

# **Russian foreign policy 2017 Long-lines and adaptations. The Middle East Dimension**

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**NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL AND HUMAN SECURITY IN  
THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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# Does Russia Have a Grand Strategy?

## Paradigm

Prevailing set of ideas on what Russia was, is and should be

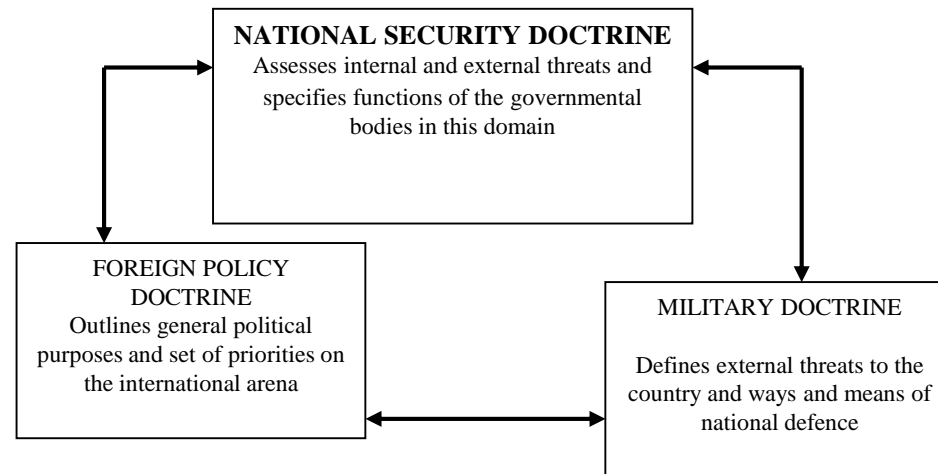
Liberal

Nationalist

Realist

Great power activist

Assertivist



## Grand Strategy

A way in which powers seek to integrate their overall political, economic and military policies in order to pursue their long-term interests.

# The pattern of Russian objectives

## Russia's long-term objectives (Black 1962)

1. Stabilization of frontiers
2. Assurance of favourable conditions for economic growth
3. Unification of Russian territories
4. Participation in alliance systems and international institutions


Black, C.C. (1962). 'The Pattern of Russian Objectives', in Ivo Lederer (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy. Essays in Historical Perspective*; London and New Haven, CT:Yale University Press,pp. 3-38.

# Pattern of Russian objectives in the post-Soviet period (Light 2015)

- Russia's top priority has been the relationship with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)
  - → the need to create buffer zones around Russia's core – the CIS forms this buffer against external aggression and is therefore viewed as a zone of Russia's privileged interests
- Russia has been opposing NATO's eastward expansion to the immediate proximity of Russian borders
  - → in the Russian view NATO has transformed from the purely defensive organization into an offensive organization
- Russia has been a staunch defender of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law in general to prevent regime change
  - → the concept of sovereign democracy and fight against the enemy within
- Russia has been opposing the deployment of ballistic missile defence systems close to Russia's borders
- Russia has been interested in the creation of a multipolar international system as a way of limiting the Western hegemony and the US domination
  - → the Primakov doctrine 1996
- Russia has been interested in regaining the status of great power

Light, M. (2015). Russian Foreign Policy Themes in Official Documents and Speeches: Tracing Continuity and Change. In D. Cadier & M. Light (Eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (pp. 13-29). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

# **2015 12 30 National Security Concept on Russia's strategic objectives in foreign policy**

- Strengthening the country's defense, ensuring the inviolability of the Russian Federation's constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, and national and territorial integrity;
  - Increasing the competitiveness of the national economy;
  - Consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world.
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# **Russia's five core interests 2017 (Rand 2017)**

1. Defense of the country and the regime
2. Influence in the near abroad
3. A vision of Russia as a great power
4. Non-interference in domestic affairs
5. Political and economic cooperation as a partner equal to other great powers.

Radin, A., & Reach, C. B. (2017) Russian Views of the International Order Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

# Kadri Liik on What Does Russia Want 2017

- To promote social conservatism → means rather than objective
- Russia does not want the restoration of the Soviet Union or even the gathering of Russian territories – or the territories populated by ethnic Russians – but establishment of **a sphere of control in its neighbourhood** where Russia would like to have the ability to manage, arbitrate, and veto the relations of these countries with the West, and to prevent the expansion of Western organisations to this area → buffer zone?
- Russia's primary goal is **to establish a new international order, and new rules of the international game, rooted not in the liberal-institutional but in realist and realpolitik paradigm.**
- Russia is no longer interested to be a rule-taker but wants a more active role as **a rule-maker and implementer**
- Russia wants to be **a great power among great powers** and to be allowed to shape international realm with the same prerogatives as other recognized great powers

Liik, K. (2017) What Does Russia Want? London: ECFR

[http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_what\\_does\\_russia\\_want\\_7297](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_what_does_russia_want_7297).

# Russian Doctrines

## Two types: more general and more specific

- 1993 Foreign Policy Concept
- 1993 Military Doctrine
- 1997 National Security Concept
- 2000 National Security Concept
- 2000 Foreign Policy Concept
- 2000 Military Doctrine
- 2008, July, Foreign Policy Concept
- 2009 National Security Strategy until 2020
- 2009/2010, Military Doctrine
- 2013, February, Foreign Policy Concept
- 2014 Military Doctrine
- 2015 National Security Concept
- 2016 Foreign Policy Concept
- 2001 Maritime Doctrine until 2020
- 2001 Arctic Strategy adopted by the RF
- 2002 Ecological Doctrine
- 2003 Energy Strategy until 2020
- 2008 The Fundamentals of Russian State Policy in the Arctic up to 2020 and Beyond
- 2009 Energy Strategy until 2030



# Military Doctrine on Key Military Risks

- The main external military risks are:
  - a) build-up of the power potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and vesting NATO with global functions carried out in violation of the rules of international law, bringing the military infrastructure of NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation, including by further expansion of the alliance;
  - b) destabilization of the situation in individual states and regions and undermining of global and regional stability;
  - c) deployment (build-up) of military contingents of foreign states (groups of states) in the territories of the states contiguous with the Russian Federation and its allies, as well as in adjacent waters, including for exerting political and military pressure on the Russian Federation;

# National Security Doctrine on US and NATO as strategic factors

- 12. The strengthening of Russia is taking place against a backdrop of new threats to national security that are of a multifarious and interconnected nature. **The Russian Federation's implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy** is giving rise to opposition from the United States and its allies, who are **seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs**. The policy of containing Russia that they are implementing envisions the exertion of political, economic, military, and informational pressure on it.
- 17. The West's stance aimed at countering integration processes and creating seats of tension in the Eurasian region is exerting a negative influence on the realization of Russian national interests.

# The Middle East in Current Set of Russian Doctrines



- 2015 National Security Concept

The practice of overthrowing legitimate political regimes and provoking intrastate instability and conflicts is becoming increasingly widespread. In addition to the persisting seats of tension in the **Near and Middle East, Africa**, South Asia, and the Korean peninsula, new "hot spots" are emerging, and zones that are not controlled by any states' authorities are expanding. Territories affected by armed conflicts are becoming the basis for **the spread of terrorism, interethnic strife, religious enmity, and other manifestations of extremism**. The emergence of the terrorist organization calling itself Islamic State and the strengthening of its influence is the result of **the policy of double standards to which some states adhere in the sphere of the fight against terrorism**.

# 2016 Foreign Policy Concept on the Middle East

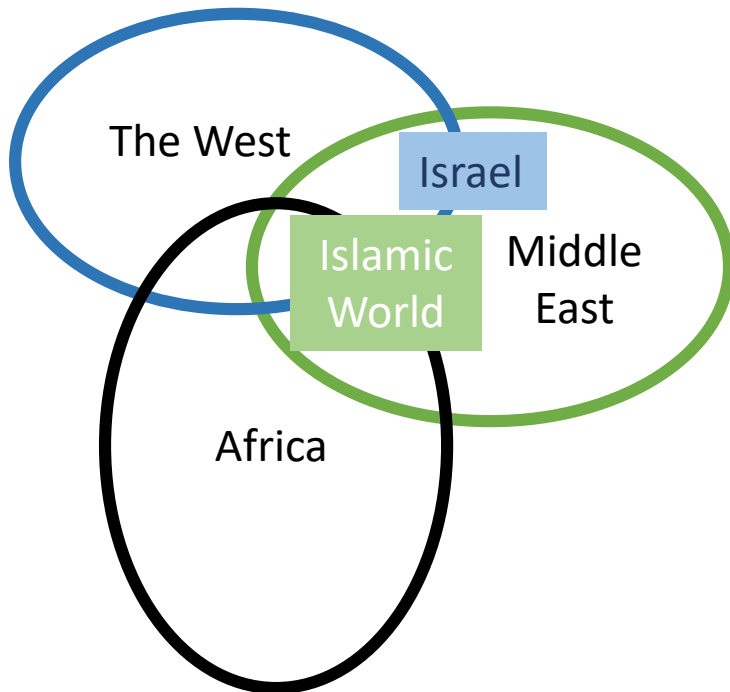
- 14. The growing threat of international terrorism is one of the most dangerous realities in today's world. The spread of extremist ideology and the activity of terrorist groups in a number of regions (primarily, in **the Middle East and North Africa**) are the result of systemic development problems that globalization processes have laid bare. External interference has also played a major role. Combined, these two factors have led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms and the illegal spread of weapons and ammunition at an even larger scale. The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside these countries in an attempt to modernize their political systems have exacerbated the negative response of their societies to current challenges. Extremist forces have exploited these trends using distorted interpretations of religious values to promote violence in pursuit of their goals in the political, interethnic and interreligious rivalry they are engaged in.
- 15. The global terrorist threat has reached a new high with the emergence of the **Islamic State** international terrorist organization and similar groups that have descended to an unprecedented level of cruelty in their violence. They aspire to create their own state and seek to consolidate their influence on a territory stretching from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to Pakistan. The main effort in combating terrorism should be aimed at creating a broad international counter-terrorist coalition with a solid legal foundation, one that is based on effective and consistent inter-State cooperation without any political considerations or double standards, above all to prevent terrorism and extremism and counter the spread of radical ideas.
- Russian Federation supports the creation of zones free from nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction, primarily in **the Middle East**;
- 92. Russia will continue making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in **the Middle East and North Africa**, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international terrorist groups, consistently promotes political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in regional States while respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and member of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, Russia will further strive to achieve a comprehensive, fair and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects consistent with international law.
- 95. Russia intends to further expand bilateral relations with **the States in the Middle East and North Africa**, including by relying on the ministerial meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, and continuing strategic dialogue with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

# Middle East in Russian doctrines 2017

## Foreign Policy Concept 2016

- 93. Russia stands for a political settlement in **the Syrian Arab Republic** and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future based on the Geneva communiqué of June 30, 2012, statements by the International Syria Support Group and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic and pluralistic State with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights and opportunities.
  - 94. Russia is committed to the comprehensive development of cooperation with the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and seeks to ensure the consistent implementation of the joint comprehensive agreement to settle the situation around the Iranian nuclear programme based on UN Security Council resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015 and relevant IAEA Board of Governors decisions, and assists this process in every possible way.
  - 96. Russia will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with a view to further expanding relations with countries of the Islamic world, and promoting partnerships with them in various areas.
- But
    - No mention of Turkey
    - No mention of Israel as a state, only in the context of Israeli-Palestinian conflict
    - Lot of mentions of economic and energy-related questions
    - Terror-related issues mentioned 58 times in the three documents

# The Middle East in Russian political practice



- Deep historical roots of Russian engagement in the Middle East as an area of rivalry between Russian and Turkish and Iranian empires involving also other great powers → the Eastern Question → Is the Orthodox question still on the regional agenda?
- Regional and ideological competition between USSR and the US/West during the Cold War → conflict/war by proxy → USSR supporting Arab states and the West supporting Israel;
- Emergence of Russian diaspora in Israel → post-Soviet *aliyah* → need to take Israel's strategic interests into account → the Russian compatriots question in the region as a new factor?
- Russia's withdrawal in 1990s caused by the lack of means to continue the Soviet policy
- Fall of some former Soviet client states (Iraq)
- Russia and Arab Spring 2011
- Russia and Western intervention in Libya 2011
- 2015 Russia's direct intervention in Syria → war by proxy? → anti-Western, anti-Turkish, anti-Saudi alliance with Assad and Iran?
- Shared or conflicting strategic energy interests with regional energy producers as factor in Russian approach to the region → OPEC, Saudi Arabia
- The Turkish factor – strategic ally or enemy → NATO?



# Interpreting Russia's operation in Syria

## Wilhelmsen and Haugevik 2017

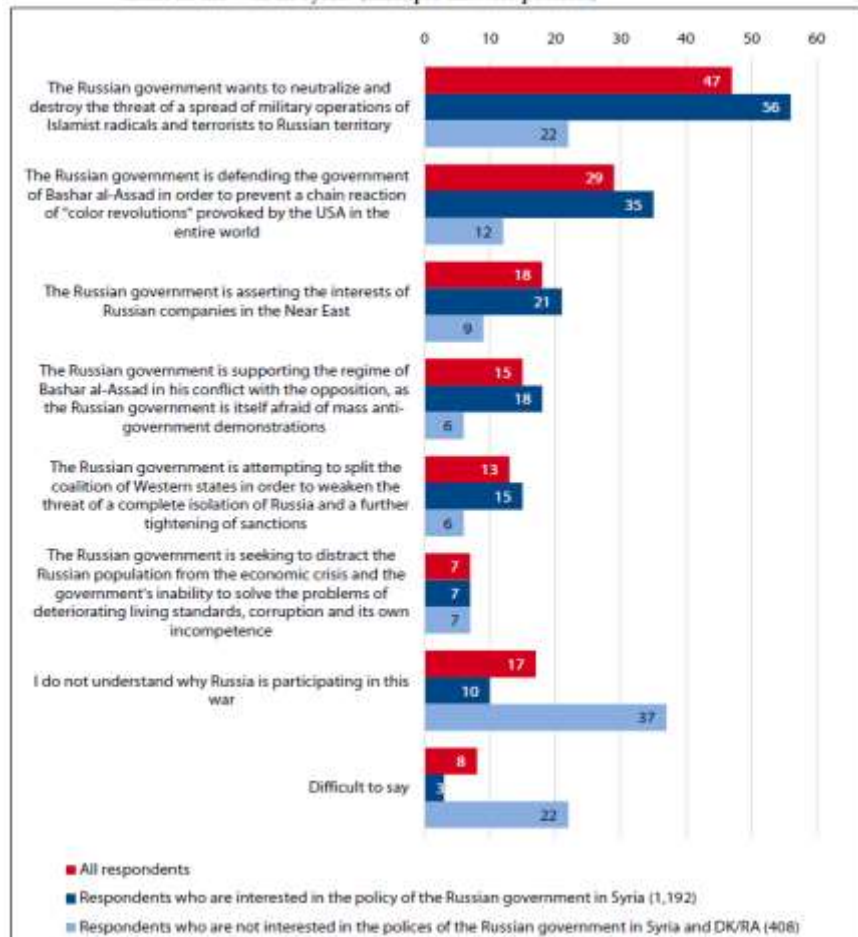


- Support a regional client against illegal attempt at regime change?
  - Russia wishes to prevent a possible forced 'regime change' in Syria. In the Russian view, the instigation of 'Colour Revolutions' in authoritarian but sovereign regimes, and military interventions to unseat such regimes, are elements in a Western scheme to govern the world.
- Fighting potential domestic terrorists far away from Russia's borders → anti-terror preventive measure?
  - Russia has ambitions of fighting international terrorism and defeating the Islamic State (IS). International terrorism has been projected as a core threat to Russian security ever since the 'anti-terrorist campaign' was launched against Chechnya in 1999.
- Challenge the Western hegemony?
  - Russia sees its involvement in the crisis in Syria as an opportunity to re-engage with the West and re-instate itself as a key player on the international political scene.



# Russian objectives in Syria (Morales 2015 and Russian public opinion)

Figure 3: In Your Opinion, Which Goals Is the Russian Government Pursuing by Its Involvement in the War in Syria? (multiple answers possible)



- Reaffirming Russia's international great power status
  - Demonstrate Russia's military prowess to boost weapons sales
- Protecting Russia from jihadist terrorism
  - Support friendly regime to secure regional presence
- Prevent the consolidation of the principle of "responsibility to protect" as a norm of international law

MORALES, J. Noviembre 2015. Fundación Alternativas. La estrategia de Rusia en Siria: Intereses y Perspectivas. Panel Rusia y Eurasia. Nota de prospectiva nº 39/2015.

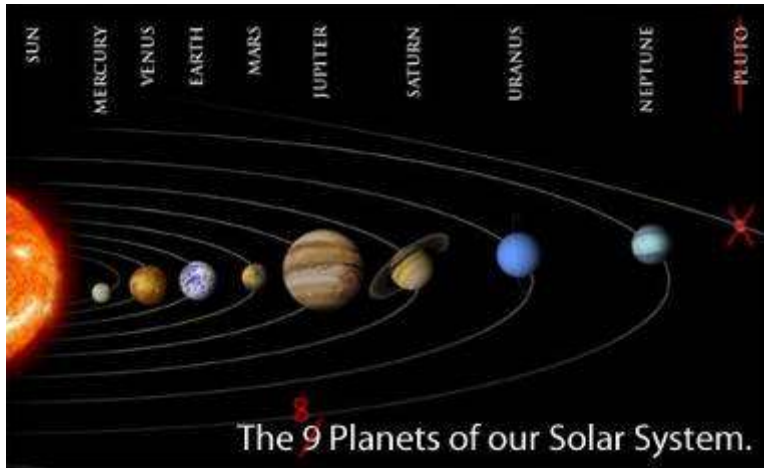
# Summing up: Long lines, old and new ideas and old and new means

- Should Russia in the wake of Syrian intervention be defined as a great power or even as a superpower light?
  - **Great power:** Needs not have big capabilities in all sectors; needs not be present in the securization processes of all areas in the int'l system; is to be treated in the calculations of other major powers as if it has the clear economic, military and political potential to bid for superpower status in the short or medium term
  - **Superpower:** First class military and political capabilities and economies to support them; have global military and political reach; see themselves and be accepted by others as having this status.
- Projection of soft power?
- Projection of military power, promoting Russian military technology?
  - In late 2015 and early 2016, Russia demonstrated in Syria that it had acquired long-range, precision-guided, conventional-strike capability, the use of which has implications far beyond military utility. Moscow's willingness to use this newly acquired class of military power in support of its foreign policy is a challenge both to the West's monopoly on global power projection, which it has held since the end of the Cold War, and to its state of denial about Russia's rearmament progress (Sokov 2017 at <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/node/9098>)
- The ability to make others do what they would not do had it not been for the Russian action?
  - Russia wanted to re-establish a strategic dialogue with the United States “as an equal,” prove to China its value as a strategic partner, divert domestic attention away from the inglorious deadlock in the Donbas, and prop up a failing client state. I would say that a factor near the very top of the list is that Moscow sought to use the Syrian conflict as a pressure point for increasing disunity in the West—specifically to aggravate discord in the EU and to get sanctions relief (2017 Baev at <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/node/9061>)

# **Some unclear unintended consequences of Russia's renewed engagement in the Middle East?**

- Has the Russian engagement contributed to increasing or decreasing migratory / refugee flows from and in the region → direct and indirect impact on the stability in the region and in Europe receiving some of the migrant/refugee flows?
- Russian stance on the re-emerging Kurdish question →?
- How may Russia's closer cooperation with Turkey that is being alienated by its Western allies in the wake of the failed coup influence NATO, EU and US position in the region?
- Has the greater level of unpredictability and tension between regional and global great powers and superpowers engaged in the Middle East that is an important global energy hub contributed to higher or lower energy prices? → Is greater political volatility translated into a greater oil price volatility? → Has this created incentives for better coordination of energy policies of key actors in the region and beyond?

# Russia and the West 2006 - 2017



- Until recently, Russia saw itself as Pluto in the Western solar system, very far from the center but still fundamentally a part of it. Now it has left that orbit entirely: Russia's leaders have given up on becoming part of the West and have started creating their own Moscow-centered system (Trenin 2006)