



# The Future of the Russian Military

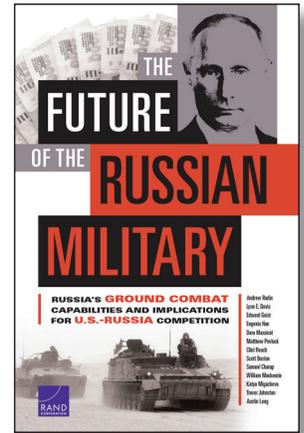
## Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition

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Since 2008 Russia's military forces have improved, enabling Russian military operations in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Syria. Researchers analyze the societal, political, economic, and demographic factors that undergird Russian military power. Based on these factors, they analyze how Russian ground combat capabilities will evolve. The challenge for the U.S. military will be to compete in different regions without provoking escalation.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How will Russian ground combat capabilities change over the next 20 years?
- How do political, economic, demographic, and social factors shape the development of Russia's military, and what are different future scenarios based on trends in these factors?
- How, then, can the United States prepare for these developments, to protect and pursue U.S. interests?



### KEY FINDINGS

Russia has a fairly coherent and consist strategy to use its military to achieve its security policy goals

- This strategy includes strategic deterrence, regional dominance, expeditionary operations, preparation in case of major war, and domestic stability.

Other key factors shaping Russia's ability to sustain Russian military forces have changed but show signs of remaining stable over the medium term

- The Russian economy faces protracted stagnation but is not on the brink of collapse.
- Defense spending is leveling out to around 3 percent of gross domestic product.
- Russian public attitudes show support for Russia's government, foreign policies, and the military.

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- Russia's demographics are stabilizing due to higher birth rates and continued in-migration.
- Russia can sustain the current size and mixed personnel system of its military.

Russia has pursued three strategies in developing its ground capabilities

- The first strategy is to retain and adapt Soviet-era systems (as in the case of the maneuver ground forces and indirect fires).
- The second strategy is to emulate and adapt Western structures while also drawing on legacy Soviet systems (as in the case of long-range strike capabilities and C4ISR systems).
- The third strategy is to asymmetrically counter foreign threats (as in the case of electronic warfare systems).

Russia will likely adjust its prioritization of ground combat capabilities based on changes in its political and economic future; across a range of scenarios, Russia will also likely invest in capabilities associated with strategic deterrence, regional dominance, and internal security

Perhaps the most dangerous possibility is a large-scale ground war with Russia; however, it is highly unlikely that Russia is preparing to initiate such a war given its security strategy, past decisions of which capabilities to prioritize, and economic constraints



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- To achieve U.S. interests, the U.S. military will need to compete with Russia across a range of different regions and situations, while limiting costs and the potential for escalation.
- Russia's pursuit of strategic deterrence and internal security are defensive but still pose a threat. To minimize the risk of unintended escalation, U.S. policymakers need to be attuned to Russian perceptions.
- Russia's pursuit of regional dominance poses a threat to U.S. partners, such as Georgia and Ukraine. Russia's ongoing expeditionary operations also could lead to a direct or indirect confrontation with Russia and its partners outside of Europe. The U.S. may be able to improve the quality of partner and allied security forces by strengthening niche areas, such as foreign area officers, units focused on providing security-force assistance, information operations, and military medical units.
- The U.S. military should prepare for a direct conflict with Russia by exploring ways to improve its own capabilities, including (1) investigating options to counter Russian indirect fires, long range strike, and C4ISR capabilities through dispersal, denial, and deception; cyber and electronic warfare; and air and missile defense; (2) bolstering communications; positioning, navigation, and timing; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and (3) developing multidomain battle and related concepts to address Russia's anti-access/area denial capabilities.

