

# Military Strategy in Contemporary Russia

## Hybrid, but Violent Way of War

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### Introduction: Roles of Military Power

Since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, Russian military strategies have been a major international security issue. The use of nonmilitary means, such as cyber and information warfare, is particularly attracting attention. Such form of struggle is also known as "Hybrid Warfare"<sup>1</sup>, "geopolitical revenge"<sup>2</sup>, or "geopolitical guerrilla warfare"<sup>3</sup>. The assumption therein is that Russia is using nonmilitary means to develop "warfare" regardless of times of peace or war and weaken and disrupt the West. Nonmilitary means has a long history as the way for conducting struggle and Soviet Union actively used such means called "political war"<sup>4</sup> or "active measures"<sup>5</sup> during the Cold War.

This study, however, focuses on the utilities of classical military power: i.e., means of struggle with the large-scale, organized violence used by nation states. The reason of this focus is simple: nonmilitary struggle is the strategy for the competition in peace time, not the war fighting strategy for the armed conflict. In the case of war, the decisive factor which plays a central role has been always classical military power as the means of violent struggle. It will be case in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, this doesn't mean there is no place for nonmilitary struggle in wars. On the contrary, many military thinkers have been discussing the impacts of nonmilitary means on the battleground and the result of war. Frank Hoffman's "Hybrid Warfare" theory would be one of the best examples of such intellectual contributions. Unlike the concept of same name which became popular

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<sup>1</sup> At the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, this concept was defined as "overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures [that] are employed in a highly integrated design". NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*, 2014.9.5. <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)>

<sup>2</sup> Volodymyr Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront*, Folio, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Octavian Manea, "Russia is practicing a form of geopolitical guerilla war against the West," *DEFENSE MATTERS*, December 14, 2017. <<https://www.defencematters.org/news/russia-is-practicing-a-form-of-geopolitical-guerilla-against-the-west/1320/>>

<sup>4</sup> George F. Kennan, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare*, 1948.4.30 (Available in Wilson Center Digital Archive. <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf?v=941dc9ee5c6e51333ea9ebbbc9104e8c>>).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2020.

after Ukrainian crisis in 2014, Hoffman's Hybrid Warfare theory eyes on the relationship between military and nonmilitary means of struggle. According to Hoffman, the latter sometimes amplifies the effect of the former dramatically, but in other cases ruins the effect of victories in battlefields<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, this study reviews military strategy in contemporary Russia with its focus on this point. To start with the conclusion, the roles that Russian military power bears in modern times can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Amplifying nonmilitary struggle under the threshold of using violence (part of "strategic deterrence")
- (2) Carrying out military struggle using violence (with the assistance of nonmilitary means)
- (3) Mitigating and terminating the use of violence under acceptable conditions (de-escalation)

## 1. Military Power as a Means of Strategic Deterrence

### (1) Russia's view on deterrence and recognition of threat against the "New Wars"

The role of military power as a strategic deterrence is covered first, but it should be noted that Russian understanding of "Strategic Deterrence (strategicheskoe sderzhivanie)" is not limited to military domain such as like nuclear deterrence. For example, according to the current version of National Security Strategy of Russian Federation (NSS) published in 2015, Strategic Deterrence refers to "interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures being developed and implemented and are intended to prevent armed conflict and to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity."<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the classical military deterrence is merely one of its elements. As Samuel Charap pointed out, Russia's "deterrence" is a more interruptive and aggressive concept that not only intimidates others, but also causes limited damage as to provoke fear and alter behavior<sup>8</sup>.

Based on this understanding, the Russian nonmilitary struggle mentioned in "Introduction" is an action to "deter" the West's behaviors using a variety of means. Behind this is a worldview that it is the West that develops a "gibridnaya voina (hybrid warfare)" to weaken and confuse Russia's and its allies' political regime using nonmilitary means (particularly democratization support and economic sanctions)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid War*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007.

<[https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> *Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации*.

<<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/docs/document133/>>

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Charap, *Strategic Sderzhivanie: Understanding Contemporary Russian Approaches to "Deterrence"*, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, September 2020.

<<https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/strategic-sderzhivanie-understanding-contemporary-russian-approaches-deterrence-0>>; Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, Jeffrey Edmonds, *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management: Evolution of Key Concepts*, CNA, 2020. <[https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/DRM-2019-U-022455-1Rev.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DRM-2019-U-022455-1Rev.pdf)>

<sup>9</sup> Ofer Fridman, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation*, C. Hurst & Co.Ltd., 2018.

The source of this view is ideas from Evgeny Messner<sup>10</sup>, who advocated to overthrow the Soviet communist system by means of psychological warfare using information. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this thought was passed onto thinkers of Eurasianism such as Aleksandr Dugin<sup>11</sup> and Igor Panarin<sup>12</sup>. Such a worldview can also be found in the speech of President Putin and other political leaders in contemporary Russia, and in policy documents such as NSS 2015.

## (2) Slipchenko's Sixth-Generation War theory

Another source of the nonmilitary struggle theory is Major-general Vladimir Slipchenko, who was Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Military Science. According to Slipchenko, human warfare started with fighting with bare hands, which he describes as “contact warfare.” Although mode of warfare has undergone several generations of changes (from First to Fourth Generation Warfare), the “contact warfare” as the fundamental paradigm of had remained unchanged until mid-20th century. In the mid-20th century, Slipchenko says, the emergence of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology led to the Fifth Generation of Warfare, in which wars can be fought without entering a battlefield (“non-contact warfare”). The Fifth Generation War with nuclear weapons, however, is a contradictory form of warfare that could lead to the extinction of humankind, and therefore fail to achieve any political goals. On the other hand, the Sixth Generation War, which uses Precision-Guided Munitions (PGM), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), stealth aircraft and so on, has the potential to carry out “non-contact warfare” without causing said contradiction, and ultimately, greatly reduces the value of classical military power, Slipchenko claims<sup>13</sup>.

Slipchenko also said that wars by means of PGMs and ICT are only the early stages of the Sixth Generation War. The vision of Slipchenko is that the main means of war in the mid-21st century will be weather control, emotion manipulation by electromagnetic waves and radiation, biological weapons targeting only certain races by means of genetic technology, and psychological warfare by ICT; there is no denying that the vision is too romantic or like pseudo-science.

However, the focus on information power among these new means of struggles has had a great impact on internal discussions within the Russian Military. This resonated with the ideas of Messner, Dugin, and Panarin, and resulted in the backbone of nonmilitary struggle theories within the Russian Military, advocated by Baluyevsky, Cekinov/Bogdanov, Gareyev, Kartapolov, Korybko, Vladimiroff,

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<sup>10</sup> Евгений Мэсснер, *Мятеж - имя Третьей Всемирной*, 1960.; Евгений Мэсснер, *Лик современной войны: О стилях войны*, 1959. (Available in *ХОЧЕШЬ МИРА, ПОБЕДИ МЯТЕЖЕВОЙНУ! Творческое наследие Е.Э. Месснера*, Российский военный сборник, Выпуск 21, Военный университет, 2005. <[http://militera.lib.ru/science/0/pdf/messner\\_ea01.pdf](http://militera.lib.ru/science/0/pdf/messner_ea01.pdf)>)

<sup>11</sup> Александр Дугин, *Основы геополитики: Геополитическое будущее России*, АРКТОГЕЯ-центр, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Игорь Панарин, *Информационная война и геополитика*, ПОКОЛЕНИЕ, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Владимир Иванович Слипченко, *Войны шестого поколения. Оружие и военное искусство будущего*, Вече, 2002.

and more<sup>14</sup>.

### (3) Roles of military power

Based on his analysis of a massive number of military publications, Oscar Jonsson revealed the process by which Messner's ideas were re-evaluated within the Russian Military as a result of increased threat perception of nonmilitary struggle instigated by the West. Particular major reasons for the process are breakdowns of authoritarianism that developed successively in countries of the former Soviet republics in the 2000s (collectively referred to as the "color revolution"), the rise of an anti-government movement in Russia, and sequential regime changes and civil wars in the Arab world in the 2010s ("Arab Spring"); these resulted in an establishment of awareness within the Russian Military that nonmilitary struggle is the next-generation "New Wars"<sup>15</sup>.

A speech by the Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov at the Military Sciences Academy<sup>16</sup> in January 2013 attracted international attention as an indication of an image of the "New Wars". According to Gerasimov, information warfare, cyber attacks, and economic sanctions play a major role in such a form of struggle to destabilize an enemy's society. Furthermore, military operations are carried out to amplify their effects in the form of targeted airstrikes and other methods. In the event that an armed conflict begins in an enemy country due to instability, Special Operational Forces (SOF), Private Military Companies (PMC), and non-state armed formations will develop a low-intensity conflict (LIC), and if it escalates to a situation favorable for the party that wages the conflict (a collapse of the enemy's government, for example), a peacekeeping force will be put in place to make it an accomplished reality, he said. In the presentation material shown by Gerasimov during his speech, the ratio of military to nonmilitary means used in the "New Wars" is 1:4.

Another prominent proponent of such concept would be General Andrei Kartapolov, the deputy Defense minister, and the head of the chief of the Main Directorate of the Politico-Military affairs of Ministry of Defense. In his article published in 2015, Kartapolov has put forward the future war concept named "New Type War (voina novogo pokaneniya, or NGW)."<sup>17</sup> According to him, NGWs

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Monaghan, *How Moscow Understands War and Military Strategy*, CNA, November 2020. <[https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/IOP-2020-U-028629-Final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2020-U-028629-Final.pdf)>; Oscar Jonsson, *Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines Between War and Peace*, Georgetown University Press, 2019. Ofer Fridman, *op. cit.*; Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, Polity, 2018.; Robert Seely, "Defining Contemporary Russian Warfare: Beyond the Hybrid Headline," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162, No.1, February/March 2017, pp. 40-49.; Rod Thornton, "The Russian Military's New 'Main Emphasis'," *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162, No. 4, 2017, pp18-28.; Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *MILITARY REVIEW*, January/February 2016, pp. 30-38.; Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy," *Proliferation Papers*, No. 54, November 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Jonsson, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Валерий Герасимов, "Ценность науки в предвидении: Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий," *Военно-промышленный курьер*, 2013.2.26. <<https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>>

<sup>17</sup> А. В. Картаполов, "Доклад Уроки конфликтов, перспективы развития средств и способов их

are the war fought with military and non-military means of struggle where the latter plays dominant roles.

#### (4) Discussions on the "Gerasimov doctrine"

The reason why the Gerasimov speech attracted attention was because it was considered to be a foresight of the method used in Ukraine. In fact, the Gerasimov speech has many features in common to what happened in the country, including the manipulation of local residents' cognition through cyber attacks and information warfare, LIC by SOFs, PMCs, and militias, and the deployment of military forces (without fighting) for creating a fait accompli. The Gerasimov speech was thus considered to direct Russia's new military power, and was widely shared under the buzz word of the "Gerasimov doctrine."

However, most of Russian military experts criticized that the Gerasimov speech should not be regarded as a "doctrine", and later, the original proposer, Mark Galeotti, wrote an apology for the inappropriate naming<sup>18</sup>. As seen before, the Gerasimov speech summarized the nonmilitary struggle theories that have persisted both inside and outside the Russian army since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation published in the year following the Gerasimov speech, nonmilitary struggle are positioned as a threat from the West and are not formulated as a military strategy that Russia takes.

More importantly, however, Gerasimov himself does not have a view that nonmilitary struggle will take the place of military struggle and become the center of wars. It is apparent by reading the entire 2013 speech that Gerasimov, who was formerly a tank officer, is mainly interested in making full use of firepower and mobility and in how they should be connected to new technology such as unmanned weapons and artificial intelligence (AI). This is also case for the Kartapolov's NGW theory.

Jonsson harshly criticized that the "Gerasimov doctrine" theory overestimated the potential of nonmilitary struggle and overlooks the value of military power<sup>19</sup>, but hardly touched on the relationship between nonmilitary and classical military struggle. He just introduced the "two-step approach", in which if a nonmilitary struggle fails to achieve its goal, military power is introduced (or a "three-step approach in the order of nonmilitary struggle, LIC, and inter-state war).

## 2. Military Power as a Means of Combat

### (1) Threat perceptions against high-tech military power

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had to drastically reduce its military capacity due to

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ведения. Прямые и непрямые действия в современных международных конфликтах," *Вестник академии военных наук*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2015), pp. 26-36.

<sup>18</sup> Mar Galeotti, "I'm Sorry for Creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'," *Foreign Policy*, 2018.3.5. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>>

<sup>19</sup> Fridman's discussion (Ofer Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare": Resurgence and Politicization*, Oxford University Press, 2018.) is argued here.

a serious economic crisis, and consequently delayed the modernization of equipment and infrastructure. Its strategic depth also became significantly smaller, because the three Baltic countries, which were members of the former Soviet Union, and the former socialist allies in Eastern Europe joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

On the other hand, the West led by the United States developed high-tech military power with PGMs, ICTs, etc. In the NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 and the Iraq War in 2003, the West made full use of such new technology to exhibit overwhelming air power, leading to its one-sided military victory. Arbatov pointed out that Russia's security circle became deeply concerned that, if the West wages a war using such high-tech and non-nuclear military power, Russia would not be able to rely on nuclear deterrence, and yet might not be able to counter it with conventional force<sup>20</sup>. The aforementioned Slipchenko's "Sixth Generation of War" theory was also derived from this threat perception, and influenced Gerasimov, Kartapolov and other military thinkers' thoughts.

(2) A2/AD and damage limitation strategy

China's Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) strategy is a widely known approach to counter the West's high-tech military power. This strategy aims to destroy the U.S. military's forward deployment bases in Okinawa, Guam, Hawaii, so on, and limit freedom of movement by means of air defense / anti-ship / electronic assets deployed in the vicinity of mainland China. It is known that Russia is deploying similar assets in European, the Middle Eastern, and the Far Eastern front. In addition, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) said Russian A2/AD assets include intelligence warfare capabilities to deny and deceive enemy intelligence activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Components of Russia's A2/AD capabilities according to the summary by the U.S. Defense Information Agency (DIA)

Information Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information control by means of "information blockades" and "information dominance" in the initial period of conflict</li> <li>- Denial of the use of the enemy's information space so as to set the conditions needed for a decisive success.</li> <li>- Electronic warfare and cyber warfare for denial and deception related to all aspects of A2/AD</li> </ul>
Strategic Air Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destruction of the enemy's mobilization and concentration area, air defense, and air-ground support in the initial period of conflict</li> <li>- Achieving strategic objectives with mass aerospace strikes without seizure and occupation</li> </ul>

<sup>20</sup> Alexei G. Arbatov, "Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya," *The Marshall Center Papers*, No. 2, 2000.

Integrated Air Defense System (IADS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aerospace defense as a key component in the overall A2/AD strategy</li> <li>- Integrating future and existing systems around a central command structure</li> <li>- Capabilities optimized against cruise missiles</li> </ul>
Air and Sea Systems in Combination with Older Technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A variety of offensive and defensive capabilities that could enable the implementation of the integrated A2/AD strategy</li> <li>- Anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes, naval mines, fighters, bombers, and surface-to-air missiles</li> </ul>

(Source) Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, 2017, pp. 32-34.

However, these assets are not an unbreakable defense line. It is not impossible for the overwhelming air power of the West to break through the defense—the problem is how much damage can be tolerated in the process<sup>21</sup>.

As noted by Michael Kofman of the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), the fact that strategic environments on the European and Asia-Pacific fronts are largely different should not be overlooked<sup>22</sup>. This is because, since Russia has been in close proximity to NATO members, the U.S. military must dispatch reinforcements during both peace times and when there are military tensions, and must assume that large-scale troops have been deployed at the start of a war. Therefore, the Russian military strategy on the European front includes A2/AD as its components, and takes the form of a broader military operation initiative—damage limitation, Kofman claimed.

First, the precondition is that a damage limitation strategy cannot prevent the U.S. reinforcement and its freedom of actions within a European war theater. Therefore, Russia's realistic goal on the outbreak of a large-scale war against the West is to secure survivability by absorbing and scattering a U.S. PGM attack in its early phase, making it deplete high-value assets through defense and offense, and disrupt operations by attacking command and control communications. The basic idea of the damage limitation strategy is to paralyze the U.S.' ability to carry out organized military operations for a period of time by conducting such small-scale or large-scale attacks, and to slow political will on the continuation of a war by making it impossible to achieve a rapid victory.

Second, to achieve these goals, "active defense", which combines defense and offense, is essential. Preemptive attacks are particularly important that are implemented to take control, including demonstrative and limited attacks for de-escalation described below.

Third, the damage limitation strategy does not presume a specific area. What is being pursued here

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Kalvik, *Russia Does Not Have an A2/AD-strategy! Nor does it have a Gerasimov doctrine*, 2018.10.24. <<https://www.etterretningen.no/2018/10/24/russia-does-not-have-an-a2-ad-strategy/>>

<sup>22</sup> Kofman, Michael, "It's Time to Talk about A2/AD: Rethinking the Russian Military Challenge," *WAR ON THE ROCKS*, 2019.9.5. <<https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/its-time-to-talk-about-a2-ad-rethinking-the-russian-military-challenge/>>

is interference with the entire ability of an enemy to carry out organized military operations, and all assets that contribute to this goal are used. Specifically, it aims to protect strategic infrastructure and field forces (the core of Russia's ability to continue fighting) by using the Integrated Air Defense System (IADS) consisting of low-level and wide-area air defense assets. It also aims to interfere with the U.S.' capability to continue fighting by means of long-distance PGMs, short-range cannons, multi-launch rocket systems, EMS operation capabilities, cyber operation capabilities, and counter-space operation capabilities.

(3) Examples of use of military power and the combat methods of the Russian military seen in its large-scale military exercises

Therefore, the Russian military strategy does not necessarily employ "non-contact warfare" which Slipchenko expected.

As seen in the Ukraine intervention, the manipulation of public awareness by information operations cannot achieve strategic goals, including overthrowing an enemy government, and SOFs, PMCs, and militias with military fighting capabilities must be deployed to achieve the goals. Given that the occupation of media- and Internet-related facilities by SOFs allowed the control of information domain, it can be pointed out that use of nonmilitary means requires military means<sup>23</sup>.

More importantly, these LIC execution means have only been effective with the backing of a large-scale conventional forces. When referring to the Crimea operation which involved lightly-armed and SOFs, PMCs, and militia, the war situation would have fallen into inferiority when the Ukraine side came to its senses and dispatched large-scale recovering units. Therefore, Russia sent a large-scale reinforcement later to prevent a such development<sup>24</sup>. In the subsequent Donbass conflict, the pro-Russian militias supported by Russia were in an inferior situation against the Ukrainian Anti-Terrorism Operation (ATO) forces in actual battlefields, so Russia's large-scale conventional forces were required to support this. In Syria, Russia adopted a "limited action strategy"<sup>25</sup> to support the Assad administration's territory recovery by combining local militias and the Russian conventional forces (airstrikes, information, reconnaissance, and monitoring by the Aerospace Force (VKS), SOFs, artillery troops, and engineering troops etc.)

Looking at Military District-level large-scale exercises held by the Russian Military every autumn, classical military means plays dominant roles. In the early phase, Russia assumes that the initial phase of future wars will take the form of "non-contact warfare." However, majority of Russian top brass doesn't seem to accept the vision that the non-contact warfare will replace the classical ground combat.

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<sup>23</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Russia's Military Modernisation: An Assessment*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>24</sup> Anton Lavrov, "Russia Again: The Military for Crimea," *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, East View Press, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> "Военная наука смотрит в будущее," *Красная звезда*, 2018.3.26.



Rather, noncontact fighting capabilities, such as PGMs, EMS operations, and aerospace defense (VKO), are considered to be important in ensuring the operations of Ground Forces, a decisive power.

Secondly, as is evident in the large-scale exercises of the Russian military since the 2010s, Russia is strengthening its view that LIC by non-state armed forces will be conducted under the Great Power's military support. Specifically, it assumes that the West will launch LIC by supporting dissident elements and Islamic extremists by means of airstrikes, naval blockades, airborne operations, and logistics<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, Russia's response is to execute a counter-insurgency (COIN) operations by deploying large-scale forces, and deter this from escalating to full-scale warfare (or large-scale warfare according to the classification in Military Doctrine of Russian Federation).

### 3. Military Power as a Means to De-escalation

#### (1) De-escalation by nuclear weapons

As described above, in the Russian military strategy, the fighting capabilities of the conventional forces, which has strong destructive power, is closely linked with conflict and LIC enhanced by nonmilitary means. Another important element is the Strategic Nuclear Forces (SNF) that prevent escalation to large-scale conflict. This is backed up by the fact that modernization of SNF is always the top priority in past State Armament Programs (GPV).

De-escalation by means of nuclear weapons is expected to be used to stop fighting at a certain phase or to prevent the enemy's dominant allies from entering the battle. This includes the strategy called de-escalation (deescalatsiya) or "E2DE: escalate to de-escalate." The important point is not to win the conflict, but to make an enemy aware that the disadvantages exceed the advantages of continuing or joining the conflict by means of demonstrative use of nuclear weapons and the use of them to cause limited damage.

The CNA published two detailed analysis reports<sup>27</sup> on a de-escalation strategy in 2020 based on a massive number of Russian military publications. According to this, many Russian nuclear strategists expect that nuclear weapons should be used for de-escalation in several phases. In recent years, Russia has been building its capability to carry out this type of nuclear use<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Yu Koizumi, *Military Strategy in Contemporary Russia*, Chikuma Shobo, 2021. (in Japanese)

<sup>27</sup> Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, Jeffrey Edmonds, *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management: Evolution of Key Concepts*, CNA, 2020. <[https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/DRM-2019-U-022455-1Rev.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DRM-2019-U-022455-1Rev.pdf)>; Anya Fink and Michael Kofman, *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management: Key Debates and Players in Military Thought*, CNA, 2020. <[https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/DIM-2020-U-026101-Final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DIM-2020-U-026101-Final.pdf)>

<sup>28</sup> This point is detailed in Schneider's discussion below. Mark B. Schneider, "Deterring Russian First Use of Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons," *Real Clear Defense*, 2018.3.12. <[https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/03/12/deterring\\_russian\\_first\\_use\\_of\\_low\\_yield\\_nuclear\\_weapons\\_113180.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/03/12/deterring_russian_first_use_of_low_yield_nuclear_weapons_113180.html)>

## (2) De-escalation by non-nuclear weapons

However, how an enemy responds to the use of nuclear weapons, even though it is limited, depends largely on the nature of the political leadership and the momentum of the people at that time, and is therefore unstable<sup>29</sup>. In fact, the United States, which was concerned about Russia's E2DE-style nuclear use, conducted Table-Top Exercises (TTXs) at the National Security Council (NSC) in 2017 on how the United States should deal with Russia when it uses limited nuclear weapons against a U.S. military. In this exercise, one team chose to retaliate against Belarus with limited nuclear weapons, and another team chose to retaliate with conventional weapons<sup>30</sup>. Based on the fact that Russia has not clarified the E2DE-style nuclear use in the Military Doctrine, Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence, and other declaratory policies, many suspect that this as a psychological warfare to create doubts and fears in Western countries, rather than having a concrete nuclear operational policy<sup>31</sup>.

In contemporary Russia, on the other hand, there has been a growing debate on the use of non-nuclear PGMs for E2DE. The idea is aimed at avoiding to directly link defeat of conventional warfare to nuclear use, and to force non-participation in or halt of combat by conventional E2DE attacks. This concept was adopted as "non-nuclear deterrence" in the 2014 Military Doctrine. Since the Georgian War in 2008, Russia has increased and modernized long-range PGMs (such as the 3M14 Kalibr sea-launched cruise missile, 9M728/729 ground-launched cruise missile, Kh-101 air-launched cruise missile, and 9M723 short range missile complex), and the "Grom 2019" exercise reportedly conducted large-scale training for non-nuclear E2DE<sup>32</sup>. Some suspect that an explosion in the suburbs of the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, just after Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a cease-fire in November 2020 under Russia's intermediation was a non-nuclear E2DE attack performed by Russia to force the ceasefire<sup>33</sup>.

Discussions on de-escalation within the Russian Military are still ongoing. According to a paper<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacek Durkalec, *Nuclear-Backed "Little Green Men:" Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, June 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Fred Kaplan, *The Bomb: Presidents, Generals, and the Secret History of Nuclear War*, Simon & Schuster, 2020, pp. 254-258.

<sup>31</sup> Ulrich Kühn, *Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018.; Olga Olikier, "New Document Consolidates Russia's Nuclear Policy in One Place," *Russia Matters*, 2020.6.4.

<sup>32</sup> Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, *В Москве прошел брифинг, посвященный подготовке и проведению СКШУ «Гром-2019»*, 2019.10.14.  
<[https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12256831@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12256831@egNews)>; Pavel K. Baev, *The Grom-2019 Exercise Illuminated the Risks of Nuclear Renaissance in Russian Strategic Culture*, George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies, January 2020.  
<<https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/grom-2019>>

<sup>33</sup> Anton Troianovski and Carlotta Gall, "In Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal, Putin Applied a Deft New Touch," *The New York Times*, 2020.12.1.

<sup>34</sup> А.В. Евсюков, и А.Л. Хряпин, "Роль новых систем стратегических вооружений в обеспечении стратегического сдерживания," *Военная мысль*, No.12, 2020, pp. 26-30.

published in the December 2020 issue of "Military Thought", a journal of the Center for Military and Strategic Research of the Russian Defense Ministry, the Kinzhal air-launched hypersonic missile is an effective striking means. It is because hypersonic weapon such as like Kinzhal can penetrate enemy air-defense networks and hit a target with precision and great kinetic energy. So, the paper claims that Kinzhal can be used when a nuclear weapon cannot be used due to "political, ethical, or other reasons", and the demonstrative use of them has an effect to limit intensity and scope of military conflict. Zircon hypersonic anti-ship missiles, which are being developed for the Navy, will have similar effects if the surface-to-surface version is developed. With the kinetic energy that the speed brings, these hypersonic weapons are expected to have a much greater destructive effect than slower cruise missiles.

The paper also states that Peresvet, a ground-deployed laser weapon, plays a similar role by causing limited damage to an enemy's satellite. This implies that a cross-domain operational concept is emerging in the area of E2DE.

### (3) Limits of the E2DE

Non-nuclear E2DE is not omnipotent. While the nuclear strategy in the Cold War period deemed quantitatively-estimated "intolerable damage" as its standard, and which aimed for a situation where an enemy state could not physically maintain itself. However, it is extremely difficult to estimate the magnitude of damage with which an enemy subjectively decides a cease-fire or postponement of participation in a war ("unacceptable damage"), which de-escalation is based on. Conventional weapon (which does not cause as much psychological impact as nuclear weapons do) will increase its complexity further.

As Johnson pointed out, the Russian Military does not consider non-nuclear means to replace that of nuclear weapons, and is still discussing the relationship between the two.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion: Value of Military Power and Nonmilitary Struggle

As stated in the 2015 Russian Federation's National Security Strategy, "the roles of power factors in international relations have not declined". The conclusion of the study is that it is during "political warfare" in peacetime when nonmilitary struggle plays central role. And when it comes to armed conflict, military struggle will be at its core.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that the role of military power here is not limited to that theorized by Clausewitz, namely the "extended duel", for the purpose of winning an international war. This is because the actually expected form of military struggle is LIC that uses SOFs, PMCs, and militias, and regular armed forces are positioned as a means to deter the escalation of LIC. While it is

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<sup>35</sup> Dave Johnson, *Russia's Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crisis, and Nuclear Thresholds*, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Center for Global Security Research, February 2018. <<https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/Precision-Strike-Capabilities-report-v3-7.pdf>>

true that the backing of the ability to engage in combat is necessary to enhance the credibility of de-escalation, it is not an optimal choice in the present day where major countries possess nuclear weapons, and therefore LIC has functionality because each party must restrain themselves from engaging in large-scale warfare. As Rupert Smith, said, the main use of older military struggle means is shifting to "deployment" rather than fighting, and this is probably true for Russia.

This structure applies to a certain extent after deterrence has been broken. Russia relies on a damage limitation strategy here, because even if it cannot win over the dominant West, it can expect the enemy to lose its will to continue to fight by extending a "no-loss" period. If the enemy's will to continue the battle is still high, Russia will use nuclear or non-nuclear weapons to cause "moderate damage" and try to reduce its will to continue or participate in the conflict.

For this reason, McMaster's thesis of warfare being essentially a "contest of wills"<sup>36</sup> is still true in modern conflict where nonmilitary struggle means are widely used.

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<sup>36</sup> H. R. McMaster, "The Pipe Dream of Easy War," *The New York Times*, 2013.7.20.