment and their strategic implications that now merge nowadays external state actors and NATO, as well as non-state actors, in their threat perceptions (Ibid). Here, the only thing to remember is that, in comparison to wars in Chechnya and Georgia, in Crimea and Syria, Russia has vastly improved its ability to fine-tune and adjust military tactics to the circumstances of operations of various scope and intensity (Ibid). Therefore, Russia did not find a new key to universal

military success in the form of “hybrid warfare”, and the effects of “fog of war”, chance and uncertainty will continue to influence the success or failure of Russian military strategy (Ibid).

Thus, the country generally possesses a classicist Grand strategy, mainly because its focus and resource capability are mostly defined in military terms (Marangé 2019). Nevertheless, through Grand Strategy, Russia possesses an approach to war as a society-wide effort (Nordberg 2014: 62). As the country recognized, Russia is working more towards merging the classicist approach with a polyvalent approach because the Kremlin understands that too much focus on classicist Grand Strategy creates an “incomplete power” or “poor Great power”. Moscow understands that Russia still has much to work on to become more “complete” by developing the non-military—economic, demographic, institutional, and cultural—aspects of its Great power status (Tsygankov 2018). Indeed, the militarization of Russia’s Grand Strategy may prove unsustainable in the long run because it hampers economic growth and prevents the transformation of its economy (Marangé 2019: 20). At a regional level, it also undermines the country’s security and alienates former partners in the “near abroad” (Ibid). It thus contributed to increase the level of insecurity and to undermine its security. Furthermore, for its part, NATO has already strengthened its defense and deterrence and enhanced its forward presence in Eastern Europe, which was what Moscow wanted to avoid in the first place (Ibid).

VII. Perspectives

Prospects on future interventions

Practically, if one wants to be aware of where Russia could intervene militarily to defend its interests, there are several possible scenarios. First, there is the Baltic States, that Russia could threaten by propaganda, cyber-attacks, and other nonviolent means of subversion, or even a confrontation (Radin 2017). Indeed, Russia could try to demonstrate the failure of the alliances' commitment to its eastern-most allies (Ibid). However, this scenario seems pretty unlikely currently, because it would have been a direct attack against NATO states, which is very dangerous for both sides.

Second, there is Libya, a Syria-like Scenario for Russia, where the country would seek marginalization of Westerners in settlement of the conflict, which is reasonably likely to happen regarding the current geopolitical situation in Libya as well as worldwide.

Third, there is the possibility of a clash in the Arctic, since the region is a top priority for Russia, from economic and strategic points. Nevertheless, Russia's Arctic strategy is neither benevolent nor belligerent (Arctic Institute 2018), because the militarization of the Arctic by Russia is more about enabling sufficient monitoring, state recognition and enforced constabulary capabilities in the vast areas of the Arctic, mainly because the civil capabilities are insufficient to fulfill Russia's economic goal (Jeppsson 2014: 65).

Finally, there is a possibility of an intervention in Belarus, in the same vein as Crimea. Indeed, since the 1990s, Russia has been trying to create a "Unified State" with its Belarusian neighbor. Following the upcoming presidential elections in August 2020, Russia could undergo a campaign of influence in order to absorb the country into the Federation, or worse, even if unlikely, to see the emergence of proxies if the elections go wrong with pro-democracy demonstrations (and therefore perceived pro-Western by Moscow).

COVID-19 crisis: curse or opportunity?

It is hard not to draw a parallel between Grand Strategy and the current pandemic, even if formally the two seem far apart. Indeed, the crisis will undeniably affect Russia, whether in a negative or positive way.

In terms of international relations, the crisis may be an opportunity for Russia, with the end of a certain multilateralism. The WHO has been cut its funding by the United States,

which constitutes 20% of its budget, because it is accused of having downplayed the extent of the virus, under pressure from Beijing. Moreover, the UN Security Council is seen as very silent in a crisis where there is a great need for it. This, therefore, reflects tensions between countries, especially between China and the USA, and it is exacerbated by the pandemic. It also questions the usefulness of this multilateralism, which can benefit Russia in its quest for recognition but also for multipolarism.

However, the domestic situation is not looking good. On the one hand, at the political level, the constitutional amendments that Vladimir Putin wished to submit to the population on April 22, before the coronavirus epidemic disrupted his plans, were postponed. These referendums were to support the constitutional reform concocted by their president to allow him to stay in power until 2036 and to do more than two terms in a row. The anointing of popular legitimacy was not legally necessary, but in this type of approach, it never hurts. Furthermore, Putin's popularity rating has dropped significantly, which is falling to an all-time low, at 59% of approval; while, it was 80% in the time of Crimea (Levada Center 2020). On the other hand, at the economic level, the crisis is very threatening to the Russian economy. The oil prices are penalized because the virus paralyzes world activity and has caused an unprecedented collapse in demand through the "Grand Containment". Hence this makes the situation for Russia difficult since the country is hugely dependent on its energy exports.

Therefore, the Russian Grand Strategy, but also one of the other Great powers, finds itself turned upside down with this crisis and the tremendous economic crash which is taking shape. The cards will be redistributed on several aspects. Is Russia going to profit from it or not, that is the question of this eventful 2020 year.

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