A LOOK TO THE FUTURE: RUSSIA'S INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Terrorismin vastainen toiminta ja Kaukoidän kasvanut merkitys ovat korostuneet Yhdysvaltojen harjoittamassa politiikassa kuluneen vuosikymmenen aikana. Samalla asevoimien operatiivinen ja strateginen ajattelu on siirtynyt pois perinteisestä kylmän sodan ajan uhkamallista. Venäjän politiikan muutokset ja aktiivinen sotilaallinen toiminta muun muassa Ukrainassa ovat vasta viime aikoina havahduttaneet amerikkalaiset arvioimaan Venäjän pyrkimyksiä aivan uudessa valossa.

Tässä artikkelissa arvioidaan pääosin amerikkalaisiin lähteisiin perustuen Venäjän kansallisia toimintamahdollisuuksia ja -kykyjä diplomatian, informaation, asevoimien ja talouden näkökulmista (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic (DIME)). Yhdysvalloissa Venäjän toimia pidetään pääsääntöisesti pyrkimyksenä palauttaa entinen suurvalta-asema takaisin. Tätä ei pidetä todennäköisenä, koska Venäjällä on arvioiden mukaan monenlaisia ja jopa ylitsepääsemättömiä haasteita voitettavanaan muun muassa talouden saralla. On todennäköistä, että Venäjä säilyy tulevaisuudessa yrityksistään huolimatta ainoastaan alueellisena voimatekijänä.

Artikkeli on majuri Teemu Kilpeläisen johtaman työryhmän laatima opinnäytetyö Yhdysvaltain Joint Forces Staff Collegessa (JFSC) alkukesällä 2015. Työn ohjaajana oli Commander Michael Bissell (US Navy).

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of hope and possibility. The West won the ideological battle contained in the Cold War and democracy and capitalism seemed poised to sweep across Russia and Eastern Europe. The era would bring a new sense of commitment to freedom and open societies. Old enemies would now meet on the world stage as equal partners in the cause of freedom, with one providing a cautionary tale about the woes of oppressive government. The reality, however, of the post Soviet space has been anything but hopeful. Russian integration into a world based on European ideas and on the West's terms has been problematic. Russia continues to struggle with its post Soviet Union identity and President Putin's motives continue to confound the West.

H.L. Menkin[1] noted that "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong" (Menkin). While it is difficult to predict the future, especially on the complex and grand scale of geo-political relationships, it is not impossible. Studying facts and professional speculation about Russia's present can help in predicting the ways they may use their elements of national power. The instruments of national power are Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME). DIME is the method used to describe the tool set of national power at the highest levels of strategic guidance, e.g., the Presidential National Security Strategy. By analyzing Russia's current and recent employment of their DIME powers this paper will speculate on Russia's future. Russia's strategic success will depend, to a great extent, on whether Russian leadership decides to increase their integration into the international system and mitigate the threat of future armed conflict. At this point, Russia does not seem eager to integrate into an international system on the West's terms. Ironically, fully integrating into this system could spell a return to superpower status. As a result, Russia will likely have to settle for the more modest role of a leading regional power in Eurasia.

DIPLOMACY

Russia's diplomatic strategy is shaped by how it views the outside world and is heavily reliant on one man, Vladimir Putin. To truly understand Putin and his motives one must understand the conditions inside Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union that led to his rise to power as well as how he used the other instruments of national power to secure and maintain his power base.

During Boris Yeltsin's presidency, Russia enacted a series of economic reforms designed to introduce free market concepts, diversify the economy, and

1 H.L. Menkin was an American satirist, critic, philosopher, and writer known for his commentaries on society and culture.

develop the private sector. Yeltsin elected to forgo a phased attempt at establishing a free market economy. The attempted reforms were aggressive in light of Russia's historical dependence on a state controlled economy. The results were uncontrolled inflation, devaluation of the ruble, and the rise of an extremely wealthy oligarchy. The marked rise in domestic instability led to increased government control and questions from the West about whether post Soviet Russia was willing to join the post Cold War world. Additionally, Russia attempted to join the World Trade Organization and G8 as way to develop closer ties to the West. Russia believed the West unfairly and unnecessarily contested its membership by withholding access in exchange for domestic reform. From the Russian point of view, the West treated Russia with great skepticism and never fully accepted their membership on the world stage. In addition, economic reforms imposed on the Western model led to domestic instability, an economic downturn and a loss of face on the international stage (Zongyou). As a result, Russia remained content to distance itself from the West and reestablish regional dominance as an entree to superpower status.

Vladimir Putin rose to power amidst this instability and skepticism. His first presidency focused on reestablishing domestic security. He began by improving the standard of living and continued to expand his power by promoting nationalism and, where that failed, through intimidation (Frum). His popularity soared in Russia and this became the foundation of his political strategy. As things got better on the home front, Putin began to wonder how to expand his vision globally. The question facing Putin became, "How do I balance a vision where the rule of law does not truly exist against avoiding provoking the West (Frum)?"

The answer to this question is, ultimately, Putin didn't need to balance his vision at all. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and began a long term occupation of breakaway republics, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Putin wondered, "Would the West tolerate a greater power carving up smaller nations (Frum)?" The answer, sadly, was yes. Russia ultimately did not face significant punishment from the West. Sanctions imposed by the Bush administration were lifted shortly thereafter by the Obama administration. Putin's main takeaway was that or all of the West's grand talk the strong still ultimately dictate to the weak (Zongyou).

In light of this important lesson, Putin's diplomatic vision is built on three pillars, security (primarily through annexing vulnerable territory), a Eurasian Union and a Russo-Orthodox identity (McKew). Putin's vision is oversimplified by attempting to boil it down to recapturing Soviet glory. Putin states, "We are not talking about recreating the USSR in one form or another. It would be naive to try to restore or copy that which remains in the past, but close integration based on new values and a political and economic foundation is imperative (Elder)." His vision is more accurately described as Russian exceptionalism.

Putin adds, "We received a big legacy from the Soviet Union – infrastructure, current industrial specialization, and a common linguistic, scientific and cultural space. To use this resource together for our development is in our common interest (Elder)."

With true acceptance and access to the West not available on anything other than terms dictated by the United States and her European allies, Putin formulated a more pragmatic approach around his idea of exceptionalism. This consists of a regional focus highlighted by closer ties to the east and mending fences with old partners (Xinhua). Putin's approach could be quite attractive to ex-Soviet states and others looking to expand opportunity, but frustrated by the bar for entry imposed by the West. Annexing the Crimea not only provided a security barrier to the West and ensures access to the Black Sea for the Black Sea Fleet, it also dramatically increased Putin's popularity at home. Putin's vision for a Eurasian Union is gaining traction with former Soviet republics - Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia (McKew). "We propose a model of powerful, supranational union, capable of becoming one of the poles of the modern world (Elder)." Additionally, Putin's emphasis on a shared Russian Orthodox heritage provides potential entrance into markets in Serbia, Greece and Cyprus. Arguably, the most compelling aspect of Putin's vision is his rejection of European ideology, a "it's ok to be what you are" membership criteria (McKew).

Putin's vision is not without weakness and contradiction. As Maxim Trudolyubov stated in the New York Times, "Mr. Putin has succeeded in (ending internal disarray), but his agenda has been achieved through negative measures . . . making the press compliant, Parliament acquiescent, the courts obeisant and business neutralized as a political actor (Trudolyubov)." He further adds, "Can a leader whose actions are so negative at home become a successful player in international politics (Trudolyubov)?" The episode in Ukraine and the Crimea provides the best example for the contradictions in the renewed Russian regional approach. If Russia's goal is to promote nationalism by annexing territory then Russia should continue to pressure Ukraine to abandon its claims to the Crimea. Russian or *freedom fighter* deaths against the Ukrainian military could also weaken nationalist viewpoints in annexed territories. If Russia's goal is to establish a Eurasian Union then it should work to bring Ukraine into the fold - not only as a counter-balance to the Russian viewpoint, but also because of its economic power (Trudolyubov). These contradictions will prevent Russia from effectively executing Putin's grand vision and potentially provide opportunities for Western success.

INFORMATION

Russian President Vladimir Putin uses the information instrument of national power effectively within the Russian borders, and, to some degree targets some

smaller, disenfranchised countries. An observation of the sources and means through which information reaches the proper audiences is necessary to understand how Putin, and Russia, could continue this successful campaign. There are multiple ways in which information is passed throughout Russia. Official, state-run news media is the primary means by which the Russian government pushes information to the masses. Other sources of information include local, independent news agencies, unauthorized sources such as underground radio and newspapers, and third-party sources which include international press and various social media outlets. Focusing on the methods through which Russia disseminates information is important in determining the current and future strength of the information instrument of national power while the credibility of various media and information sources, as perceived by the groups involved, is also critical. (JP 2-01.3, III-40)

During the Soviet era the Soviet government used the information instrument of national power very effectively. Two ways they did so were the *total control of terror* and *total control of the lie*. It is highly unlikely *total control of terror* can be used in Russia today, however a variant of the *total control of the lie* does show some potential for short term gain (Gessen). Specifically, on today's global stage, whoever controls the information can dominate the world. The Kremlin, under Putin's tenure has been adjusting information-related laws very quickly in the attempt to gain and maintain control over information flow and availability. For example, restrictions on blogging took effect following the first round of Russian information laws being passed in merely four months of Putin's ascent to power (Laine). These laws transformed the Russian blogosphere as compared to the West. Moreover, the three major national television networks were taken under the control of the state less than a year after Putin was sworn into office (Gessen, 174). Media in Russia is segregated into discrete circles with regulations in place to keep media sources from interacting and producing a *bigger picture* message. Mass protests of any sort seem unlikely as multiple sources of information have no means of connection or interaction large enough to gain momentum or escape from the watchful eyes of Russian regulators (Gessen, 262). Furthermore, printed media and internet sites are easily manipulated and controlled by the Russian government. Overly cautious reporting and self-censorship are commonplace in Russia, and critical voices are falling into silence which are the real threats for liberty for the Russian presses (Laine). These overarching information regulations will be beneficial to Putin in the short term as he looks to exert some control over the Russian people.

The information instrument of national power has been effective for Putin on the home front in regards to his use of the military instrument of national power for the land grab of the

Crimean peninsula. Putin's popularity in Russia soared above 80 percent as state-controlled television unleashed tirades against the West. Public opinion polls showed that 90 percent of Russians considered the referendum in Crimea to be the result of the free will of the Crimean people and western pressure against them. Official results showed that 83 percent of Crimean citizens turned out to vote and 97 percent voted in favor of annexation. These were the numbers reported in Russian media, although the president's own Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights astonishingly declared that the actual numbers were quite different. The council estimated that the voter turnout was closer to 30 to 50 percent of which only 50 to 60 percent voted in favor of annexation. The council's final estimate was around 22.5 percent of registered Crimean voters voted in favor of annexation. So while media reports showed 82 percent of Crimeans voting for annexation, Putin's inner circle showed only 22.5 percent voting in favor (Dawisha, 319).

Protests against electoral fraud in May of 2012 resulted in increased restrictions on the Internet and threatened to completely eliminate freedom of the press which was already largely driven from mainstream newspapers and television media (Dawisha, 317). Russian media appears to be blind to the degrees of freedom which have been lost. Some commentary on Russian journalism from inside Russian politics sees many of the restricting measures as a means of information security (Laine).

Should Russia continue to use the information control tactic of the *total control of the lie*, she will face challenges in achieving long term strategic goals. The Russian citizens might believe initial reports through state-run media for a short period of time but as other internal and external information sources begin to report, they will discover the gaps. Freedom of information is in jeopardy in Russia and this is prevalent to the international community. This is very dangerous in that approval in Russia does not give the Kremlin, nor Putin for that matter, *carte blanche* authority to act outside of the Russian borders. Information is very powerful tool and can be used to great benefit or adversity as proven by Putin's information dominance campaign within Russia, seemingly bringing Russian legitimacy to his military and diplomatic actions. However, this control of the media via internet firewalls, media regulations, etc., takes away from the legitimacy of the Russian government on the international stage which will no doubt cause problems for Russia in the long-term and for her strategic and international ambitions.

MILITARY

The military option as a means of national power is well known. Although it is usually the biggest instrument of national power, and unarguably the most costly, it is also generally viewed as the

last resort in terms of diplomacy. The Russians, however, have begun using their military assets as a primary diplomatic tool in an attempt to assert dominance on the international stage. The Kremlin is also using the military as a means of grabbing land to expand Russian borders. The problem with this assertion and utilization of military forces is that it comes with a cost. The current economic state is exacerbated by the Kremlin's incestuous desire to assert dominance.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian military was relatively quiet and took a back seat as a formidable force on the world stage. As Russia rebounded from the Soviet collapse, they began to reconstitute their military forces. In 1999, the Russians held a theater exercise known as ZAPAD-99. This exercise was enormous and included the headquarters and command structures of five military districts, three fleets, and about 50,000 command and staff personnel. This exercise modeled a response to NATO 'aggression against Russia and its allies' (Kip). In 2007, Russian aircraft returned to some of the Cold War era, long distance probing flights by deploying the Tu-95 bombers along the United States coastline. These flights soon became more robust with the use of fighter escorts and intelligence gathering aircraft (Quinilivin). In 2008, Russia went to war with Georgia over South Ossetia, giving more legitimacy to Russia's new contract military versus a conscript military while bolstering confidence in Russia's ability to win local wars without the use of nuclear weapons (Friedman). In September of 2014, two Bear bombers flew past to Greenland via Iceland and in November of the same year, one flight of these bombers with tanker support and fighter escort made it as far south as Northern California.

The most notable military action by the Russians in recent times is the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and her support to the Eastern Ukrainian rebels. In February 2014, Russian Special Forces under the guise of self-defense units and embedded with rebel fighters, took over multiple government buildings. Over the next few weeks these forces gained control of several Ukrainian military and naval bases. A month later, President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty to annex Crimea (Macias). The Kremlin is now using Crimea as a forward staging base. Russia has stated that it will build up her military presence on the Crimean peninsula as a response to NATO and U.S. forces being built up within the region (Agence Presse-France).

Unfortunately for Russia, these military courses of action are unsustainable. Russia's current military ambitions are costly. Russia has been propping up her military despite a fledgling economy. Budget data recently published shows the Russians have already spent over 9% of their quarterly GDP for 2015 which is more than double what was budgeted (Holodny). Due to Russia's actions in the Ukraine, and more specifically on the Crimean peninsula, she faces ongoing Western sanctions limiting her ability to borrow on the international markets. The

decline of the ruble and the price of oil are two more stressors on a timid Russian economy (Adomanis). These are just three examples of the economic strain Russia faces as the Kremlin continues her unsustainable military spending frenzy.

ECONOMIC

Russia's application of military power in the Ukraine sparked an international response which included sanctions imposed by the United States. US President Obama stated:

> *[W]e were doing the hard work of imposing sanctions along with our allies, as we were reinforcing our presence with frontline states, Mr. Putin's aggression it was suggested was a masterful display of strategy and strength. That's what I heard from some folks. Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated with its economy in tatters. (Obama)*

However, recent reviews of Russia's economy indicate that the sanctions had little effect and any decline can be attributed to the international price of oil (Matthews). Despite these setbacks the Russian stock market has gained 20% in 2015 over their past declines (Matthews). Contrary opinions are also readily available through the reports of several internationally-focus financial think-tanks. Estimates on Russia's economic reserves vs their international debt may tempt the Kremlin to increase ruble production to buy foreign currency --a sure fire way to increase their inflation rate and push economic problems only a slight distance into the future ("The Rouble: The Worst Is Yet to Come").

One indicator of the limitations of Russia's economic power is their involvement in the space industry. Space policy analyst Pavel Luzin of Perm State University[2] indicates that Russia has never recovered from the abrupt change in funding felt with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The economic principles that enabled Soviet space and missile programs to thrive during the Cold War are gone. The current big-three space companies in Russia do not have the funding to innovate and create new space systems and most particularly, rockets (Bodner). The most expensive aspect of operating is the space domain is getting into orbit and Russia is recycling and repurposing old Soviet era technology--the inventory will eventually be depleted. Currently Russia is benefiting economically from providing space transportation for humans two-and-from the International Space Station (ISS). When the US Space Transit System (i.e., the space shuttle) program ended in July 201,1 the cost of flight for one astronaut

2 Permskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet is a Russian University in the city of Perm and was founded in 1916 in line with strategies to increase cultural and geopolitical education and understanding in the Ural economic region ("Perm State University").

went from $8 million to $70.7 million per seat virtually overnight (Wall). The contract between NASA and Russia has currently been extended through 2018 as the US continues to fund and explore its own human spacelift capabilities through innovative companies such as SpaceX (Clark). It is this exact type of innovation that Russia does not seem to have to capability to foster due to their current economic policy and funding. While their economy is currently benefiting from our lack of human space lift capability it will be our future capability that cripples the advantages they currently exercise.

Russia's economic national power is not singularly reflected by their current space policy. End-of-the-millennium financial decline prompted reforms in Russia that have helped them weather subsequent declines and to take better advantage in times of prosperity. President Vladimir Putin, however, has significantly hindered the reforms that have been so advantageous to the economic progress Russia has enjoyed. Analysts predict that unless those reforms are put back into play soon, things will begin to look dire for the mid-level country as compared with the rest of the world (Aslund).

Education also plays into the economic equation that seems to predict a dark future. While Russia consistently scores high in education it remains profoundly hamstrung by the relative lack of technological innovation. Despite their enormous reserve of talent in applied and theoretical sciences, they logged only 0.2 percent of the 1.3 million overseas patents awarded since 2000 by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. This is another indication that Russia's economy is not sustainable for the long duration (Dawisha, 315).

As Russia progresses towards becoming a regional player instead of an international *Superpower* they should look to furthering their expansion through accepting partnerships within a Eurasian Union. China and the US are able to compete internationally, (e.g., space exploration), through their own internal resources and significant influence within the international economic community--a model that Russia can not currently apply to its own situation. The former USSR contained the locations (e.g., Kazakhstan, Latvia) and resources required to power the aggressive Soviet space program that still provides space lift and vehicles used in present day to transit humans to and from the International Space Station (Zak). Russia could leverage the economic power of a Eurasian Union to exploit the resources available in that region as the means to gain a foothold in superpower-level economics such as the space industry (Elder).

CONCLUSION

If Russia's desire for a greater role on the world stage is based on the level of stability within their instruments of national power then prospects are grim. Russian applications of the instruments of national power are not sustainable over the long term and will ultimately

prevent Russia from reaching a stage of full participation in the international order. Of late, Russian diplomacy has attempted to take a more pragmatic tack, but its application has often been at odds with the West.

The National Security Strategy 2015 identifies Russia as an aggressive international force (Obama). Russia has countered President Obama's viewpoint by stepping up its information campaign. The main theme of Russia's information war is anti-Americanism, the fight against "fascism" in Ukraine, and a renewal of a sense of Russian greatness, and the distinctiveness of Russian values. Putin wants to be seen as the liberator of Russian lands and the head of a great civilization--morally superior to a gay-dominated and degraded Western culture (Dawisha, 318).

In 2012, Global Trends 2030 *Alternative Worlds* predicted:

> *"Russia could become a very troublesome country, trying to use its military advantage over its neighbors to intimidate and dominate. This outcome would be most likely if a Russian leader were facing rising public discontent over sagging living standards and darkening economic prospects and is looking to rally nationalist sentiments by becoming much more assertive in the Near Abroad." (Alternative Worlds, 80).*

When Russian troops marched into Crimea in 2014, Putin had clearly decided that he could maintain his power by coupling the economic reliance on oil and gas extraction with domestic increase in propaganda.

Russian economic power is threatened not only by scientific progress in the world market, but by the problems that exist internal to their own financial systems. The Russian economy relies heavily on a single-source of income which suppresses investment in other sectors. Oil and gas are the single source and has increased from 30 to over 50 percent over the past decade. Efforts to modernize the economy have made little or temporary progress. Further stressing their economy is an aging workforce that will put a drag on economic growth (Global Trends, 80). Russia's export revenues, which fluctuate between 25 and 35 percent, comes from non energy sources in primarily military hardware sales (Dawisha, 322). A decade of high oil revenues means that Russia has no sovereign debt which leaves them flexible, even if they are not taking measures on this advantage (Dawisha, 325). These factors together create a situation where democratic, political, and economic institutions stagnate as income from natural resources provides no incentive for the elite to develop new areas of economic growth.

Russia's role in the world during the next two decades will be shaped by the rising challenges it faces at home as well as in the global environment. Russia will continue to assert its dominance and look to expand influence regionally in the hopes that this will force the West to fully accept them as members of the international system on terms that are

comfortable to Russia. Russia will likely continue to face challenges in all the individual and interrelated aspects of DIME and will remain only a regional power for the foreseeable future.

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