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RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT AND NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE WEST

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JCSP 43 DL

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Word Count: 2634

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INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The postwar structures through which East-West international affairs were conducted for the previous 40 years, were about to change led by the United States and Europe.¹ The relationship between the East and West after 1991 was characterized by the United States' increased influence in international politics. Concurrently, former Warsaw pact countries were being integrated into Europe and with the 'colour revolutions' in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, Russian influence and power in the former Soviet space and internationally, decreased.² The low point occurred in September of 2004 when terrorists held over 1,100 hostages in a school gym in Beslan, North Ossetia, for over 52 hours before blowing it up.³ In a State of the Nation address in early 2005, Vladimir Putin declared that Russia would decide and pursue its own course and never again be influenced by external forces.⁴ His experience in the Beslan crisis was that the weak get beaten and Russia would not be beaten again.⁵

It will be demonstrated that strategies based on realpolitik or global power politics implemented to assert Russian influence has resulted in Russia's power being enhanced in the international system.

¹ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Beyond the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 1 (1989), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1990-02-01/beyond-cold-war>.

² Dmitri, Trenin, "Russia Leaves the West," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2006-07-01/russia-leaves-west>

³ "Beslan and after. Terror's new depths." *The Economist Special Report* (September 9, 2004), <https://www.economist.com/node/3172704>

⁴ Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order* (Cambridge, UK: The Polity Press, 2012), 126.

⁵ *Ibid*, 125.

BACKGROUND

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *realpolitik* as “politics based on practical and material factors rather than on theoretical or ethical objectives;”⁶ however, a proposal by Goddard and Nexon provides a better description of recent Russian actions. They propose the phrase “global power politics” defined as “politics based on the use of power to influence the actions and decisions of actors that claim, or exercise, authority over a political community.”⁷

In his book *Power in the Changing Global Order*, Martin A. Smith compiles several ideas about power resulting in a framework on which a state’s application of ‘power’ may be examined. Basically, Smith concludes that power is a social construct to produce intended effects.⁸ Smith further proposes that power is created and operationalized through social interaction: “It requires conscious human endeavor and activity in order to assume tangible existence.”⁹ In other words, power must be applied to produce a desired effect.

Smith references Bertrand Russell and Joseph Nye to further refine his ideas of power. Power is not simply about making something happen. Both men offered the concept of *intended effects* or *preferred outcomes* in the use of power.¹⁰ To achieve these intended effects, Smith considers the requirement for resources, defined by Robert Dahl as ‘anything that can be used to sway the specific choices or the strategies of another’.¹¹ When conveying power through resources, there are two types of resources: tangible and intangible.¹² On the international stage,

⁶ Merriam-Webster online, s.v. “Realpolitik,” accessed 21 May 2018, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/realpolitik, Accessed 21 May 2018.

⁷ Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, “The Dynamics of Global Power Politics: A Framework for Analysis,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* volume 1, issue 1. (1 February 2016): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogv007>

⁸ Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order* (Cambridge, UK: The Polity Press, 2012), 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² Joseph Nye. “Power and Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (April 2011): 12.

the important tangible resources from which power may be employed are military and economic resources. The phrase ‘hard power’ refers to the use of these resources in ways such as military intervention and economic sanctions to coerce appropriate behaviour.¹³

Joseph Nye best describes intangible resources as those characteristics of a state that make it attractive to others such as its culture, political ideals and policies.¹⁴ Nye defined the phrase ‘soft power’ as “the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction”¹⁵ providing an alternative to coercion to affect behaviours. This Western definition of soft power differs from the Russian definition of the phrase. Instead of attraction, Russia engages soft methods to coerce.¹⁶ Nye also coined the term ‘smart power’ to refer to strategies that combine hard and soft power resources in different contexts to successfully produce intended outcomes.¹⁷

To summarize, Smith’s framework allows for the analysis of a state’s application of power by examining the projection of power resources for the purposes of achieving intended effects or, as defined by the concept of global power politics, influencing the actions and decisions of specific actors.

For the purposes of this paper, there are three broad intended effects that are discussed in Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept and National Security Strategy issued in 2013 and 2015, respectively. The key concepts and themes in the documents reflect realist assumptions: zero-sum competition for influence between states, the importance of geography and the self-

¹³ Joseph Nye. "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power." *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 161.

¹⁴ Martin A. Smith, *Power . . .*, 21.

¹⁵ Joseph Nye, "Get Smart: . . .", 161.

¹⁶ Keir Giles, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, “Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West. Continuity and Innovation in Moscow’s Exercise of Power,” last modified March 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/russias-new-tools-confronting-west,4>.

¹⁷ Nye, Joseph. "Power and . . .", 20.

proclamation of being a global power opposing the West.¹⁸ From these themes, three main goals were identified: acceptance by the West of a polycentric system of international relations, ensuring Russia's status as a great power that is involved in "solving the world's most important problems"¹⁹ and, to diminish the West's influence on the world economy and political system.²⁰

Russia's employment of power resources to assert influence in the achievement of these three main goals will be examined using Smith's framework.

ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS

From the low point of the Beslan crisis, Russia commenced its transition from being the intended target of external influence efforts to the actor projecting influence strategies. It started with reclaiming what President Dmitri Medvedev termed as its "sphere of privileged interest."²¹ He was referring to the region composed of former-Soviet states and Russia's self-declared 'privileged' influence over the area. The term was used in a 2008 speech after Russia deployed its conventional military forces in the Georgia conflict. Georgia had ambitions to join NATO but two Georgian territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, separated to remain with Russia. The conflict was a test of Russia's ability to project its influence into the region by the deployment of power resources.²² It was also an opportunity to oppose the West, in particular the United States who had been supportive of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who came into power after

¹⁸ Ben Smith, *Russian Foreign and Security Policy*, House of Commons Briefing Paper CBP 7646 (London: The Stationery Office, 2016), 8.

¹⁹ Olga, Olikier. Centre for Strategic & International Studies, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy," last modified 7 January 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-russias-new-national-security-strategy>

²⁰ Ben Smith, *Russian Foreign . . .*, 18.

²¹ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence", Carnegie Moscow Center, <https://carnegie.ru/2009/09/22/russia-s-spheres-of-interest-not-influence-pub-23863>, last accessed 23 May 2018.

²² Elena Morenkova Perrier, *The Key Principles of Russian Strategic Thinking*, Laboratoire de l'IRSEM no. 22 (Paris: Ecole militaire, 2014), 44.

the Rose Revolution. This was a turning point in Russia's international strategy. Russia had designated the post-Soviet space as its 'sphere of privileged interest' and therefore, considered itself the predominant regional power.²³ NATO enlargement to Russia's door step was not an option. This policy was in line with the realist theories of the importance of geography and a zero-sum competition for influence.

Russia used a simple yet effective strategy to address the problem: create the conditions for an intervention and then deploy the requisite power resources. In a publication for the Atlantic Council of the United States, M. Czuperski *et al* used the phrase "distract, deceive, destroy" to describe this strategy.²⁴ To set the conditions, Russia conducted an information operations campaign before deploying its conventional military. The resource employed for this task was the Russian all news network RT, a proxy of the Russian government, to report disinformation. While the RT may have native English speakers, it is organized such that key editorial decisions are made by Russian producers and editors giving the Kremlin an efficient distribution system to spread disinformation in support of operations.²⁵ In Georgia, RT was reporting stories of genocide conducted by the Georgian government against pro-Russian citizens to support the Kremlin's excuse for an armed military response. This is in agreement with Orysia Lutsevych's assessment that Russia has been using proxy groups and organizations since the early 2000s to project Russian 'soft power' abroad.²⁶ The purpose of the proxies is to influence the local population with messaging from the Kremlin. After having set the conditions

²³ Isabelle, Facon, *Russia's National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and their Implications for the EU*, (Brussels: European Parliament, 2017), 14.

²⁴ M. Czuperski *et al*, *Distract Deceive Destroy Putin at War in Syria* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council of the United States, 2016), 2.

²⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, *World Affairs Journal*, "Yes, Russia Matters: Putin's Guerrilla Strategy", last accessed 23 May 2018, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/print/83765>

²⁶ Orysia Lutsevych, Chatham House the Royal Institute of International Affairs, "Agents of the Russian World. Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood," last modified April 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/agents-russian-world-proxy-groups-contested-neighbourhood>.

for armed intervention, the military effort was assisted by another proxy group, the separatists in the contested areas. Russia had been supporting the separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia militarily since the 1990s, projecting its influence through these proxies to undermine Georgia's independence.²⁷

Russia successfully asserted its influence in its “sphere of privileged interest.” It prevented Georgia from joining NATO and changed state borders by force.²⁸ With no meaningful response from the West, the theme of a polycentric system of international relations was reinforced while US influence in the region was diminished. As well, the effectiveness of the NATO umbrella in eastern Europe was severely degraded.²⁹ While the Russian campaign successfully achieved its objectives, it identified weaknesses in Russia's power resources. In response, Russia commenced a deliberate restructuring and modernization of its military to improve the combat readiness and the rapid deployment of its forces for future projection of Russian power. Along with improvements to its conventional military, its information warfare and cyberwarfare abilities were also improved in preparation for the next conflict.

Having achieved success in Georgia, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 after the fall of pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. In his place a pro-European government was established. As in Georgia, Russia faced the possibility of NATO enlargement into its “sphere of privileged interest.”

In response, Russia employed the same deceive, distract and destroy strategy used in Georgia; however, Russia did not destroy the enemy, it annexed the peninsula. To achieve the objective, Russia engaged in asymmetrical warfare by deploying a coordinated variety of power

²⁷ Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, *The Russia Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*, (Pennsylvania, USA: United States Army War College, 2011), 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

resources. These resources were any and all means to influence the operating environment to include political engagement, information operations directed at the Ukrainian/Crimean population as well as the world, the covert deployment of special operations soldiers, the use of the local population as self-defence forces and then the overt deployment of conventional military.³⁰ As analyzed by Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, Russia's coordinated application of power resources was very effective and novel. "The efficacy with which these achieved Russia's political goal was unprecedented . . ." ³¹ The strategy also marked a shift in its military operations, one from simple destruction of the enemy to achieving a specific effect through influence.³²

Again, Russia demonstrated its ability to apply various strategies in asserting its influence in the region to achieve its goals. It made Ukraine's entry into NATO a complicated issue, it redrew state borders with no effective international pressure to reverse them and it further reduced the West's influence in the region. Russia's success served notice to other former-Soviet states and NATO itself that Russia does not accept NATO enlargement eastward. As a bonus to Russia, the alliance recognized the use of asymmetrical warfare and is now concerned that Russia may use the same tactics on a NATO country "to complicate decision-making within the Alliance by creating ambiguous situations and intimidating some of the members, to the detriment of allied consensus."³³

Its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula clearly demonstrated an enhancement of Russia's power in the region while, once again, the West's has been reduced. There is no doubt Russia is one centre in a polycentric system of international relations.

³⁰ Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul," *The US Army War College Quarterly Parameters* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2014), 85.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

³² Keir Giles, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, "Russia's 'New' Tools . . ."

³³ Isabelle, Facon, *Russia's National . . .*, 16.

During the Syrian conflict in the early summer of 2015, President Assad's forces suffered numerous defeats at the hands of ISIS, the Nusra Front and the US-backed armed opposition groups.³⁴ Assad was losing ground on the western coastline of Syria, close to Tartus which was home to a Russian naval supply depot. The facility was an important strategic asset because it was Russia's only navy repair and replacement facility in the Mediterranean. Its location saved the ships from having to sail to the Black Sea. The very real threat of losing a Russian ally and its navy facility forced Russia to commence preparations for military operations in Syria.³⁵ By August, personnel and material were on their way to Syria and for the first time since the war started, Russian leaders were publicly speaking of a military intervention in Syria.³⁶ A month later, President Putin was on Russian television stating that Russian forces were there to support the Syrian government in its fight against ISIS' terrorist aggression.³⁷ As it had done in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia turned to the proven strategy of distract, deceive and destroy.

The distract phase of the strategy set the conditions for the employment of the main power resource, the Russian military. In his 27 September 2015 speech before the UN General Assembly, Putin presented his reasons for entering Syria. "Today we are providing military and technical assistance to Iraq, Syria and other countries of the region that are fighting terrorist groups."³⁸ In the same speech, he distracted attention away from Russian support for Assad's government by criticizing the current US-led coalition and laying blame on the war in Syria on the West's actions in Iraq and Libya.³⁹

³⁴ M. Czuperski *et al*, *Distract Deceive . . .*, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷ Jethro Mullen and Laura Koran, CNN, "Russia trying to set up base in Syria, U.S. says", <https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/15/middleeast/syria-russia-military-buildup/>

³⁸ Vladimir Putin (speech, United Nations, New York, 28 September 2015).

³⁹ M. Czuperski *et al*, *Distract Deceive . . .*, 8.

The start of the Russian Aerospace Force's air campaign signaled the start of the deceive and destroy phases of the strategy. In the first twenty-four hours of the air campaign, Syrian state media reported Russian aircraft struck five ISIS locations which was confirmed the following day by a spokesman for the Russian Aerospace Force, who stated the Russian air group hit all of the targeted ISIS facilities.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the locations that were targeted were not known to be ISIS strongholds. Instead, they were locations in which opposition groups were operating.⁴¹ This was the standard operating procedure for the Russians throughout their time in Syria. The priority of the campaign was to assist the Syrian forces which did not necessarily mean that ISIS forces were the intended targets. This fact was overlooked as the disinformation reported was that the targets were always ISIS forces.

The destroy phase accomplished the real mission of the Russian forces, which was to weaken the US-backed opposition forces and allow Assad's forces to advance and retake the lost territory. Studies by various organizations of the situation on the ground in Syria have concluded the following: Russian bombing had little effect on ISIS, Russian bombing enabled pro-government forces to advance and, Russian bombing degraded US-backed opposition forces.⁴² These conclusions are corroborated by the Carter Center's dynamic map of control which confirmed that once the Russian bombing began, pro-government forces reversed earlier losses.

The main Russian campaign in Syria occurred between the period of September 2015 to March 2016.⁴³ In that short time, they accomplished several things: it allowed Russia to transition from an adversary in Ukraine to a partner in Syria and it ensured that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a Russian ally, remained in power. The corollary to this is that the US-backed

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

rebels were weakened and by extension, US influence in the region was degraded. Russia had reshaped the operating environment in Syria and had severely constrained US actions in the region. An example demonstrating the operating constraints imposed by Russia's presence was the deployment of the S-400 air defence system. The S-400 is a very capable weapon system. It can engage targets over all of Syria which forced the US to coordinate and deconflict air operations with Russia.⁴⁴ "Russia has used its military primacy to oblige others – including the United States – to treat it as the gatekeeper to a negotiated solution to the conflict."⁴⁵

Russia's involvement in Syria is a major advance in its ability to project influence beyond the former-Soviet space. What makes this accomplishment more significant is that Putin achieved his goals in a war zone in which the US was also operating and he had the freedom to conduct his campaign according to his plan.⁴⁶ The Kremlin is now a major actor in the Middle East and, therefore, may lay claim to being influential in major international issues and problems. Its power in international relations has been greatly enhanced and the next logical progression is to assert its influence in other areas in which the US and Europe are already engaged.

CONCLUSION

President Putin was true to his word when he declared in 2005 that Russia would never again be influenced by external forces. The lesson from the Beslan crisis, that the weak get beaten, was learned and applied. Russia released a new Foreign Policy Concept and National

⁴⁴ Sam Heller, War on The Rocks, "Russia is in charge in Syria: How Moscow took control of the battlefield and negotiating table, last modified 28 June 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/06/russia-is-in-charge-in-syria-how-moscow-took-control-of-the-battlefield-and-negotiating-table/>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ M. Czuperski *et al*, *Distract Deceive* . . . , 22.

Security Strategy, improved its power resources and then went on the offensive. It applied a strategy best described by M. Czuperski et al as “distract, deceive, destroy”⁴⁷ to exercise its influence, first in its “near abroad” with actions in Georgia and Ukraine, and then internationally with actions in Syria. Russia’s power was enhanced with each crisis. In his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly on 1 March 2018, Putin reminded the audience that nobody wanted to talk to Russia in the past and that nobody wanted to listen to them. He is telling the West to listen now.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁸ President of Russia. “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” last accessed 5 May 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/56957>

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