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The Military Power of Russia – a Means for Activating an Expansionist Policy

The majority of scientific research on the international behavior of Russia has so far been largely grounded on political decisions made exceptionally by its political elite. However, in this article, the author is trying to prove that political decisions are first of all based on material resources of the state, and this, in turn, can likely determine the causality between the military power of the state and its foreign policy. Therefore, Russian military power is treated in this article as a means of carrying out expansionist foreign policy. The premise is raised that the growth of Russia's military power is related to its aspiration to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet region. The analysis of Russia's security and defense policy, defense expenditure, military capabilities and military activeness reveals that the military power of Russia is growing with a dual aim: (1) to deter NATO and the EU from further enlargement; and (2) to retain and/or expand its influence in the post-Soviet states.

Introduction

The political and military elites of Russia constantly emphasize that Russia is a great power of the world, but more so in the region. Therefore, according to them, in order to maintain the status of a powerful state, Russia's foreign and security policy should be a priority area of the state. As pointed out by Richard Pipes, an expert on Russian history, the ruling class and a large part of the intelligentsia of Russia are more concerned about maintaining the international influence rather than the low living standards of the country¹. Consequently, because of its ambition to become the leader of the region as well as its aggressive foreign policy towards neighboring countries, in the international arena Russia is often treated as a state harboring expansionist goals. The fact that Russia is seeking to remain a dominant state in the region and is aiming at increasing its authority in the world was confirmed in 2013 by the laconic commentary on the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Fede-

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¹ Pipes R., "Is Russia Still an Enemy?", *Foreign Affairs* 76 (5), 1997, pp. 65-78.

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ration by the current president of Russia, Vladimir Putin: “*Its [Russia’s] weight and authority will be strengthened*”². In the opinion of many political experts³, Russia is seeking to restore the former might of the Soviet Union and pursues this goal not only to political leverages but also to military capabilities of the state. The growing military power of Russia is a distinct sign pointing to the intentions of the Russian ruling power to employ this means in order to achieve its political goals. Moreover, that Russia’s foreign policy has become more active is revealed not only by the Kremlin’s rhetoric, but also by concrete actions: the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 and the current events in Eastern Ukraine. These concrete examples prove that Moscow is determined to defend its interests in the post-Soviet area by employing all available means, including military force.

The objective of this study is to assess the premise that the growth of Russia’s military power is associated with the aspiration to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet region. To this end, two essential tasks are set: first, to assess Russia’s foreign policy towards post-Soviet states; and second, to assess changes in Russia’s military power in terms of time. It is important to point out that in this paper that the growth of military power is considered a precondition for the execution of the expansionist policy.

Most scientific research on the international behavior of Russia so far has been largely based on analysis of only political and military decisions. For example, conclusions of analysts performing research on exceptionally current military actions of Russia in South-Eastern Ukraine are actually uniform – the causes of these events are the expression of no one’s but specifically Vladimir Putin’s long-term strategy and short-term decisions⁴. These clarifications, largely based on the decisions of Russia’s political elite, have undoubtedly broadened the understanding of what reasons have induced Russia to start the desta-

² Черненко Е., “Вес и авторитет России в мире будет укрепляться” [“Weight and authority of Russia in the world will be strengthened”], Коммерсант, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2129338> (in Russian).

³ de Haas M., “Russia’s Military Reforms: Victory after Twenty Years of Failure?”, *The Clingendael Institute, Clingendael Diplomacy Paper*, 2011; Capezza D., “Translating Russia’s Military Reform”, *Small Wars Foundation*, 2009; Grigas A., “Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States”, *Briefing Paper*, 2012; Trenin D., Lecture at the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, Stockholm, 2013a; Hedenskog J., Pallin C. V., eds., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2013*, Försvarsdepartementet, 2013.

⁴ Tang S., Long S. R. J., “America’s military interventionism: A social evolutionary interpretation”, *European Journal of International Relations* 18: 509, 2012; Trenin D., *The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014; Woehrel S., “Ukraine: Current Issues and U.S. Policy”, *Congressional Research Service Report*, 2014; Smith B., Harari D., “Ukraine, Crimea and Russia”, *Research Paper* 14/16, 2014.

bilization process in South-Eastern Ukraine, and in general, what motives are concealed beyond the present expansionist foreign policy of Russia. Notwithstanding, this exceptional attention to ideological factors only partly discloses causal relationships. Although personal attributes, ideas and decisions of leaders are undoubtedly very important factors, in seeking to carry out a more comprehensive scientific analysis it is, however, necessary to assess “hard” variables of the state as well. First of all, one should realize that ideas and decisions are based on material resources. It is obvious that Russia, being the largest state in the world as to its size, being the ninth largest global economy and possessing abundant natural resources, feels free to pursue the kind of policy that it is carrying out today, i.e. a rather aggressive foreign policy grounded in such material factors as economy, energy and military power. Thus, it is possible to make the assumption that the analysis of the constant (geographical) and changing (economic, energy-related and military) parameters of the state can reveal foreign policy preferences of the state. In other words, there is a causal relationship between the material factors and foreign policy of the state. That is why, while analyzing Russia’s expansionist policy in this article, material factors of the state (specifically – parameters of the military power) and their change in terms of time are emphasized.

Analyzing Russia’s motives regarding the employment of military leverages in order to extend its influence in the post-Soviet region, it is worthwhile noting that the strategic guidelines of the defense and security policy of Russia are rather heavily influenced by NATO and the EU enlargement tendencies, because the Kremlin considers the enlargement of these international organizations, particularly NATO, a serious threat to the national interests of Russia. Therefore, it is normal that Russia’s reaction to some post-Soviet states (the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova), integrating into Euro-Atlantic organizations, is rather hostile. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, an advisor to the former president of the USA, Russia aims at uniting and integrating the entire Russian nation and establishing (restoring) the Great Russian civilization,⁵ whereas the enlargement of NATO and the EU can significantly aggravate efforts of the Kremlin in seeking this objective.

⁵ Brzezinski Z., Discussion on European security issues, held at Wilson Center, Washington, 2014, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?319979-1/> European-security-ukraine.

1. The Conception of Expansion and Its Causes

Expansion can be perceived as a political strategy, used to expand the boundaries of the state while encroaching on the territories of other nations⁶. Canadian scientist Tudor Onea claims that “expansion is a kind of consciously pursued political activity the aim of which is to expand the area of political influence in other states”⁷. It is obvious that a state (or an organization) should invoke certain resources or means for executing expansion. From the point of view of the American academic David Baldwin, “countries can seek to enhance their influence through the areas of interests (persons/sectors under influence)”⁸ whereas in the opinion of John J. Mearsheimer, the originator of offensive realism, in order to expand influence “leverages of a state’s political power (a state’s capabilities)”⁹ can be made use of. Thus, a state can expand in two ways: (1) materially, i.e. by annexing/occupying foreign states or territories of foreign states, most often by using hard power (for example, the annexation of Southern Ossetia, Abkhazia or Crimea) and (2) non-materially, i.e. by expanding influence in a foreign state by using to this end both hard (by demonstrating potential military capabilities of the country) and soft power (for example, by using cultural, political and social instruments).

Authors representing power transition theory (Abram F. K. Organski, Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke) emphasize that expansion is most probable at the time when the growing power of the region (being discontent with the established order) becomes a dominant state in that region and is ready to use *force* for the reorganization of the rules and institutions of the existing system¹⁰. The American scientist M. Taylor Fravel raises the premise that the essential aspiration of an expansionist state is to change the rules of the international system that is not to that state’s liking¹¹. Russia, as a rapidly growing regional power, has already long been dissatisfied with the international order constructed by the architects of Western democracy. In 2007, during the conference in Munich, Vladimir Putin clearly voiced his position against the

⁶ Oxford Dictionaries, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/expansion>.

⁷ Onea T., “Putting the ‘Classical’ in Neoclassical Realism: Neoclassical Realist Theories and US Expansion in the Post-Cold War”, *International Relations* 26(2), 2012, pp. 139–164.

⁸ Baldwin D., *Paradoxes of Power*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 29–30, 36.

⁹ Mearsheimer J. J., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

¹⁰ Organski A. F. K., Kugler J., *The War Ledger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; Lemke D., *Regions of War and Peace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹¹ Fravel M. T., “International Relations Theory and China’s Rise: Assessing China’s Potential for Territorial Expansion”, *International Studies Review* 12, 2010, pp. 505–532.

unipolar world system¹². The president of Russia reiterated the same idea at the Valdai International Discussion Club conference also adding that at present a “change in the world order” is underway and reminding the audience that such processes are most frequently inseparable from serious conflicts¹³. Consequently, if the strengthening regional state has started doubting the perfection of the existing system, it may start initiating power redistribution in the region; in other words, initial actions are taken to change the international rules by making use of the military power of the state.

John J. Mearsheimer argues that major states of the world always seek the possibility to gain more power than their rivals (other major states)¹⁴. According to John J. Mearsheimer, the essential and ultimate objective of the state is to seek world or at least regional hegemony since this is the only way for the state to ensure the absolute security of the state¹⁵. Perhaps, the current aspiration of Russia is not global domination; however, it is obvious that its goal is regional hegemony, comprising the geographical territory of the “Russian world” (*Rus. Русский мир*¹⁶). Without any doubt, it would not be tantamount to the restoration of the Soviet Union as a *global* superpower but it would absolutely mean the creation of a state as a *regional* superpower capable of significantly influencing geopolitical processes in the neighboring countries. Consequently, on the basis of the assumptions of offensive realism, it is probable that Russia, while increasing its military potential, is seeking to win back regional influence and thus ensure the security of the state which it gradually started to lose because of the intensive enlargement of NATO and the EU in the direction of the East. Therefore, this study exploits the premise that the growth of Russia’s military power is related to its aspiration to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet region which is allegedly declining because of NATO and EU enlargement. In other words, Moscow’s “expansionism” is a reaction to the “expansionism” of the West.

¹² The Washington Post, *Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy*, February 12, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

¹³ DELFI, *V. Putinas pasakė itin griežtą kalbą [Putin said very strong speech]*, 2014 m. spalio 24 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/world/v-putinas-pasake-itin-griezta-kalba.d?id=66214116#ixzz3KBCtE24s> (in Lithuanian).

¹⁴ Mearsheimer J. J., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ The Russian world (*Rus. Русский мир*), according to the author of the Russian World Doctrine Piotr Shchedrovicky, is a net structure of larger or smaller communities speaking and thinking in Russian; therefore, in essence, involving the entire bloc of post-Soviet states.

2. Russia's Influence in the Post-Soviet Region

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 15 new independent states emerged on the geopolitical world map. It is natural that after the long presence of these countries in the composition of the Soviet Union, a common cultural, social and economic identity was being formed in them. Therefore, until now, Russia has been treating these states as the “near abroad” (*Rus.* Ближнее зарубежье), i.e. potentially existing within the area of Russia's influence. However, in 2004, when the Baltic States became members of NATO and the EU, the influence of the Kremlin in this region began to dwindle. The advancement of Westernization eastward was a signal for Russia that it has to strengthen its influence in the remaining 11 post-Soviet states in seeking to maintain the position of the regional leader.

It should be stated that even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moscow retained a comparatively large influence in the post-Soviet states. As it has been mentioned above, this was influenced by the long-forming common culture, identity, norms, language, trade ties, infrastructure, etc., i.e. Sovietization. Therefore, it is normal that post-Soviet countries are rather closely associated in the social, economic and security-related context. It is clear from Figure 1 that the change of state capabilities of Russia and post-Soviet countries (with the exception of the Baltic countries) in terms of time, was rather similar. The performed statistical correlative analysis of Russia's and post-Soviet states' capabilities has yielded a correlative quotient of 0.72. This proves that a direct, strong functional link exists between Russia and post-Soviet states. It should be emphasized that this statistical link does not mean a causal link, i.e. the statistical link between these states is determined not by groups of variables that define the magnitude of a state's power, but a certain common factor which in this case could be a geopolitical element. Whatever the case, this correlation shows that states belonging to the post-Soviet space are strongly influenced by processes taking place in Russia, such as economic and financial policy, setting value for industrial and natural resources as well as security and defense policy.

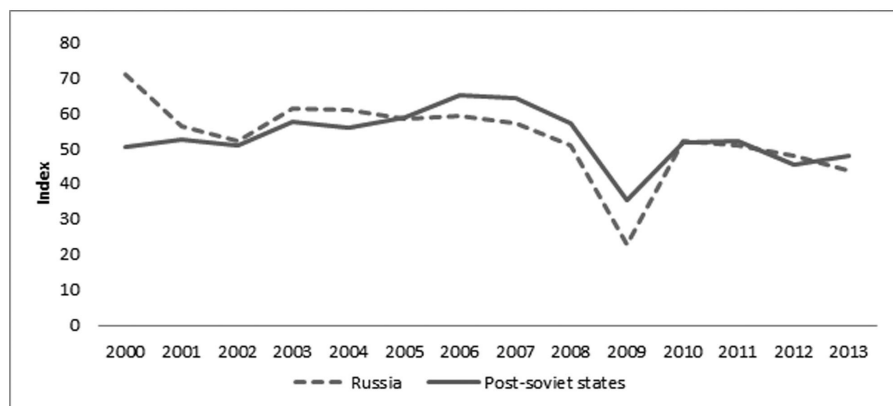


Figure1. **Change of state capabilities of Russia and post-Soviet states (except the Baltic countries) in terms of time¹⁷**

However, it should be noted that Russia's influence in the post-Soviet states is not distributed evenly. For example, Russia's influence in Belarus is by far bigger than in any other post-Soviet state. A particularly active diplomatic and military bilateral cooperation is in progress between Russia and Belarus: in 2014, six bilateral summit meetings took place; six agreements of economic nature related to favorable terms-based loans and energy projects were made; as many as twenty-six military nature agreements, largely on joint military training and military-technical cooperation were recorded; additionally, joint integrative projects related to the EEU, CIS, CSTO¹⁸ and an allied state were actively developed. Meanwhile, Russia's influence in Uzbekistan, in comparison to Belarus, is considerably smaller in scope. In 2014, the cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan was sluggish. During the aforementioned years only several more significant events took place, events that could be linked to Russia's efforts to increase its influence in this state: Russia ratified the protocol on Uzbekistan's participation in the CIS free trade zone and attempted to win Uzbekistan over by writing off huge debts.

Russia's objectives concerning the post-Soviet region are reflected in strategic documents determining the foreign and security policy of Russia.

¹⁷ Here values of the variables are expressed by a certain index which is calculated in compliance with the highest for the year 2000 value of the figure of the analyzed states which is assigned the accountability index of 100. Capabilities of a state are computed according to the following variables: the GDP, industry-created value, natural resources-created value, defense expenditure and the number of military personnel (statistical data obtained from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>).

¹⁸ EEU – the Eurasian Economic Union; CIS – the Commonwealth of Independent States; CSTO – the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

The Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2013) defines the cooperation with the post-Soviet region as a priority area, while on the basis of the guidelines of the National Security Strategy (2009), one can state that the CSTO is the key interstate instrument with the help of which regional military threats could be solved; also, the analysis of the Military Doctrine (2010) reveals that priority directions of military-political cooperation are Belarus, CSTO and CIS¹⁹. However, in spite of the exceptional attention to the post-Soviet space declared by the Kremlin, the integration process of this region is rather slow. Quite a few of CIS meetings end without having reached decisions acceptable to all states; besides, many heads of state are rather strict in criticizing CIS for its inability to seek common interests and are clearly against Russia's dominance in taking common decisions. Consequently, then Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin, seeking to better integrate the post-Soviet region, published an article in 2011 proposing to establish the "Eurasian Union" joining the former soviet states²⁰. This "Eurasian Union", according to Putin, would be economically and politically integrated and would combine structures and functions of CIS, Russia and the allied state of Belarus, CSTO and EEU.

All of this above-mentioned publicly declared foreign policy demonstrates Russia's determination to expand its influence in post-Soviet states by using to that end a variety of integrative multi-lateral and bilateral projects. However, to the detriment of Russia, not all post-Soviet states are willing to choose the way of greater integration insistently pushed forward by the Kremlin. The Baltic States have demonstrated their determination to distance themselves from the post-Soviet space by becoming members of NATO and the EU, while "color revolutions" in Georgia ("Roses", 2003), Ukraine ("Orange", 2004), Kirghizstan ("Tulips", 2005), Belarus ("Jeans", 2006) and Moldova ("Twitter", 2009) testify to the fact that other post-Soviet states are also inclined to choose the pro-Western direction. That is why Russia, seeking to maintain its influence in the region and unwilling to see the recurrence of the Baltic States' scenario (the accession to NATO and the EU) can, in case of necessity, employ not only diplomatic means but also military power. The 2008 war in Georgia and the current war in Ukraine are distinct examples of the employment of military power (as a means of maintaining influence). Thus, Russia's influence in post-Soviet countries is being shaped by resorting to a countless variety of means attributable to both soft and hard power. However, the increasing attention of

¹⁹ Putin V., "A new integration project for Eurasia: The future in the making", *Izvestia*, 2011.

²⁰ de Haas M., 2011. *Russia's Military Reforms. Victory of Twenty Years of Failure?* Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2011, pp. 16.

Russia's political elite to military power, which finds its expression not only in rhetoric but also in practical decisions, indicates that this "hard" means is getting more and more significant in Russia's foreign policy construction process.

3. Analysis of the Russian Military Power

In order to determine the military power of a state, it is necessary, first of all, to choose certain objective variables, capable of disclosing the genuine military power of a country. This study makes use of four groups of variables referring to the military power of a state: (1) defense and security policy; (2) defense expenditure; (3) military activity; and (4) military capabilities.

First of all, it should be noted that the need to strengthen the armed forces of Russia emerged when Vladimir Putin first became the president of Russia. The president of Russia realized that in seeking to turn Russia into a dominant regional state it was necessary to modernize the military potential of the state. Therefore, the need to reform the armed forces of Russia emerged. In 2003, the then Defense Minister of Russia Sergey Ivanov presented a document prepared by the Defense Ministry "Urgent tasks for the development of the armed forces of the Russian Federation", unofficially called "Ivanov's doctrine"²¹. Later, in 2004–2005, the General Staff led by Army General Juri Balujevsky prepared a conception of a strategic headquarters, while 2006 was devoted to the preparation of Russia's military organization 2020 reform plan²². Starting with 2008, Russia's military forces began to execute a broad scope reform program the objective of which was to increase military capabilities in particular to strengthen force readiness and applicability. An obvious necessity to reform Russia's military forces emerged after the 2008 Georgia war. This conflict revealed significant problems in command structure, force logistics and military training²³. Russia's military reform, initiated in 2008, covered essentially three areas: organizational structure, personnel and modernization of armaments. The key objectives of the reform were: (1) to change over to professional army instead of conscription; (2) renounce the organizational structure based on divisions (up to 13,000 military personnel) and pass on to brigades (4,000 servicemen) as primary structural subunits; and (3) to have four military districts

²¹ Petraitis D., "The Russian Military Reform 2005-2015", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2010–2011*, 2011.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Gratz J., "Russia's Military Reform: Progress and Hurdles", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 2014.

instead of six (Western, Central, Eastern and Southern)²⁴. Thus, taking the objectives of the reforms into consideration, Russia began to formulate new a defense and security policy.

3.1. Defense and Security Policy

Seeking to properly assess the military capabilities of Russia in the perspective of the near future, analysis of the defense and security policy of the country becomes an essential tool. Military forces do not emerge of their own accord – they are a collection of decisions of the entire society and the political power representing it. These decisions, related to the security of the country, are usually made official in certain strategic documents. In Russia’s case, the key documents determining the security and defense policy of the country are the following: the National Security Strategy, the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine.

A detailed analysis of the above-mentioned documents reveals which threats are considered in Russia to pose the greatest danger to national security. They are:

- NATO’s expansion²⁵;
- Anti-missile defense²⁶;
- Regional and local wars next to Russia’s border²⁷;
- Terrorism and radicalism²⁸;
- “Instability” of neighboring countries²⁹.

It should be stated that NATO plans and activities are considered in Russia to be one of the greatest threats. Notwithstanding, Russia points out in its Foreign Policy Concept that it actively seeks trilateral cooperation with

²⁴ Nichol J., “Russian Military Reform and Defense Policy”, *Congressional Research Service Report*, 2011.

²⁵ Военная доктрина Российской Федерации [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 февраля 2010 г., § 8a (in Russian); Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 12 мая 2009 г., § 12 (in Russian).

²⁶ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 12 мая 2009 г., § 17, § 30 (in Russian); Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], 12 февраля 2013 г., § 32e, § 70 (in Russian).

²⁷ Военная доктрина Российской Федерации [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 февраля 2010 г., § 7–8 (in Russian).

²⁸ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 12 мая 2009 г., § 1, § 36 (in Russian); Военная доктрина Российской Федерации [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 февраля 2010 г., § 8k (in Russian).

²⁹ Gratz J., “Russia’s Military Reform: Progress and Hurdles”, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 2014.

the EU and NATO based on long-term and strong relationships. However, this stated aim of a close cooperation with the West became null and void when Russia started active actions in Eastern Ukraine. Russia violated the international law and its actions, at the same time, contradicted the principles and commitments of the essential document of the Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council, the NATO–Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration. Consequently, in April 2014, on the grounds of the decision by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all NATO states, the Alliance suspended civilian and military cooperation with Russia³⁰.

While analyzing Russia's Foreign Policy Concept 2013, one can discern certain standpoints of an expansionist nature. The document presents the position to maintain and even increase the influence in post-Soviet states. The famous Russian political analyst Dmitry Trenin claims that the new Foreign Policy Concept reveals that grievances concerning the disintegration of the Soviet Union are still very strongly perceived³¹. Besides, since NATO and the EU significantly restrict Russia's expansionist plans, it is logical that the tone of the Concept is obviously anti-American and anti-Western.

It should be noted that in the Russian Military Doctrine 2000, NATO and the USA are not named, at least directly, as the main potential military threat³². In the Doctrine, one could discern Russia's wish to hold a constructive dialogue with NATO in shaping the European security policy. Meanwhile, in the newest Military Doctrine 2010, it is already possible to notice certain expansionist objectives, for example, to enlarge the Collective Security Treaty Organization as an alternative to NATO. This organization gives Russia an additional possibility to ensure its dominance in this principle zone of interests and, at the same time, substantiates and expands the employment of the Russian army beyond its state borders on the mandate of the CSTO³³. The Doctrine also states the objective to expand and strengthen cooperation with the neighboring (CIS) states on the basis of common interests. Besides, the Doctrine defines a possibility for the use of armed forces to protect Russian citizens in foreign countries. The practical implementation of this can be observed in the current conflict in Ukraine.

Because of the rapidly changing geopolitical situation, in the near fu-

³⁰ NATO, *NATO's relations with Russia*, September 16, 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm.

³¹ Trenin D., "Russia's foreign policy outlook", in Lipman M., Petrov N., eds., *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2011.

³² Pugačiauskas V., "The Military Doctrine of Russia and Practical Realities", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2010–2011*, 2011.

³³ *Ibidem*.

ture Russia is planning to develop new versions of some strategic documents. For example, *Mikhail Popov*, Deputy Secretary of Russia's Security Council, announced that a specified version of the Russian Military Doctrine will be released by the end of 2014. According to M. Popov, it is to be associated with "the drawing of military infrastructure of NATO member countries to the borders of our country, including via enlargement"³⁴. It is also planned in the near future to prepare a specified version of the "White Book"³⁵ on national threats and to work out a ten- to fifteen-year development strategy of the armed forces.

3.2. Defense Expenditure

Essentially, state expenditure on defense as a percentage of the GDP is an indicator that reveals the intentions of the authorities regarding military capabilities. Figure 2 illustrates that Russia's decision to increase defense expenditure over a thirteen-year period was made three times: the first time followed the Russian crisis and Putin's becoming president, the second time was in 2008, when Russia launched an active military reform, and the third time occurred in 2011, which coincides with the end of the global economic and financial crisis and rapid increase in the price of oil; additionally, in 2011 the implementation of state armaments programs (for 2011–2020) was started with the aim of creating forces capable of carrying out operations, based on new military planning principles, against any adversary (including NATO and the USA).

According to the defense expenditure, in 2012 Russia took third place in the world (after the USA and China), whereas in 2010 it was fifth, and in 2005 it was only ninth³⁶. Assessing in absolute figures, the growth of the defense expenditure from 260 billion rubles in 2000 increased to 2.796 trillion rubles in 2013, which exceeds 1,000 percent growth. Notwithstanding the fact that today Russia is experiencing both external and internal economic problems, a further increase in military spending in 2015 is planned. Federal budget expenditures allocated to national defense in 2015 as compared to 2014, will increase by 21.2 per cent and amount to 3.032 trillion rubles. Meanwhile, in 2016 and 2017, the increase in military spending will be rather insignificant: 7.8 percent up to 3.23

³⁴ БРЯНСК, *Россия меняет военную доктрину [Russia is changing military doctrine]*, 2 сентября 2014, <http://briansk.ru/world/rossiya-menyaet-voennuu-doktrinu.201492.320302.html> (in Russian).

³⁵ "The White Book" is a publication which presents the official position of the Russian Defense Ministry on existing military dangers, threats and risks to national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests of Russia.

³⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Monitoring Military Expenditures*, 2013, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/measuringmilitary-expenditures>.

trillion rubles in 2016 and 4 percent up to 3.36 trillion rubles in 2017³⁷.

In spite of the Kremlin's intentions to considerably increase defense expenditure in the near future, it may be assumed that the economic sanctions imposed on Russian companies and individuals by the EU, the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and some other states, as well as ruble devaluation and the decreasing price of gas and oil have a significant impact on decisions related to financing the defense sector. This premise is confirmed by an anti-crisis plan signed by Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on January 27, 2015, which provides for the compensation of financial losses of military industry enterprises caused by exchange rate fluctuations during the implementation of the State Defense Order and Rearmament and Reconstruction programs³⁸. However, this in its turn demonstrates Russia's resolute and consistent security and defense policy; the funds for the implementation of which, in case of necessity, will be supplemented from national reserves, the reallocated state budget or from friendly Eastern states' markets.

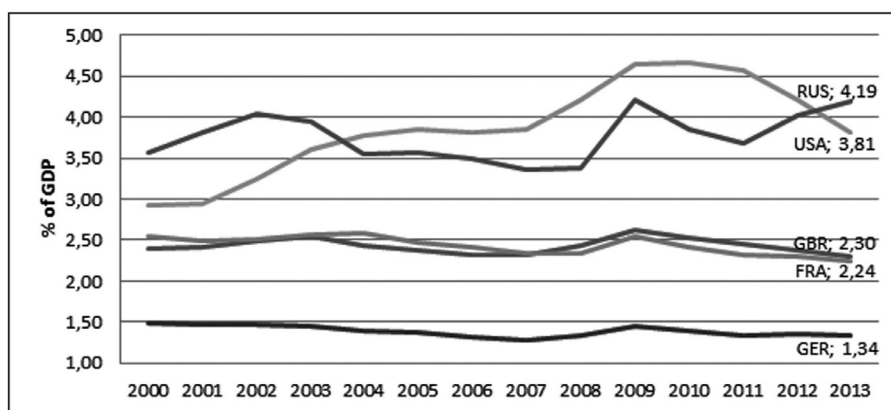


Figure 2. Defense expenditure of GDP³⁹

³⁷ VEDOMOSTI, *Военные расходы в 2015 г. вырастут, как и было запланировано, несмотря на внешние и внутренние экономические проблемы* [Military spending in 2015 will grow, as planned, despite the external and internal economic problems], 17 сентябрь 2014, <http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2014/09/17/rost-po-planu> (in Russian).

³⁸ Правительство Российской Федерации, *План первоочередных мероприятий по обеспечению устойчивого развития экономики и социальной стабильности в 2015 году* [Priority Action Plan for sustainable economic development and social stability in 2015], 27 января 2015 г., <http://government.ru/media/files/7QoLbdOVNpc.pdf> (in Russian).

³⁹ Statistical data obtained from: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>.

3.3. Military Capabilities

The Russian Federation military forces consist of the Ground Forces, the Air Force, the Navy, the Airborne Troops, the Aerospace Defense Forces and the Strategic Missile Troops. The Russian Ground Forces are the largest of all Russian military forces, consisting of 285,000 servicemen⁴⁰. The Ground Forces are composed of 38 combat brigades and 41 combat support brigades⁴¹. Also, Russia has four reinforced brigade-size military bases deployed abroad: in Northern Ossetia, Abkhazia, Armenia and Tajikistan. In the nearest future, Russia is planning to make considerable reinforcements to its Ground Forces: by 2020, it is planned to form 40 additional brigades⁴², to procure over 11,000 pieces of modernized armored military equipment and about 14,000 modern vehicles⁴³.

The Russian Air Force consists of 150,000 military personnel⁴⁴. It comprises the Air Force High Command, two functional commands (Long Range Aviation Command and Military Transport Aviation Command) and four territorial Air Force and Aerospace Defense Commands (one in each military district)⁴⁵. A major part of Air Force aircraft are Soviet legacy, but the Russian Ministry of Defense is planning to renew the military aviation arsenal: by 2020 production of a new type of stealth bomber and fifth-generation fighter aircraft will be started; also, by the end of this decade the Air Force should be reinforced with new heavy transport aircraft (total 260)⁴⁶. Moreover, already this year (2015) it is planned to form 4 new army aviation brigades and 10 helicopter regiments⁴⁷. All of this would significantly strengthen Russia's offensive capabilities and increase strategic flexibility of the military.

⁴⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia and Eurasia", in *Military Balance 2013*, Abingdon, 2013.

⁴¹ Gratz J., "Russia's Military Reform: Progress and Hurdles", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 2014.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ ИНТЕРФАКС-АВН, *В Сухопутные войска РФ поступят более 11 тысяч новых и модернизированных танков, БМП и бронетранспортеров [Land Forces of RF will receive more than 11 000 new and modernized tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers]*, 1 октября 2014, <http://www.militarynews.ru/Story.asp?rid=1&nid=354351> (in Russian).

⁴⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia and Eurasia", in *Military Balance 2013*, Abingdon, 2013.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Gratz J., "Russia's Military Reform: Progress and Hurdles", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 2014.

⁴⁷ ИНТЕРФАКС, *В ВВС России решено сформировать 14 бригад армейской авиации и вертолетных полков [The Russian Air Forces decided to form 14 army aviation brigades and helicopter regiments]*, 26 июля 2014, <http://vz.ru/news/2014/7/26/697375.html> (in Russian).

The Russian Navy has 130,000 military personnel⁴⁸. It consists of four fleets and one flotilla. It also includes the Naval Aviation, Naval Infantry and Coastal Defense subunits⁴⁹. All current efforts to modernize the Navy are mainly concentrated on strengthening the capabilities of the Northern Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet. By 2020, the Northern Fleet will have been reinforced with 6 submarines, 2 large amphibious assault ships, 5 frigates, 5 trailers and 21 logistic support vessels⁵⁰. Meanwhile, by 2020 the Black Sea Fleet is planned to be strengthened with 80 warships⁵¹, and 86 billion rubles will be allocated to its modernization⁵². There is no doubt that these efforts are related to Russia's intentions to expand its territory towards the Arctic as well as the current tense situation in Ukraine.

In addition to the above-mentioned Ground, Air and Naval Forces, the Russian military forces also include three more independent branches that are under direct subordination of the Chief of the General Staff (equivalent of the Chief of Defense). The first of them is the Strategic Missile Forces, which control the arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles. According to information provided by the US State Department on October 2, 2014, it was the first time that in the 21st century that Russia was on a par with the USA regarding the number of nuclear weapons carriers and warheads of the Strategic Nuclear Forces⁵³. The second branch is the elite Airborne Troops that are rapidly-deployable forces. These forces consist of 450,000 servicemen divided into four air assault divisions and four air assault brigades; an airborne reconnaissance regiment is also part of these forces. It should be noted that it was the Airborne Troops that were used in the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula (76th Air Assault Division and 31st Air Assault Brigade). The third branch of the army is the Airspace Defense Forces that have at their disposal early warning radar

⁴⁸ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia and EUrasia", in *Military Balance 2013*, Abingdon, 2013, pp. 225–236.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ ИНТЕРФАКС, *Северный флот получит более 40 новых кораблей и судов обеспечения до 2020 года* [The Northern Fleet will receive more than 40 new ships and support vessels until 2020], 8 апреля 2014, http://vpk.name/news/108277_severnyii_flot_poluchit_bolee_40_novyih_korablei_i_sudov_obespecheniya_do_2020_goda.html (in Russian).

⁵¹ ELTA, *Rusijos Juodosios jūros flotilę papildys 80 karo laivų* [Russian Black Sea fleet will be complemented by 80 warships], 2014 m. rugsėjo 23 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/world/rusijos-juodosios-juros-flotile-papildys-80-karo-laivu.d?id=65928640#ixzz3TW8GAyFX> (in Lithuanian).

⁵² ИНТЕРФАКС, *На развитие Черноморского флота Россия выделит 86 миллиардов рублей* [Russia will allocate 86 billion rubles on the development of the Black Sea Fleet], 6 мая 2014, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/06may2014/86mrfchernomor.html> (in Russian).

⁵³ VEDOMOSTI, *Россия догнала США по общему количеству носителей стратегического ядерного оружия* [Russia overtook the United States by the total number of carriers of strategic nuclear weapons], 05 марта 2015, http://naviny.by/rubrics/abroad/2014/10/5/ic_news_118_445501/ (in Russian).

systems, satellite systems designed to identify missile launches from enemy forces, and missile defense systems. Significant expansion of these forces is planned in the future⁵⁴.

Signs of increase in Russian military capabilities can be most obviously noticed while comparing them to military capabilities of other states. It may be seen from Figure 3 that starting with the year 2010, the military capabilities of the USA, Great Britain, Germany and France were gradually shrinking, whereas Russian military capabilities, on the contrary, were increasing. Although the military potential of Russia in 2013 lagged behind the USA by approximately 1/6; however, should such tendencies remain in the future, and should American military capabilities keep on decreasing while those of Russia continue to increase at the same pace, by the end of the second decade (by 2020) the military capabilities of these two powers would be equal. Additionally, attention should be drawn to the fact that in 2013, Russia's military capabilities were 50 percent larger than those of France and even 63 percent larger than Germany's.

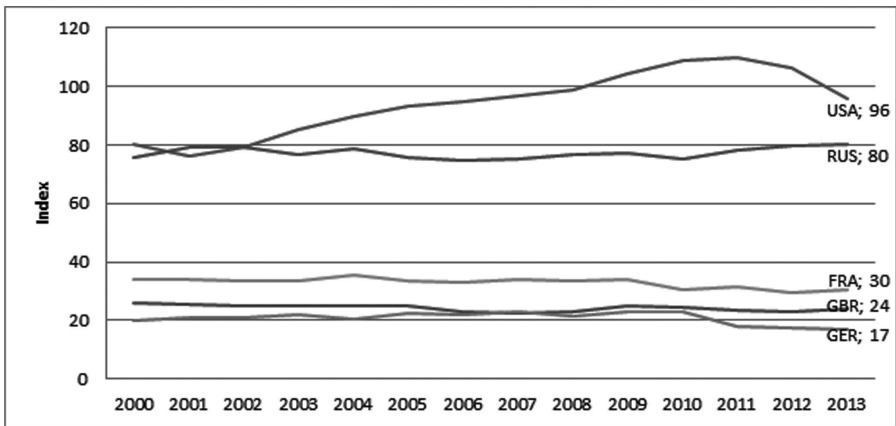


Figure 3. **Military capabilities**⁵⁵

While assessing the current Russian military capabilities, one can claim that the Russian military reform which started in 2008 has yielded rather good results. Although it is possible to discern certain problems which this reform is still facing (conscripts, Soviet-era armaments, the “holey” Navy), it is evident

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Here values of the variables are expressed by a certain index which is calculated in compliance with the highest for the year 2000 value of the figure of the analyzed states; it is assigned the accountability index of 100. Military capabilities were calculated according to the following variables: defense expenditures, export of weapons, number of military personnel and number of warheads (statistical data obtained from: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>).

that today the Russian military potential is considerably stronger than in 2008 and has a tendency to further increase in the future. According to Russian Defense Minister Army General Sergei Shoigu, in 2014 as compared to 2013, supplies of armaments and military equipment to the Ministry of Defense increased by 31 percent and by 84 percent as compared to 2012⁵⁶. Presumably, Putin's obstinacy to keep on increasing funding for the military, even while the country is struggling with economic problems, is not accidental. On the basis of the power transition theory, a hypothesis can be made that seeking to retain Russian status as a dominant state in the region, Putin and his team are ready to use military force.

3.4. Military Activeness

Military activeness can manifest itself in different forms: military exercises and trainings, activities of military personnel and military equipment next to the borders of foreign states, tests of strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles and other military activities. Nevertheless, the growing intensity of Russian military activeness has been most evidently revealed by the military actions that were carried out in Georgia and are still going on in Ukraine. The five-day military conflict which on August 8, 2008, erupted between Russia and Georgia, is a practical and distinct example of military expansion. After the end of the Cold War, it is the first case of Russian armed intervention in a state of the post-Soviet space. Meanwhile, the lightning annexation of Crimea and the ongoing military actions in Eastern Ukraine are further obvious examples that demonstrate that the Kremlin does not shy away and is presumably not going to shy away from using military power to strengthen its influence in the future. It must be said that Russia's military actions in Ukraine are carried out in blatant violation of international legal norms, and this means that Russia can and is capable of unilaterally pursuing a purposeful expansionist policy, acting following only self-made laws of international relations. The war in Ukraine (unlike the war in Georgia) demonstrated the Russian military power to the whole world. After the annexation of Crimea, Supreme Allied Forces Commander of Europe (SAC EUR) General Philip Breedlove characterized the Russian military as a very capable, very well trained, and very well equip-

⁵⁶ ITAR-TASS, Шойгу: объем поставок вооружений для Минобороны вырос на 31% по сравнению с 2013 годом [Shoigu: volume of supplies of arms for the Ministry of Defense increased by 31% compared with 2013 year], 18 июля 2014, <http://tass.ru/politika/1326912> (in Russian).

ped force⁵⁷.

It is obvious that a political decision to employ national military forces to seize another state or territory is a manifestation of a certain extreme diplomatic policy. The fact that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has used its military assault capabilities to annex territories of foreign countries only twice (in 2008 in Georgia and in 2014 in Ukraine) is indicative of the exceptional character of these decisions. However, both military conflicts occurred within a period of six years, and this can already be considered evidence of the growingly aggressive foreign policy having the features of military expansion.

The activities carried out by Russian military personnel and military equipment alongside the borders of foreign states is another variable which makes it possible to determine the level of the military activeness of Russia, concentration areas and directions of military capabilities. Russia's military activeness in 2014 is revealed in the information provided by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. According to him, within this year [until December 2014] the Alliance's fighters were scrambled 400 times to identify and escort Russian aircraft—50 percent more than in 2013⁵⁸. In addition, intense military activeness in 2014 was recorded in the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic regions. This presumably reflects the directions of Russian foreign policy interests.

One more variable that determines military activeness is military exercises. Frequent and large-scale military exercises are among the essential factors contributing to strengthening military capabilities. In this paper, it is presumed that the scenario, frequency and location of exercises may reveal Russia's military strategic objectives. In 2014, a military exercise named "Vostok 2014" was held in the Far East⁵⁹. It was the largest exercise since the times of the Soviet Union, with 100,000 military personnel, 1,500 tanks, 120 aircraft and 70 ships involved⁶⁰. The scope of the exercise demonstrates the growing need to be capable of controlling and commanding while carrying out military operations of one strategic direction; moreover, this exercise reveals the

⁵⁷ THE INTERPRETER, *Is Russia's Military Really As Good As It Was in Crimea?*, April 3, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/is-russias-military-really-as-good-as-it-was-in-crimea/>.

⁵⁸ Jozwiak R., *NATO Chief Blasts Russia Over Military Activity*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/nato-stoltenberg-blasts-russia-destabilizing-Europe/26719202.html>.

⁵⁹ Such large-scale military exercises are held once a year each time in a different military district. For example, in 2013, exercises of this kind were conducted in the Western Military District („Zapad 2013“), and in 2015, it is planned to hold exercises, named „Centre 2015“, in the Central Military District.

⁶⁰ ITAR-TASS, *Russia's large-scale military drills Vostok*, September 25, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/750825>.

ability to rapidly deploy large numbers of military equipment over relatively long distances. According to the data of the Russian Defense Ministry, in 2014 3,000 military exercises were held, and in 2015 25 percent more exercises are planned⁶¹. This again shows an increased need to improve military training of servicemen while preparing them for possible military conflicts.

Conclusions

The growing military power of Russia that has particularly increased in recent years, as well as Russia's influence determined by this power in the post-Soviet region, is an extremely interesting yet so far rather lesser-studied phenomenon. Such studies not only make it possible to assess the military power potential of the state, but also consider this power as a means for pursuing Russia's expansionist policy. This analysis is of great importance since it helps to determine how and to what extent the growing military power of Russia influences the post-Soviet states, and vice versa—to what extent the geopolitical situation in this region is important to the Russian political elite making decisions regarding the strengthening of military power.

After carrying out a survey of Russia's recent international relations, one has to state that the geopolitical situation in the post-Soviet space is rather tense. The key reason for this tension is the declining influence of Russia in the post-Soviet states: Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Seeking to retain and increase influence in these states, Russia does not shy away from using military power. Russia's military activeness next to EU borders and violations of international commitments undoubtedly raise concerns in Western states; therefore, it is natural that NATO has started to strengthen its military capabilities in Eastern Europe. This is another factor that adds to the mounting tension within the region and induces Russia to further increase its military power. In addition, the data analysis disclosed that in trying not to lose its influence in other post-Soviet states as well, Russia is striving to maintain with them the closest possible diplomatic relations that involve not only bilateral cooperation (particularly military), but also different regional integrative projects: EEU, CO, CSTO and SCO. All this increases Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, and at the same time, counterbalances the West (the EU and NATO states).

⁶¹ REUTERS, *Russia to carry out large-scale military drills in 2015*, December 1, 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/russia-carry-large-scale-military-drills-summer-2015-130849798.html>.

The analysis of Russian military power has revealed that the ambitions of the political elite to strengthen Russia's military power have yielded rather positive results. The ongoing military reform and growing defense expenditures have significantly expanded and increased military capabilities (a more effective organizational structure, more professional personnel, more modern equipment). The number of military exercises, which has increased over the recent years as well as their level and scope, has greatly enhanced military readiness. The analysis of Russia's defense and security policy shows that there still remains a strong political will to further increase the military power of the state. Taking into account the fact that NATO and the EU enlargement eastward is officially considered a key threat to the national interests of Russia and regarding the enlarged NATO military capabilities and activeness in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea Region, it is likely that in the near future Russia will continue to increase its military potential, focusing on strengthening military capabilities of the Western Military District and the CSTO.

The analysis of Russian military power and international relations carried out in this paper reveals that the increase in military capabilities may possibly reflect the expansionist tendencies of the foreign policy of the state, i.e. a wish to retain and increase its influence within the post-Soviet region. In this case, military power is probably the most used for two main objectives of Russia's foreign policy: (1) to deter NATO and the EU from further enlargement; and (2) to directly (friendly/hostile military activities in foreign states) and indirectly (demonstration of military power) expand its influence in neighboring states.

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