

# **Russian Security State**

GOVT-5519/IPOL-3519/REES-5519/SEST-6763

## **Lecture 01. Russia in 2025**

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## Today's objectives

1. *Define*: concepts of power, grand strategy, offensive, defensive
2. *Identify*: key elements of Russian grand strategy
3. *Evaluate*: sources of continuity/change in Russian strategy

# Is Russia a “Great Power”?

## What is power?

**Power** is the capacity to influence other actors

Power is **not absolute** (is A powerful?)



Figure 1: Little power

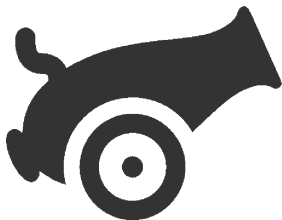


Figure 2: Big power

Power is **relative** (is A more powerful than B? ✓)



Figure 3: Power parity

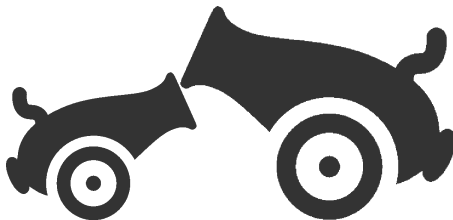


Figure 4: Power asymmetry

To be a **great power**, you have to be good at more than 1 thing

- population size
- natural resources
- technological base
- industrial capacity
- territory
- education
- defense spending
- diplomatic skill
- domestic unity/cohesion

Are some of these more/less important than others?

What's missing?



## What is **polarity**?

Polarity is a term that “realists” use to denote the number of great powers in the international system

- **unipolar**: one center of power
- **bipolar**: two centers of power
- **multipolar**: multiple centers of power

These terms appear *a lot* in Russian diplomatic rhetoric. Why?

## Measuring power

## *Example: Composite Index of National Capability (CINC)*

Proportion of world's

- (1) total population
- (2) urban population
- (3) iron and steel production
- (4) energy consumption
- (5) military personnel
- (6) military expenditure

Criticism: captures “**hard power**”, not “soft power” (Joseph Nye)

- power to co-opt rather than coerce

(e.g. attractive culture, political values, moral authority)

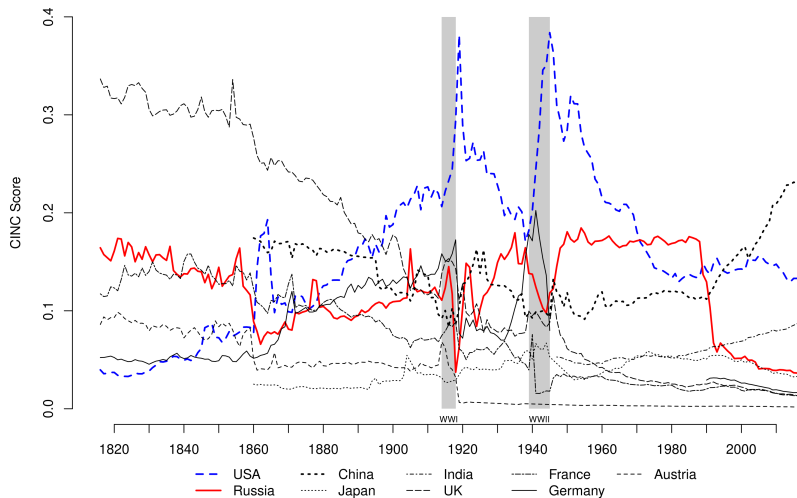


Figure 5: Composite Index of National Capability (1800-2016)

# Russia's Grand Strategy

What is "grand strategy"?

**Grand strategy** is a state's theory about how to best defend itself  
(definition from Posen, Sources of Military Doctrine, 1984)

A grand strategy must:

1. identify major threats to the state's security
2. devise political, military, diplomatic, economic and other remedies for these threats
3. establish priorities across these threats and remedies

Examples:

- Containment
- Bush Doctrine
- Obama Doctrine

Does every state have a "grand strategy"? How can we tell?  
Can a grand strategy exist without a state ideology?

## What does it mean for a strategy to be **offensive** vs. **defensive**?

1. military doctrine and force posture
  - *offensive*: rapid mobilization & deployment, motorized armor (Offensive a outrance, Blitzkrieg, AirSeaBattle)
  - *defensive*: defense-in-depth, air/area/sea denial (Maginot Line, AirLandBattle)
2. arms procurement and offense/defense investment ratios
  - *offensive systems*: long-range, mobile, capable of penetrating defenses (artillery, tanks, aircraft, cruise missiles, drones)
  - *defensive systems*: mobility-reducing, firepower-enhancing (moats, machine guns, anti-air defenses, nuclear weapons)
3. geography
  - *offensive advantage*: flat, rolling terrain, short distances
  - *defensive advantage*: mountains, rivers, swamps, long distances

Why does this distinction matter?

Is it possible to discern offensive vs defensive capabilities, intentions?



How has Russia's grand strategy evolved?

## Who makes "grand strategy" in Russia?

1. President
  - sets main contours of foreign policy, per Constitution
  - authority to enact new strategy and doctrine
2. Security Council
  - interagency working group develops national security strategy
3. Ministry of Defense
  - civilian control loosened after USSR collapse
  - able to "freelance" foreign policy in 1990s
  - takes lead on formulating military doctrine
4. Intelligence and Security Services
  - increasingly influential
  - but little interagency coordination (FSB, SVR, GRU)
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
  - managers, not makers of foreign policy
6. State Duma
  - has a Committee on International Affairs
  - but no policy-making or oversight authority

## Where is Russia's "grand strategy" articulated?

### *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*

- 2021, 2015, 2009, 2000 (*National Security Concept*)

### *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*

- 2021, 2014, 2010, 2000, 1993

### *Foreign Policy Concept*

- 2023, 2016, 2013, 2008, 2000, 1993

### Subsidiary documents

- *Maritime Doctrine, Information Security Doctrine, Energy Security Doctrine, Food Security Doctrine*

## Russia's **grand strategy** has *constant* and *variable* elements

**constant elements** (always salient, from Peter I to Putin):

- *perceived threats*:
  - Western great powers
  - territorial claims against Russia
- *avored remedies*:
  - strategic depth (geopolitical sphere of influence / buffer zone)

**variable elements** (these change in salience/priority over time):

- *perceived threats*:
  - regional instability / "local conflicts" in neighboring countries
  - interference in Russian domestic political affairs
  - mistreatment of Russian speakers abroad
- *avored remedies*:
  - nuclear retaliation for conventional attack
  - political, economic integration with West
  - isolation / economic self-sufficiency
  - pursuit of "multipolar" balance of global power
  - promotion of traditional values / natalism

## How has Russia's grand strategy changed in last 30 years?



Figure 6: Moscow, 1993



Figure 7: Moscow, 2025

## Russia's grand strategy in **1993** (1993 MD, 1993 FPC)

### **perceived threats**

- ☒ military threat from NATO, Western powers
- ☒ territorial claims against Russia
- ☒ regional instability, local conflicts (New! ✓)
- ☒ interference in domestic affairs
- ☒ transnational terrorism (New! ✓)
- ☐ malign cultural influence from West
- ☒ mistreatment of Russian speakers abroad (New! ✓)

### **favored remedies**

- ☒ strategic depth / buffer zone
- ☒ nuclear retaliation for conventional attack
- ☒ political, economic engagement with West (New! ✓)
- ☐ isolation / economic self-sufficiency
- ☐ pursuit of "multipolar" balance of global power
- ☐ promotion of traditional values / nativism

## Russia's grand strategy in **2000** (2000 MD, 2000 NSC, 2000 FPC)

### **perceived threats**

- ☒ military threat from NATO, Western powers
- ☒ territorial claims against Russia
- ☒ regional instability, local conflicts
- ☒ interference in domestic affairs
- ☒ transnational terrorism
- ☐ malign cultural influence from West
- ☒ mistreatment of Russian speakers abroad

### **favored remedies**

- ☒ strategic depth / buffer zone
- ☒ nuclear retaliation for conventional attack
- ☒ political, economic engagement with West
- ☐ isolation / economic self-sufficiency
- ☒ pursuit of "multipolar" balance of global power (New! ✓)
- ☐ promotion of traditional values / nativism

## Russia's grand strategy in **2010** (2009 NSS, 2010 MD, 2008 FPC)

### **perceived threats**

- ☒ military threat from NATO, Western powers
- ☒ territorial claims against Russia
- ☒ regional instability, local conflicts
- ☒ interference in domestic affairs
- ☒ transnational terrorism
- ☐ malign cultural influence from West
- ☒ mistreatment of Russian speakers abroad

### **favored remedies**

- ☒ strategic depth / buffer zone
- ☒ nuclear retaliation for conventional attack
- ☒ political, economic engagement with West
- ☐ isolation / economic self-sufficiency
- ☒ pursuit of "multipolar" balance of global power
- ☐ promotion of traditional values / nativism



## Russia's grand strategy in **2025** (2023 FPC, 2021 NSS, 2021 MD)

### **perceived threats**

- ☒ military threat from NATO, Western powers
- ☒ territorial claims against Russia
- ☐ regional instability, local conflicts
- ☒ interference in domestic affairs
- ☒ transnational terrorism
- ☒ malign cultural influence from West (New! ✓)
- ☒ mistreatment of Russian speakers abroad

### **favored remedies**

- ☒ strategic depth / buffer zone
- ☒ nuclear retaliation for conventional attack
- ☐ political, economic engagement with West
- ☒ isolation / economic self-sufficiency (New! ✓)
- ☒ pursuit of "multipolar" balance of global power
- ☒ promotion of traditional values / natalism (New! ✓)

## **What explains these shifts in Russia's grand strategy?**

Which of these do you think has been most impactful?

- external events (outside Russia)
- role of individual leaders
- economic developments
- technological changes
- domestic politics
- something else?

## **Additional questions**

How seriously did Russia seek acceptance by the West?

How willing was the West to accept Russia?

Does growth of military power make foreign policy more "aggressive"? Or is it the other way around?

# NEXT MEETING

*Backgrounder: Collecting Data on Russia* (Tuesday, Sep. 9)

- how to collect open-source data on a country that knows how to keep its secrets
- including:
  - official government statistics
  - human subjects (surveys, interviews)
  - text-as-data (archival documents, news and social media)
  - maps and geospatial data
  - other sources of publicly-accessible information