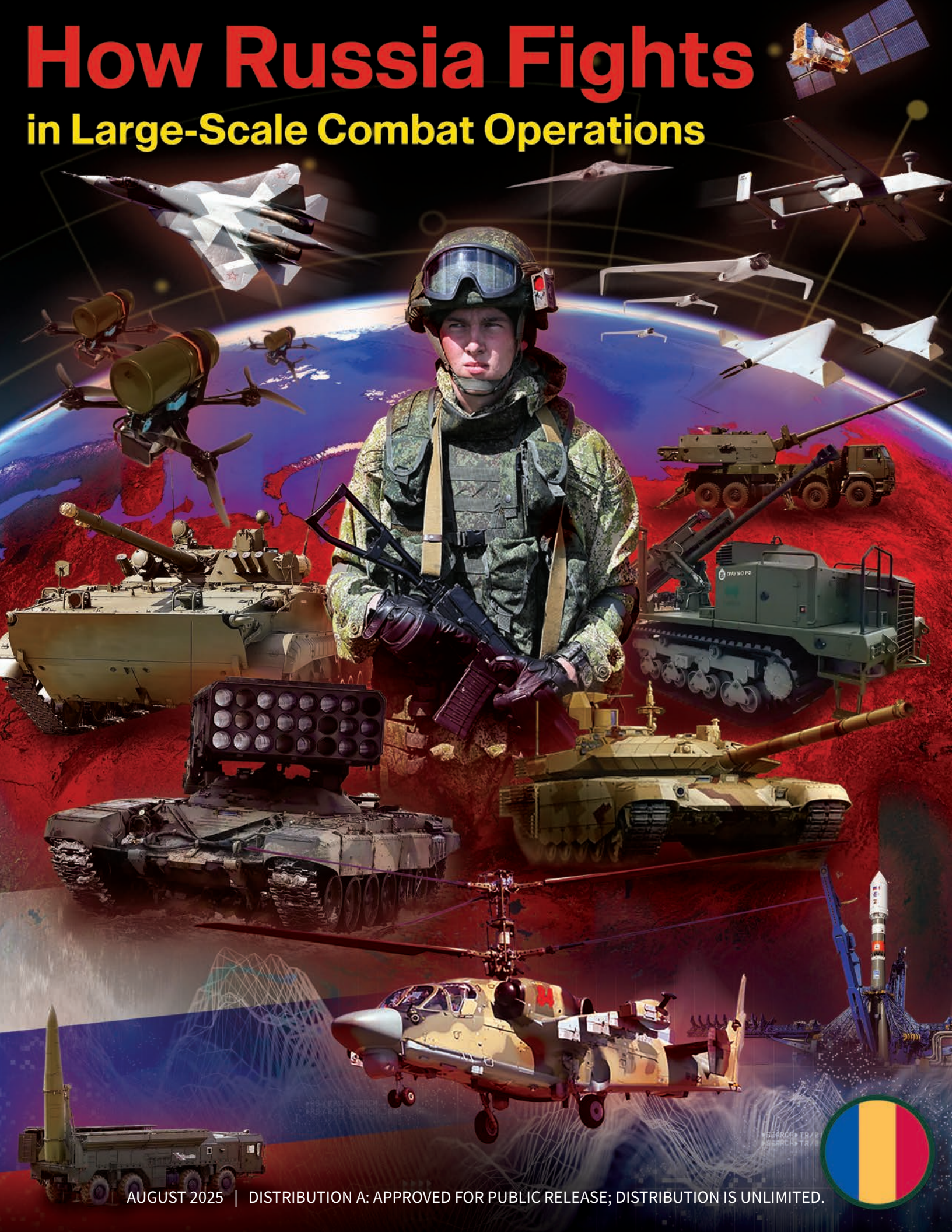
How Russia Fights

in Large-Scale Combat Operations



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Foreword

As Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), I am pleased to introduce this critical publication, *How Russia Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. It could not arrive at a better time, as we prepare to stand up the new Army Transformation and Training Command to face a rapidly evolving and increasingly dangerous Operational Environment. This document provides a comprehensive assessment of how Russia is likely to approach large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in the European theater over the next decade.

This document is the second in a series, following *How China Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, and builds upon two seminal TRADOC publications. The first is TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, *The Operational Environment 2024-2034: Large-Scale Combat Operations*, which addresses 12 key conditions we assess are present in LSCO and adds another five implications for the U.S. Army when contemplating LSCO. The second is Army Techniques Publication 7-100.1, *Russian Tactics*, which serves as a foundation for how Russian ground forces think and act in tactical operations.[1] *How Russia Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations* draws from Russia's operational art dating back several decades and more recent lessons learned in Ukraine, addressing how the leadership in Moscow sees Russia's security environment and how this threat perception shapes its way of warfare.

While China is identified as our pacing threat, Russia remains a near-peer competitor with a global intelligence apparatus, a robust nuclear deterrent, and a demonstrated willingness to use force—especially in the former Soviet republics. This document provides detailed insights into how Russia's armed forces will likely evolve doctrinally in the coming decade and how they will fight at echelon. Further, it is intended to inform U.S. Army professional military education, support curriculum development, and ensure our combat training centers incorporate relevant threat modeling into training scenarios.

I encourage all leaders, planners, and educators across the U.S. Army to engage with the content of this document and to consider its implications for doctrine, force structure, and training. Our ability to understand and anticipate the security challenges posed by Russia—especially in the complex and lethal context of LSCO—is essential to deterrence, maintaining overmatch, and ensuring victory in future conflicts.

Gary M. Brito
Commanding General, U.S. Army
Training and Doctrine Command

"To achieve victory, we must know the enemy.
Knowing the enemy starts with the Operational Environment."

Victory starts here!

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Executive Summary

How Russia Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations draws on historical precedent, operational lessons from the current war in Ukraine, and recent doctrinal developments to provide a comprehensive assessment of Russia's military strategy, key operational concepts, and the anticipated employment of its ground forces in a major theater conflict with NATO forces. Russia remains an acute challenge for the United States and the West, with a demonstrated willingness to use force, a robust capacity for rapid mobilization, and a vast nuclear arsenal. This document builds on foundational material presented in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, *The Operational Environment 2024-2034: Large-Scale Combat Operations*, and Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 7-100.1, *Russian Tactics*. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92 identifies the key Operational Environment (OE) conditions that will define large-scale combat operations (LSCO) for the foreseeable future, while ATP 7-100.1 provides insights into Russian Ground Forces tactics. Together, these resources offer a comprehensive foundation for understanding Russia's approach to conflict and its implications for U.S. Army training and education.

Russia's leadership perceives its security environment as one of perpetual strategic rivalry with the West, particularly the United States. The Kremlin sees NATO expansion, the U.S. military's presence in Europe, and Western political influence as existential threats to the Russian regime's survival. Moscow's military strategy reflects its pursuit of strategic depth, emphasis on territorial defense, and readiness to employ all means necessary to deter or defeat adversaries. While grounded in Soviet-era operational art—emphasizing mass, deception, and attrition—Russia's approach now integrates modern capabilities such as uncrewed systems, long-range precision fires, electronic warfare, and offensive cyber operations.

Ground forces are central to Russia's concepts for LSCO. Combined-arms armies, supported by powerful artillery and air defense assets, are designed to execute both positional defenses designed to draw in and attrit enemy forces as well as rapid offensives intended to seize operationally significant terrain. These formations operate within a command structure anchored by the Russian General Staff and five military districts, optimized for fighting near Russia's borders but capable of supporting operations across multiple theaters.

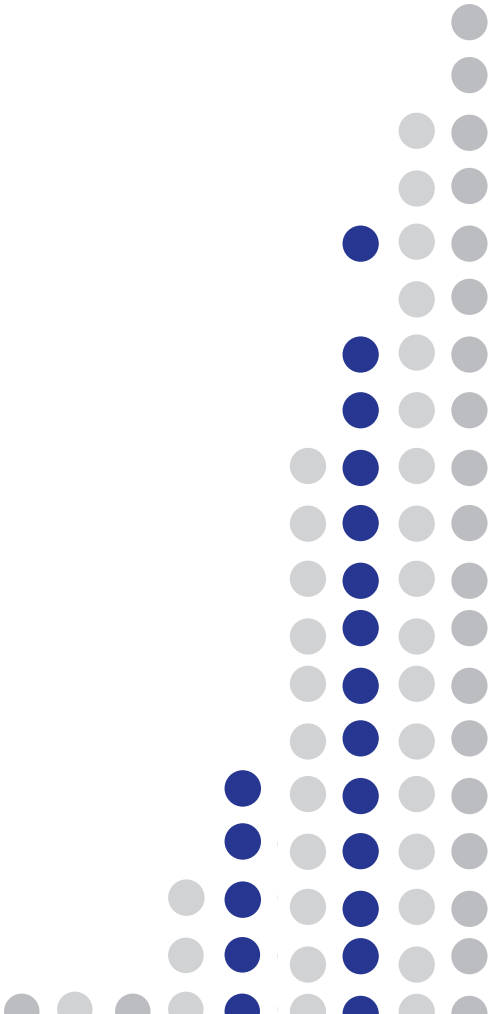
Over the next decade, the makeup of Russia's Ground Forces will be shaped by lessons from the war in Ukraine. The force is likely to emphasize division-based maneuver units supported by massed fires, upgraded artillery, and traditional armor, while integrating drones, electronic warfare, and improved command-and-control systems. Despite modernization efforts, Russia will continue to rely on conscription as it rebuilds its depleted officer corps and trains for LSCO. Chemical, thermobaric, and tactical nuclear weapons will remain embedded in its escalation framework.

Russian LSCO will most likely occur along its immediate frontiers, and Moscow views NATO forces on its Western borders as the greatest threat while also preparing for contingencies along its Pacific coastline and in the Arctic. In a Western campaign, Russia could launch surprise offensives against NATO Allies or partners, employing narrow axes of advance designed for speed, supported by aviation, long-range fires, and possibly nuclear first use. Alternatively, Russia may be forced into defensive operations, using the geography of its vast interior—forests, rivers, marshes, and harsh climate—to slow adversaries through attrition, deception, and maneuver defense.

Two hypothetical vignettes based on Russian doctrine and observations of the war in Ukraine explore how Russian combined-arms armies might conduct LSCO in both defensive and offensive campaigns against NATO.

In a positional defense, Russia would likely trade space for time, using depth, artillery, and UAVs to attrit and stretch enemy supply lines, thus creating opportunities for counteroffensives. In an attack scenario, Russian forces would seek to achieve surprise and overwhelm defenses through massed artillery, rapid advances on multiple axes, and airborne insertions against critical nodes. Both vignettes underscore Russia's continued reliance on heavy artillery, deception, and maneuver at scale, while also revealing the challenges it faces in sustaining offensive momentum, synchronizing fires and maneuver, and protecting massed formations on the modern battlefield.

Ultimately, this assessment reinforces the judgments in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, particularly regarding the complexity of the OE and the importance Russia places on its Ground Forces to protect its periphery. Moscow's emphasis on territorial defense, strategic depth, and coercive military posture continue to shape its force modernization and evolving approach to LSCO, which is grounded in historical precedent, lessons from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and its enduring rivalry with the West. For the U.S. Army, this means preparing for the reality of fighting in a battlespace marked by contested electromagnetic environments, near-peer artillery duels, and adversary resilience enabled by mobilization and an increasingly self-sufficient defense-industrial base. This preparation is vital not only for deterring Russian aggression but also for ensuring victory in any potential land conflict in the European theater.



Introduction

The prospect of LSCO against a peer or near-peer adversary is the most complex and lethal challenge the U.S. Army faces. The threat posed by Russia provides a case in point, given its ongoing military operations in Ukraine, the massive size and force structure of its military, and its proclivity for conducting warfare below the threshold of armed conflict. Whereas China is the United States' designated pacing threat, the threat from Russia is in some ways more immediate, proximate, and direct. The Kremlin seeks to challenge the existing Western-led international order and to restore its influence over much of the former Soviet Union, as evidenced by its 2014 and 2022 invasions of Ukraine. Russia has and will continue to invest heavily in restoring its depleted military capacity and has retooled its ability to carry out sophisticated asymmetric cyberattacks, electronic warfare, information operations, and acts of sabotage against its adversaries. At the operational level, Russia is prone to use a mix of accurate, massed fires and precision strikes.

This paper is the second in a series—following a companion paper focused on China—that builds upon the work presented in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, *The Operational Environment 2024-2034: Large-Scale Combat Operations*. That publication, disseminated in December 2024, established the 12 key Operational Envirnoment (OE) conditions of modern LSCO. This paper addresses these LSCO conditions as they apply to Russia throughout the text, as well as summarizes the key points in a convenient one-page reference aid. Additionally, this paper is divided into sections that provide an analysis of the Kremlin's security perceptions, Russia's approach to conflict, the Russian Ground Forces' organization and warfighting capabilities, and the implications for future LSCO of Russia's so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine.[a]

This paper advances work presented in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 7-100.1, *Russian Tactics*, and incorporates current and postulated campaign scenarios to understand conditions and implications of Russian LSCO. It should be noted that the analysis is an informed interpretation of what Russia's LSCO might resemble over the next decade, not Russia's own vision of its force structure or capabilities. While ATP 7-100.1 explains how Russian ground forces might operate at the brigade and battalion echelons, it does not address how echelons above brigade level would operate. This paper will fill that gap by describing how Russia might conduct LSCO against another great power, such as the United States.

This document is the result of TRADOC analysts' continuous study of Russia and its military forces. This work also stems from routine collaboration across the Army Intelligence and Security Enterprise, as well as with the Intelligence Community and NATO Allies. TRADOC would like to give special thanks to the U.S. Army Futures Command, National Ground Intelligence Center, U.S. Army Europe and Africa, and 66th Military Intelligence Brigade for their support in this effort.

a We assume that Russia's conduct of its war in Ukraine offers our best insight into how Russia is likely to fight future conflicts involving LSCO. However, it is important to note that this conflict is not fully representative of how Russia would fight against other adversaries, particularly the United States or NATO Allies.

Russia's View of Its Security Environment

Russia views the OE through a lens of perpetual strategic rivalry with the West, particularly the United States. Russia's perceived encirclement by NATO, internal stability, and historical regional hegemony are central to this perspective. Reflecting its geopolitical isolation from the West, Russia's national security priorities are threefold: to maintain regime stability, defend its borders, and reinforce its role as a great power.

Russia seeks "strategic depth" by maintaining influence in its so-called "near abroad" of former Soviet satellite states to serve as buffers against Western encroachment. Russia's approach to the post-Soviet space reflects its desire to maintain dominance along its periphery in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia using a combination of economic pressure, political influence, information campaigns, and military force. To this end, Russia has sought to intervene in the national elections of its neighbors, including Moldova, Georgia, and most recently Romania.

Russian leaders believe that the international order is shifting toward multipolarity and away from being dominated by the United States. Russia represents itself as a global power but has limited ability to project power beyond its immediate region. President Putin made a near-record

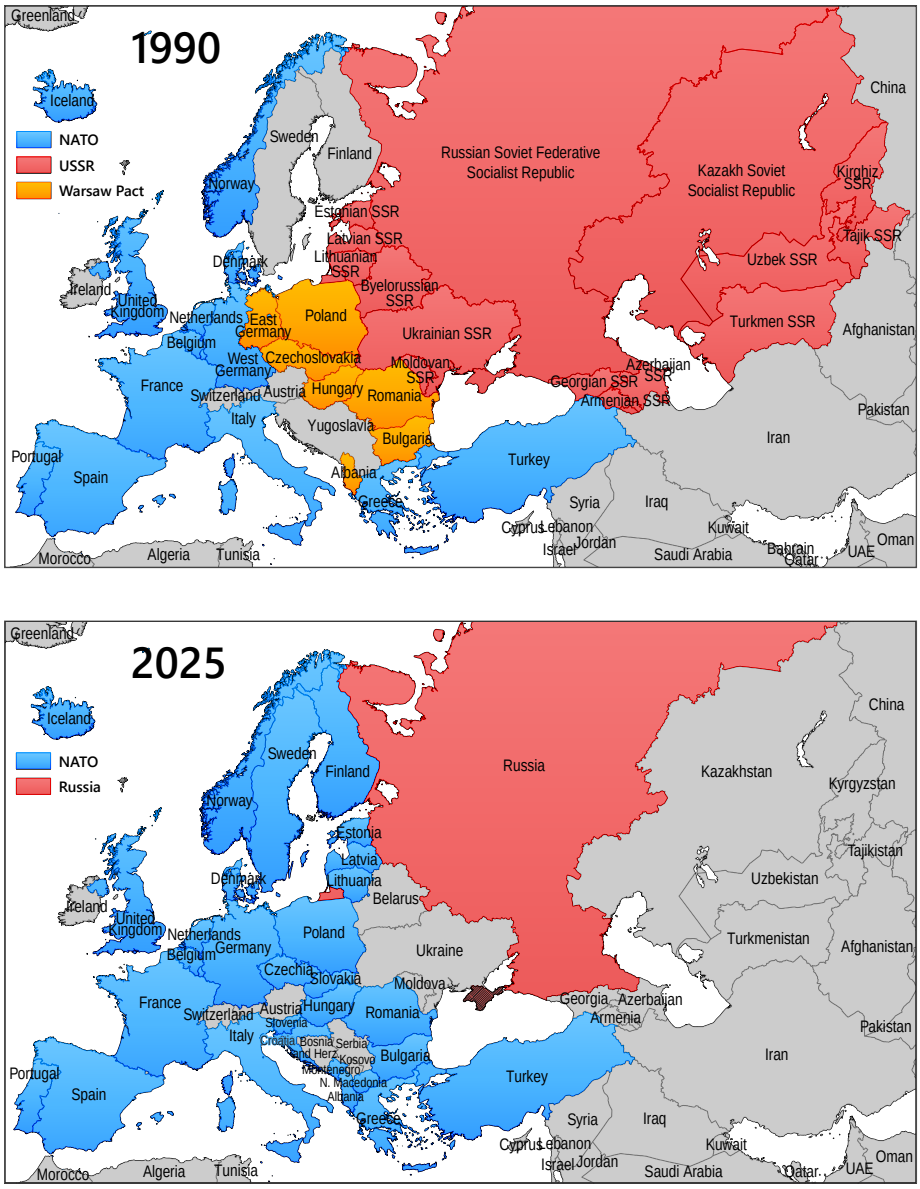


Figure 1: NATO's gradual expansion to the east and north have significantly shaped Russia's perceptions of its security environment. (Source: TRADOC G-2)

number of foreign visits in 2024,[2] likely to demonstrate that Russia was not isolated. Russia relies heavily on regional security bodies like the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization to extend its influence. It has also reoriented itself toward Asia by forging closer alliances with China, Iran, and North Korea. Russia, too, has expanded its influence across large swaths of the Global South to prop up pro-Kremlin regimes and exploit them for resources, in part as a way to evade Western sanctions. Russia's military intervention in 2015 on behalf of the former Syrian regime, as well as Russia's efforts to expand its influence in Africa using private military companies (PMCs), illustrate both the breadth of the Kremlin's ambitions and the limits of its power.

The Kremlin approaches its foreign policy chiefly in zero-sum terms, implying the need to reduce the power of the United States and its NATO Allies. Russia perceives NATO expansion, U.S. military deployments in Europe, and Western financial and military support for Ukraine as direct threats. As such, Russia seeks to deter the United States and NATO through ramped-up military spending, nuclear capabilities, and strategic deployments. Simultaneously, Russia prioritizes economic nationalism to withstand Western sanctions, focusing on greater self-sufficiency, diversification, and alternative trade partnerships. Working with China, Russia has sought to weaken the U.S. dollar and reduce dependence on it in global financial markets.[3]

Russia's Approach to Conflict

Figure 2: Russia's territory comprises 10 percent of Earth's land surface, spanning 11 time zones across two continents and bordering three oceans. (Source: TRADOC G-2)

Russia's strategy is shaped by its perception of external threats, its need for strategic depth, and its ambition to maintain great-power status. It integrates what it refers to as operational art with deterrence, hybrid warfare, and force transformation and reform to achieve its security objectives.

Russian Strategy

Russia's grand strategy reflects its view of itself as a historic defender of a greater civilization, as well as a deep-seated sense of insecurity stemming from a long history of invasions by neighboring powers. These include invasions by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1598-1613), Napoleonic France (1812), and Nazi Germany (1941-43).[4] Russia's threat perception is reinforced by its geography: the Russian landmass spans 11 time zones and shares borders with several other current and historical great powers. Russia's objective of restoring an idealized *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) is reflected in its 2021 National Security Strategy, which calls for the "formation of new architecture, rules and principles of the world order," placing sovereignty, independence, the territorial integrity of Russia, the security and rights of its citizens abroad, and the protection of its spiritual and moral foundations at the core of its foreign policy.[5]

Russia's grand strategy is manifest in an expansionist military strategy within—and occasionally beyond—its near abroad. Its invasion of Ukraine, beginning in 2022, represents the most recent example of Russia's expansionism in the name of its self-appointed role as a defender of all ethnic Russians. This has become a grinding war of attrition resulting in more than 800,000 Russian casualties throughout more than three years of sustained fighting. Moreover, it is only the latest in a series of Russia's conventional military interventions—Syria in 2015, Crimea and the Donbas regions of Ukraine in 2014, and Georgia in 2008—intended to shore up its geostrategic position and defend its interests.

Russia's military is the Kremlin's key instrument for achieving its security objectives, complemented as necessary by economic coercion, information operations, and other means. Russia uses military force to coerce, destabilize, and in some cases directly occupy neighboring states. Russia maintains protracted and 'frozen' conflicts along its periphery, such as in Moldova's breakaway Transnistria region and the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan, often deploying soldiers under the guise of peacekeeping operations.[6] Russia's leadership has increasingly militarized Russian society, using the military buildup to continue waging war in Ukraine and patriotic rhetoric to bolster domestic support. Russian leaders portray conflicts like the one in Ukraine as part of a broader civilizational struggle against the West.[7] Since 2022, the Kremlin has assumed greater control over the country's security apparatus, including the military, intelligence services, and PMCs (e.g., the Wagner Group, Redut, etc.) to ensure the regime's survival and project strength overseas. The Kremlin suppresses political opposition, limits free press, and quells popular dissent.

Operational Art

The closest Russian term to "LSCO" is "operational art," reflecting how Russian military definitions, and the broader military thought behind them, differ from Western perspectives. The U.S. Army defines LSCO as "extensive joint combat operations in terms of scope and size of forces committed, conducted as a campaign aimed at achieving operational and strategic objectives."[8] For the Russian military, combat is a tactical term (squad through division) and operations is an operational term (armies and fronts). Thus, operational art involves conducting operations by large units and occupies a mode of thinking between strategy and tactics.[9] Related Russian terms include "large-scale war," meaning conflicts between coalitions demanding full resource mobilization, and "regional war," as Russia would likely classify the Ukraine conflict.[10]

Evolution of Russian Military Thinking

Russian military development has always been more evolutionary than revolutionary, building on existing doctrines, structures, and technologies rather than more radical modernization. During the Cold War, the Red Army's emphasis was on deep battle, maneuver warfare, and massed firepower—all concepts still relevant today. However, the Russian military has now integrated these concepts with modern multidomain warfare elements—including cyber operations, EW, information operations, and precision strikes—within a largely Soviet-era structure. For example, Russia's emphasis on information warfare is an evolution of Soviet-style deception, and its use of PMCs echoes Soviet advisory roles in other countries. While Russian military decisionmaking remains centralized, limited command decentralization is evident in Russia's evolving approach to the Ukraine conflict following its initial setbacks. This incrementalism extends to equipment as well; Russia prefers upgrading existing platforms to developing entirely new systems as a way to preserve continuity and reduce costs. Russia also continues to integrate unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and longer-range precision weapons to augment artillery, evolving its firepower-centric approach.

Deterrence

Strategic deterrence is at the heart of Russia's military doctrine, with its nuclear arsenal—the world's largest—serving as the ultimate guarantor of its security. Russia still relies on survivable deterrence based on its nuclear triad of land-based missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers. Moreover, Russia has developed new hypersonic missiles that potentially can deliver nuclear weapons with improved speed, maneuverability, and ability to overcome missile defenses.

Figure 3: Urban Combat in Ukraine's Donbas
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Russian_forces_in_the_Russo-Ukrainian_War#/media/File:Vostok_group_2.jpg)

Russia's nuclear doctrine has evolved beyond the Soviet-era focus on strategic level of war to include the operational level as well. Russian leaders perceive their adversaries as weak, casualty averse, and unwilling to escalate in the event of a nuclear showdown, and the Kremlin maintains policies such as its "escalate to deescalate" concept to introduce nonstrategic nuclear weapons onto the battlefield.[11] In 2000, Russia revised its doctrine to reserve the right to use nuclear weapons not just "in case of a threat to the existence of the Russian Federation" but also "to repulse armed aggression, if all other means of resolving the crisis have been exhausted."[12] Russia's first-use of nuclear weapons may be directed against a nonnuclear member of NATO to prevent nuclear retaliation by NATO and create a rift between NATO's nuclear and nonnuclear members. Russian political and military leaders often use nuclear saber rattling to deter or limit NATO members' conventional military responses.

Hybrid Warfare

Russia emphasizes hybrid warfare, an evolution of Soviet-era "active measures," which blends conventional military operations with cyber capabilities, disinformation, sabotage, and the use of proxy forces.[13] Russian leaders view cyber operations and influence campaigns as integral to stoking domestic political divisions in Western countries, eroding NATO unity, and weakening the rules-based international order. Russia's use of proxies can include a wide variety of combatants, including PMCs, Chechen mercenaries, or even Russian soldiers wearing unmarked uniforms like the so-called "little green men" who led Russia's takeover of Crimea. Russia successfully combined these hybrid warfare elements with conventional military operations during its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in Russia's annexation of Crimea and contested control of the Donbas.

Force Transformation and Reform

Russia recognizes its conventional military weaknesses and seeks to improve its force projection and create asymmetric advantages whenever possible to counterbalance NATO's military superiority. Its investments in precision-guided munitions, air defense systems, EW capabilities, and hypersonic weapons aim to challenge Western technological advantages. Rather than serve as a distraction, the Russia-Ukraine war has reportedly increased Russia's demand and funding for these technologies. Russia has also instituted reforms to professionalize its conventional forces and develop rapid-reaction units, enhancing its ability to engage in limited, high-intensity conflicts near its borders.

Understanding the Scale of Modern LSCO With Russia

World War II provides a crucial framework for understanding LSCO and potential future conflicts because the Soviet Union, United States, and other Allied Powers relied on mass conscription and fought an attritional war against the Axis Powers. During World War II, the Soviet Union fielded more than 500 divisions, fighting primarily on its own territory and reconstituting units at 30-percent strength. The United States deployed 91 larger, but comparably powerful, divisions, rotating them out for replenishment well before that threshold. The United States also maintained a larger support structure due to fighting in multiple theaters. The Soviet Union, with a population of about 170 million, suffered approximately 10.7 million military deaths (roughly 6 percent of the total population), plus substantial civilian losses. By contrast, the United States, with a population of about 135 million, lost 416,800 military personnel (roughly 0.3 percent of the total population). Today, Russia's population is only about 144 million compared to a U.S. population of about 335 million, suggesting hypothetical modern LSCO between Russia and the United States and their allies would likely involve large, conscript-based forces and protracted conflict following initial heavy losses.

Russian Ground Forces

Russia's control of its Ground Forces in LSCO starts with the General Staff and extends through its military districts to the armies and commands. The Ground Forces are the primary player in the Russian way of war and are organized and trained for LSCO with other forms of combat, such as regional war, guerrilla war, and peace enforcement. Russian aerospace, naval, nuclear delivery, and airborne forces support the Ground Forces.

Russian General Staff

Russia's military has a professional General Staff composed of carefully selected officers who conduct operational planning.[b] These officers wear service uniforms with General Staff insignia, rather than branch-specific insignia, to discourage parochialism. Selected in their 10th to 12th year of service, these officers graduate from the highly competitive two-year General Staff Academy course and spend the duration of their careers as General Staff professionals whose focus is on territorial defense, not expeditionary efforts. Officers who graduate from the General Staff Academy do not automatically serve as career General Staff officers. Maneuver commanders may opt to continue in the traditional command track, and those who reach the highest levels will serve several assignments in the General Staff and may rise to become the Chief of the General Staff.

The Russian Chief of the General Staff works directly for the Ministry of Defense and interacts with the Joint Strategic Command, military districts, and centrally controlled forces, which direct their subordinate operational and tactical elements. General Staff officers serve in Moscow, in military districts, combined-arms armies, fleets, and high-level aerospace and strategic nuclear forces commands. The General Staff uses a tailored, analytical approach to forecasting, trend analysis, correlation of forces and means, and determining forms and methods.

The Russian General Staff provides the long-term planning, intelligence analysis, transportation planning, capabilities development, and procurement decisions usually conducted by the defense ministries and unified commands in other countries.

The General Staff reportedly was sidelined by President Putin's intelligence advisers during the initial planning for Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which may explain many of the initial failures.[14] Despite key differences in the circumstances, the invasion was based on Russia's successful Prague and Kabul takedowns during the Cold War.[15] In Ukraine, Russian forces invaded on five operational axes yet had logistics in place for only two. Additionally, Russian forces invaded at only 60-percent strength in a bid to decapitate the government in Kyiv and keep Ukraine's army in barracks. Although the Russian airborne captured Hostomel airbase, where Ukraine's General Staff and government control bunker are housed, these elements were not there.

b Strategic planning is a function of the Russian Security Council, an interministerial body composed of high-level security and intelligence officials. The Chief of the General Staff is a member.

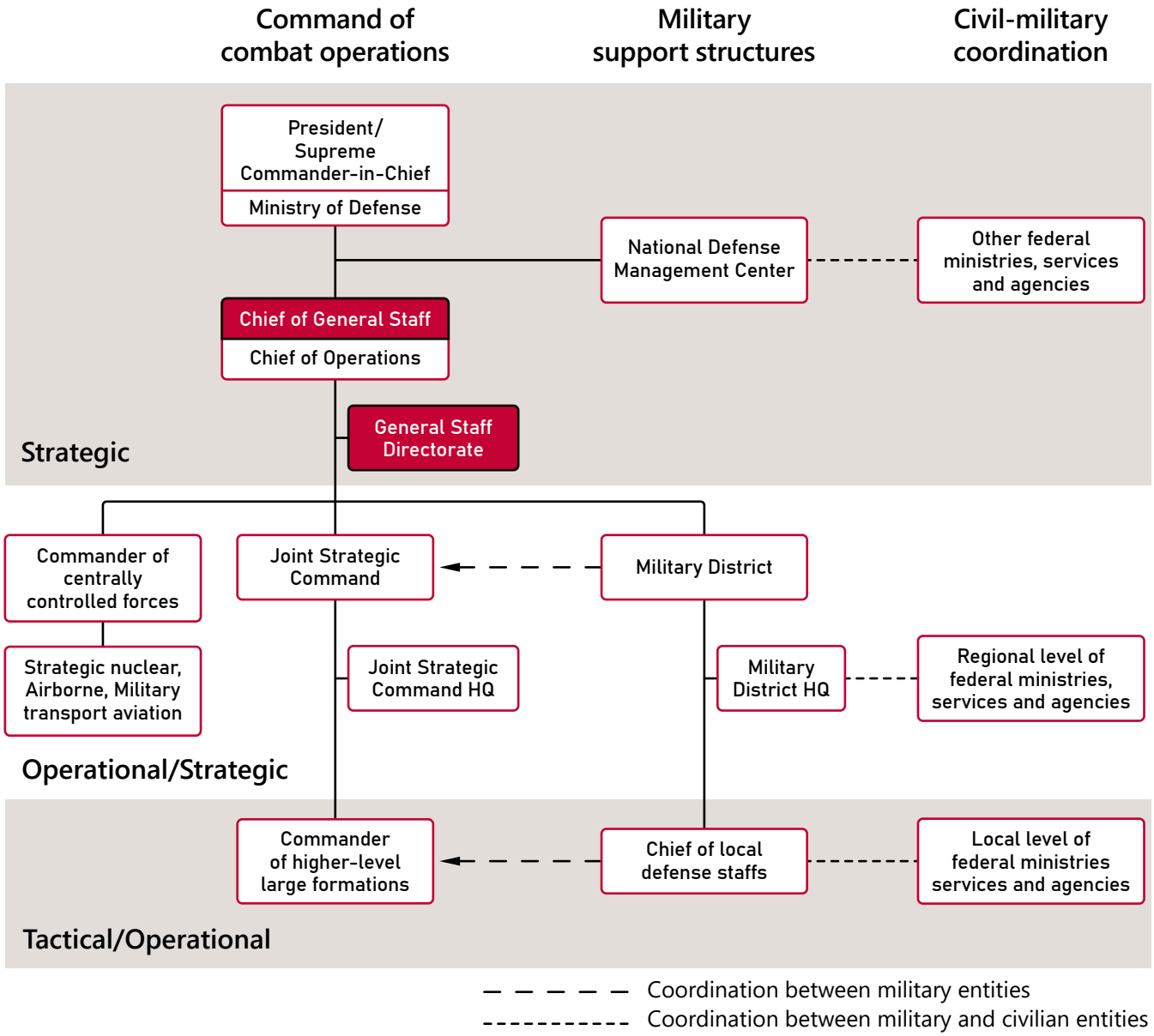


Figure 4: Organizational Chart of Assessed Chain of Command for Russian Combat Operations (Source: TRADOC G-2)

Russia's Military Districts

Russia reorganized its military districts in late 2023 to add two new districts in Moscow and Leningrad, ostensibly in response to NATO's expansion to include Finland and Sweden, which doubled the Western alliance's shared border with Russia.[16] All five of Russia's military districts—which also include the Southern, Central, and Eastern districts—serve as operational/strategic commands led by ground force commanders, with ground/air headquarters for combined-arms and tank armies, air force commands, and air defense commands. Naval fleets and flotillas, however, are under the direct command of the separate Naval Headquarters in Saint Petersburg. Military districts are responsible for drawing on local pools of manpower to organize groupings of forces, pre-conscription training, spring and fall conscription, mobilization, military farms, transport, logistical support, replenishment, and support for retired personnel. Forces from all military districts have fought in Ukraine, which has spread combat experience throughout the force and helped identify 'up and comers' for future advancement.

Figure 5: Present-day Russian military districts were reorganized in response to NATO expansion. (Source: TRADOC G-2)

Structure of Russian Ground Forces

The combined-arms army, or army group, is Russia's operational-level command, and it serves as the intermediate echelon between the country's military districts. Army groups can fight independently, with other army groups, or push capabilities down to divisions and brigades.[c] The army group system was developed during World War II, when the echelons of corps and armies merged. In that war, the Soviet Union combined army groups into fronts, which remains a possibility for future Russian LSCO as well. Although there is currently no uniform set of capabilities or assets that army groups possess, the Ground Forces may be moving toward establishing such a standard for each army group. In general, army groups have several motorized rifle or tank divisions and brigades; headquarters, artillery, logistics, air defense, reconnaissance, and pontoon bridge brigades; an engineering regiment; and a nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) defense regiment. Ground Forces UAS regiments may be added to military districts, which could attach these to army groups. During operations, the army group detaches assets to support maneuver units. Logistics brigades feed, fuel, supply, and maintain the maneuver divisions and brigades, and the artillery and multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) brigades detach assets to strengthen division and brigade artillery groups.[17]

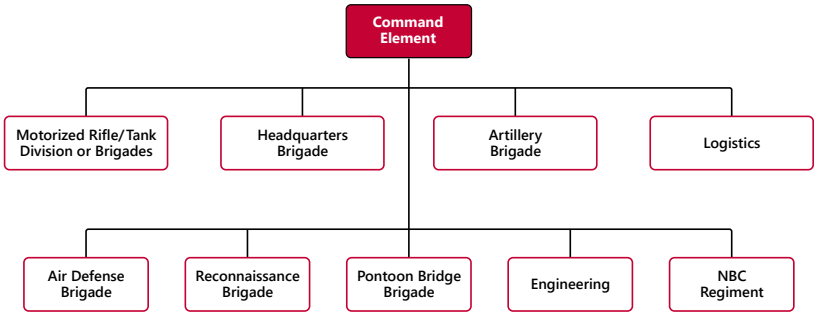


Figure 6: Russian Ground Forces Group Army Structure (Source: TRADOC G-2)

The Russian Ground Forces also includes corps. However, these corps are primarily Ground Forces and Naval Infantry brigades formed as part of a naval fleet along with coastal defense units. There are plans to expand these brigades into divisions, but the level of priority Moscow places on this change is unknown.[18] One Ground Forces corps is stationed in the Eastern Military District as an island defense formation.

c The Russian Ground Forces are currently converting from a brigade-based force back to a primarily division-based force. This transition is phased to not disrupt the ongoing fight in Ukraine and to maintain force readiness, training standards, and equipment integration throughout the process.

Russian Ground Forces Over the Next Decade

The way ahead for Russia's ground forces will be determined, in part, by the lessons and outcomes stemming from today's war in Ukraine. Russia will likely be recovering from the political, military, and economic effects of its indirect confrontation with NATO in Ukraine for much of the next 10 years.

Military Strength and Formations

During the Cold War, the peacetime Soviet military fielded 5 million personnel, but the Russian military now intends to field only 1.5 million soldiers after the war in Ukraine winds down.[19] Should Russia reimplement conscription for two-year tours, it will probably pay major dividends in military readiness because brigades and divisions will be able to conduct a single integrated training cycle with new conscripts arriving as a group every six months. The regiment-based division will have regained prominence as the primary maneuver ground force, while brigades will be garrisoned in select areas for secondary efforts. The emphasis of training will likely be on LSCO, including river crossings, penetration of deeply integrated defenses, and deep operations.

Fires

Russian artillery has received a major boost during the Ukraine war and will continue its dominant role of providing rapid, highly maneuverable mass fires to destroy hectares while precision fires are delivered as required on select targets. Russia's 2S235 Koalitsiya 152-mm self-propelled howitzer will begin to replace older howitzers in operational-level field artillery brigades as well as in select motorized rifle divisions, tank divisions, and brigades, although many of the older systems will remain. The fighting in Ukraine ensured that Russian self-propelled guns now fire and move quickly to escape counterbattery fire. There will still be towed artillery pieces in artillery divisions and war stores primarily in the Eastern and Central Military Districts. Russia aspires to field a 152-mm towed artillery piece that is self-loading and remotely adjusted and fired. Overall, Russia is expanding from one heavy artillery brigade—equipped with 2S7 203-mm cannons and 2S4 240-mm self-propelled mortars—to one per military district—for a total of five. In the longer term, the NATO-facing Moscow, Leningrad, and Southern Military Districts will likely be given priority to receive any additional brigade artillery elements.[20] Additionally, artillery divisions (cannon and rocket artillery brigades) are planned for all five districts.[d] Russia is also upgrading multiple rocket launcher (MRL) systems and developing unmanned ground vehicles to reload MRL systems. Russia's fires community already features UAS-delivered and loitering munitions. Russian combat aircraft now normally use munitions guided by positioning, navigation, and timing to deliver devastating fires from behind the line of contact to avoid air defenses. Tactical nuclear weapon delivery will remain an artillery mission, primarily using the proven Iskander missile system.

d The heavy artillery brigades may be incorporated into the military districts' artillery divisions along with multiple cannon and rocket artillery brigades.

Leadership

Russia's initial heavy losses of officers in its war with Ukraine—the result of going in understrength and infantry-light—is a major long-term military problem. Lieutenants take five years to produce, while seasoned officers require additional time. As a result, Russian officers were frequently promoted early to jobs that required more experience, and average officers were promoted to senior positions out of necessity. To address this problem, Russia reopened seven military academies, shuttered after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that are now working to capacity. Despite continuing to experience high casualty rates among its officers, the Russian military, particularly the Ground Forces, has managed to slow the officer promotion rate, leading to a current officer corps that is better balanced than it was early in the Ukraine war. Russia has no desire to create a long-term Western-style noncommissioned officer corps, without which Russian officers will continue to lead from the front.

Movement and Maneuver

Tanks and armored vehicles will remain the Russian Ground Forces' maneuver force. Though new models are being introduced, improved Soviet-era T-90 tanks, as well as BMP-3s, BTR-82As, and BTR-90s armored vehicles are still in full production and will likely remain so for the coming decade. Russian combat vehicles will remain smaller and lighter than their Western counterparts, while Russian Ground Forces' squads and platoons will remain smaller but more heavily armed than their Western counterparts. Movement and maneuver will be affected by some evolving developments—for example, tactical EW and small UAS already have a substantially increased role in the Russian Ground Forces with operators now having their own branch.

The Ground Forces, especially company-grade officers, will need to learn or relearn LSCO skills and practices because the ones learned in Ukraine will not all apply. The Russian battle drills for deployment dating to before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine—from assembly areas or from the march to the attack—will continue to be adjusted for terrain and enemy force size. However, scouts or platoons may precede the main body based on Ukraine combat experience. The assault detachment, which Russia resurrected from its World War II experience and used widely in Ukraine, may remain as part of the Ground Forces' table of organization and equipment (TO&E) or may be resurrected again during wartime. Russian Ground Forces' skills for river crossings and breaching defensive lines during LSCO will require particular effort. The vehicle-swimming and fording capability of newer systems is being improved, while bridging systems are undergoing upgrades. Improved entrenching systems are under development for engineer forces but are less of a priority than upgrading artillery and maneuver systems.

Command and Control

The Russian Ground Forces are making significant advancements in streamlining their automated command-and-control (C2) system. Tactical planning will be based on a series of standard rehearsed maneuver and battle drills that allow Russian commanders to make rapid decisions and adjustments on the fly.[21] Russian commanders will further rely on mathematical determinations of the outcome of combat, based on computer-assisted

Figure 7: BMP-3 (Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin, https://www.vitalykuzmin.su/Military/ARMY-2021-Demonstration/i-GMdhjpg/A, Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND)

calculations of the correlation of forces and means. Army headquarters will remain the center of planning and coordinating combined-arms operations, while subordinate elements will be responsible for executing directed action plans.

Protection

The goal of a Russian defense is that it will deflect attacks by superior enemy forces; inflict maximum losses; retain important areas, objectives, and key terrain; and create favorable conditions to conduct an offensive. The key requirement for a defense will remain that it is stable and active with in-depth echelonment, as well as antitank, air defense, and anti-air-assault capabilities. It will keep the enemy under constant fire, create unfavorable conditions for the enemy offensive, enable Russian maneuver, and allow Russia to conduct decisive counterattacks. It may be a positional or maneuver defense depending on the mission.

Special Weapons

Over the next decade, Russia's use of special weapons—including chemical and nuclear weapons—is unlikely to change from its present approach. Russia has developed systems and methods for employing chemical weapons, and it has probably trained for chemical defense and decontamination more than other large armies. This will give Russian Ground Forces a decided initial advantage if they use chemical weapons first against a foe with a lesser chemical strike or defense capability. Whether Russia will use biological weapons is murkier—it has the capability but appears to be concerned about containment of pathogens.[22] Russia will likely use strategic nuclear weapons in the event of a large-scale invasion of Russian territory. Should Russia invade another country, it may use tactical nuclear weapons initially "to escalate in order to deescalate." Russia has also led the way in developing thermobaric weapons, which have the effect of a tactical nuclear strike without radioactive contamination.

Figure 8: Russian Iskander-M SRBM (Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin, https://www.vitalykuzmin.su/Military/ARMY-2018-Demonstration-part-2/i-t5MHQGr, Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND)

Russia's Border Defense Strategy

Since the Russian military is primarily a ground force designed to protect the country's borders, Russian LSCO will most likely be fought near its immediate borders. Russia views NATO, primarily located on its western border, as the biggest threat to its territorial integrity. In the west, Russia borders several NATO Allies as well as a former Soviet republic and aspiring NATO member state in Ukraine. Russia's southern border consists of various approaches, including from the Black Sea and Central Asia. Russia's eastern flank involves more than 4,500 kilometers of Pacific Ocean coastline and the U.S. allies of Japan and South Korea, while vast Arctic approaches from the north and northeast are exposed to the United States and NATO Allies via Canada, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

Western Campaign

Russia's western border remains an active conflict zone as its war with Ukraine carries on into its fourth year. Additionally, Russia's northwest border in the Baltic region is one of the continent's key flashpoints given that NATO members Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland sit exposed on rolling heavily wooded terrain hemmed in by the Baltic Sea and Kaliningrad and lack the strategic depth to withstand a frontal assault by Russian forces. Russian geography facing NATO in the west features much open ground conducive to maneuver warfare as part of LSCO; however, there are also serious hindrances that would contribute to canalization of forces. Broad north-south rivers intersect the terrain, while the Pripet marshes divide any logical major operational advance. Vast, unbroken forests stretch across the land. The Russian winter is long and formidable. The road network is underdeveloped, and parts are impassable during the spring thaw and autumn flooding. Many road bridges will support the weight of Russian tanks, but not NATO tanks. The railway system, which is a primary means of transport, runs on a different gauge track than those in NATO countries.

If western Russia is invaded, its ground forces will carry the main fight supported by aviation, naval, nuclear-delivery, and airborne forces. Spetsnaz teams will use UAS to scout the enemy force for nuclear weapons, major headquarters and communications nodes, as well as locations of enemy fuel and ammunition dumps. Rail traffic will be primarily military, moving necessary forces and supplies to designated offload sites. National Guard forces will participate in urban defense, search for enemy special forces, and may organize guerrilla forces in the enemy rear areas.[e] Russia's early first-use of nuclear weapons is highly likely to repel or deter any invasion of Russia. Russian forces can be expected to conduct operational and tactical communications over the extensive underground fiber-optic system that honeycombs much of the country's western region and parallels highways. They will disable Western satellite communications and cellphone usage as long as Russian communications remain functional.

Russian ground forces will not immediately constitute a wide contiguous defensive line; rather, they will establish strong points at key or commanding points. Forward

e The Russian National Guard is the full-time national gendarmerie and internal military security force. It is a trained, full-time combat force of some 340,000 personnel organized into battalions and brigades directly controlled by the president. It is primarily a mounted light infantry force designed for combatting civil unrest, but it did participate in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Urban defense is an expected National Guard mission.

regimental detachments will conduct initial ground force defenses up to 30 kilometers from the first integrated defenses. Bridges, ferries and crossing sites will be prepared for destruction. Open flanks will be covered by difficult terrain, reserves, counterstrikes and counterattacks, and artillery. Maneuver defense will dominate in select sectors designed to draw the enemy into difficult terrain, such as deep forests, swamps, mountains, or cities. Senior commanders will own a range of deep-strike artillery and missiles that they will use at their discretion to destroy vital enemy targets. Russian forces may consider causing deliberate flooding or possibly the contamination of key areas with chemical or biological agents. The combat will be designed to slow the enemy, attrit its forces, exhaust its supplies, and harass its rear areas.

Ukraine's offensive in Russia's Kursk region beginning in August 2024 provides a useful case study of Russian territorial defense in its western territory, albeit on a smaller scale than what Russia would face from an adversary such as NATO. The operation was an attempt to force Russia to withdraw forces from Ukraine to combat the Ukrainian occupation of Russian territory. Russia chose to contain the Ukrainian force and destroy it through attrition, retaking portions of Kursk piecemeal while building strength for a counteroffensive. Russia deployed conscripted forces that had been withheld from the conflict in Ukraine, as well as reserve forces and forces that had been withdrawn from Ukraine for reconstitution. Russia later supplemented these forces with a North Korean contingent. Ukrainian forces withdrew under pressure in March 2025 without Russia ever withdrawing forces deployed in Ukraine to fight in Kursk.

Southern Campaign

Russia's southern border consists of several diverse approaches, including from the Black Sea, Central Asia, Mongolia, and China. The Kremlin views control of the Black Sea as essential for Russian security, as reflected by the 12 wars it fought with Turkey between the 16th and 20th centuries and its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Russia considers the Central Asian approaches to be its secondary concern following the loss of these states when the Soviet Union dissolved. As a result, Russia continues to try to knit a patchwork of pacts and alliances, including through the Collective Security Treaty Organization, to reestablish a buffer zone on its southern flank as a complement to the region's wide rivers, rugged mountains, vast forests, and underdeveloped road networks. Perhaps of lesser concern, Russia shares a 3,485-km long border with Mongolia and a 4,209-km border with China. Though both are sparsely populated, the latter border has been the site of historical animosity that could reignite if China's regional ambitions continue to grow over the next decade.

Pacific Campaign

The sparsely populated Russian Far East is rich in natural resources and remains a potential hotspot for conflict given the mix of potential adversaries of Russia, including Japan and South Korea, as well as sometimes problematic partners, such as China and North Korea. Russia maintains four combined-arms armies, an army corps, and its Pacific Fleet in its Eastern Military District, which encompasses this Pacific region. Half of Russia's nuclear-armed submarines are based in the Pacific Fleet. The road network in the Russian Far East is limited, and rail and water transport provide most of the transportation.

Arctic Campaign

For Russia, the Arctic presents a dual challenge given its two different approaches from the east and north. Russia's Eastern Military District controls the near-Arctic approach from Alaska westward across the Bering Sea toward the Northern Sea Route, where Russia perceives the United States and Canada to be the primary threats. Russia's Northern Sea Fleet and Leningrad Military District control the western Barents Sea approach to the Northern Sea Route, where Russia perceives the United States, Norway, Sweden, and Finland to be the primary threats.

The Arctic is vital to Russia's extraction of its vast natural resources, and the northern ice melt is providing increased access to energy, minerals, and fishing, which Russia intends to control. The Northern Sea Route also allows Russia to profit from faster and more secure transportation of Chinese goods to Europe than southern routes offer.[23]

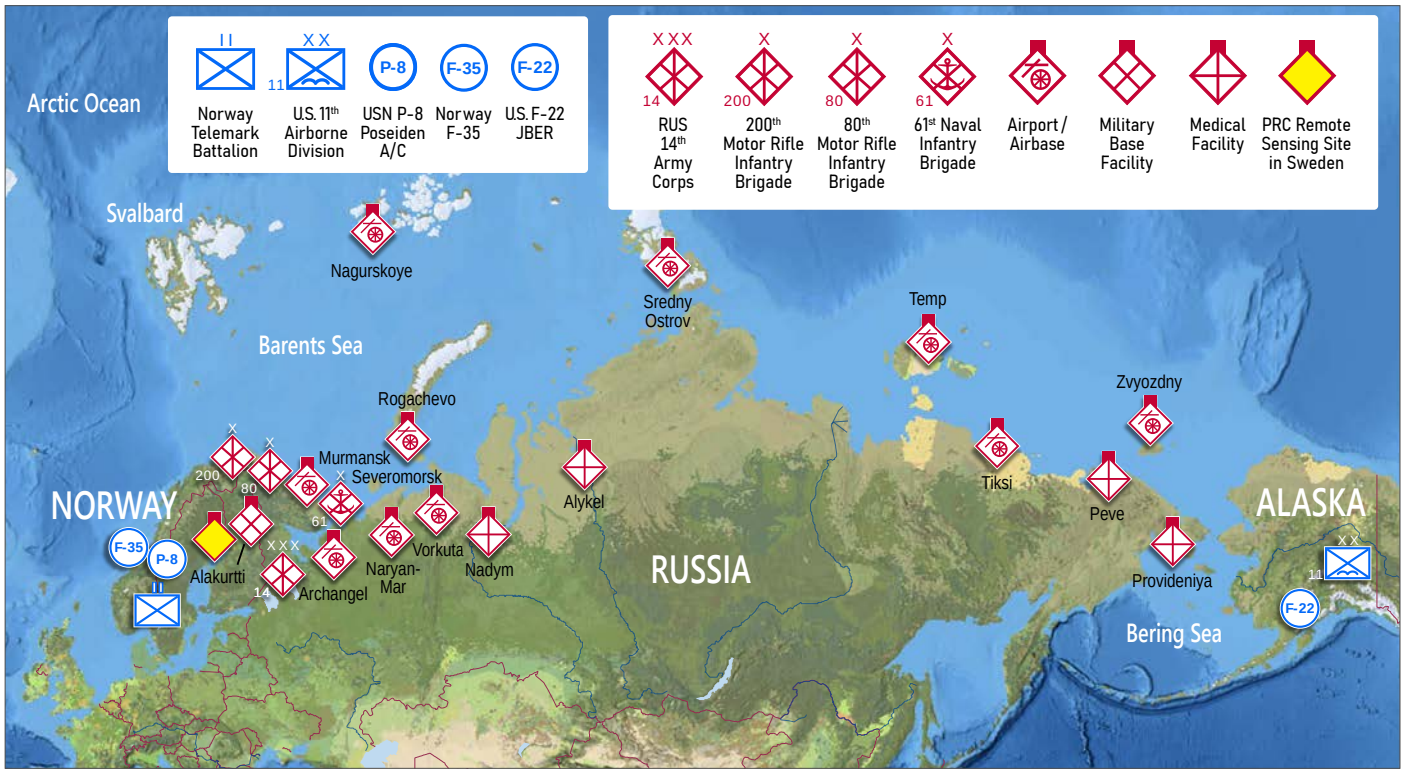


Figure 9: Positioning of Select Ground Forces in a Potential LSCO in the Arctic (Source: TRADOC G-2)

Russia steadily increased its military forces in the Arctic until its war with Ukraine began in 2022, and all Arctic Ground Forces and Naval Infantry units have combat experience in Ukraine. The Northern Sea Fleet is Russia's biggest and most powerful, with a large arsenal of nuclear weapons. The 14th Army, consisting of the 80th and 200th Ground Forces Motorized Rifle Brigades, also has the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade and some coastal defense artillery forces. The Eastern Military District regularly conducts exercises in its portion of the Arctic.

To conduct a LSCO campaign in the Arctic, ground forces would require special Arctic-capable vehicles, equipment, small watercraft, and communications, as well as Arctic-specific training.[24] LSCO in the Arctic would also entail close cooperation between ground and naval forces involving ice-class vessels, riverine operations, naval gunfire from the sea and rivers, transport of forces and equipment, and logistics support. Similarly, ground and air forces would need to cooperate closely on fires, transport, and logistics.[f]

Russia Victorious During Largest Arctic Operation

During World War II, Russia achieved victory in the largest land-sea-air operation ever in the Arctic. From 7-29 October 1944, Soviet forces—the 14th Army, 7th Air Army, and Northern Fleet—defeated the German 9th Mountain Corps and seized the Pechenga Peninsula. The Soviets fielded 113,200 soldiers, 2,013 artillery pieces, and 126 tanks, while the combined German-Norwegian force comprised three divisions and four brigades with 753 artillery pieces and 27 tanks. This Soviet victory inflicted approximately 30,000 casualties and expelled the Germans from Arctic Norway.

f The U.S. Army issued ATP 3-90.96/MCTP 12-10E, *Arctic and Extreme Cold Weather Operations*, in February 2025.

Ground Forces-Focused Vignettes

The following vignettes illustrate Russian's Ground Forces capabilities and perceptions in two different LSCO scenarios. Both scenarios could feature either a brigade-based combined-arms army or a division-based combined-arms army augmented with brigades. The first vignette examines a Russian Ground Forces combined-arms army in a positional defense against a NATO offensive. The second vignette examines a Ground Forces combined-arms army attack against a NATO defense. While hypothetical, these vignettes are included because of Russia's focus on these scenarios and their relevance to the U.S. Army. They are based on both established Russian doctrine as well as observations of how Russian LSCO has evolved since 2022 over the course of the Ukraine conflict.

Russian Combined-Arms Army in a Positional Defense

The first scenario involves a Russian Ground Forces combined-arms army conducting a defense in the west against a U.S./NATO corps (see Figure 10). Based on historical precedent, in such a scenario Russia will likely trade space for time and draw the enemy deeper into Russia's interior, stretching the enemy's supply lines while preparing for an eventual counteroffensive.

Russian Formation

In this scenario, the Russian combined-arms army will have two motorized rifle divisions and a tank division, a separate tank brigade, and a separate motorized rifle brigade. They will defend with two forward motorized rifle divisions, each with a motorized rifle regiment initially forward in the security zone. The army artillery group, comprised of a 300-mm MLRS battalion and a self-propelled artillery brigade, will be centrally located near the forward defensive line. A tank division and separate motorized rifle brigade will constitute the second-echelon defense. The Iskander long-range missile brigade of the army artillery group will be located further to the rear.

NATO Formation

A NATO corps will have a tank division and a mechanized infantry division leading the attack, with a mechanized infantry division in the second echelon.

The Defense

The Russian defense will be designed to subject the attacker to attrition throughout its movement. The security zone will be up to 40 kilometers deep, designed to detect the direction and size of enemy axes and attrit enemy forces through rocket and artillery fires throughout their advance. The security zone regiments probably will have artillery battalions or batteries forward with them to conduct fires. The security zone motorized rifle and tank battalions will engage the attackers long enough to cause them to deploy under artillery fire before moving back to secondary or tertiary lines to repeat the process. Artillery will fire and move. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) will search for and strike the attacking columns. The mainline defense battalions will take up the fight as the security zone battalions and artillery withdraw into reserve fighting positions and refit and repair. Scatterable minefields will be launched. Artillery and UAVs will continue to attrit and disrupt the deploying enemy formation. If the attackers push into the depths of the forward regiments' defenses, those defense elements may withdraw to form a large fire sac. This fire sac would be anchored on the second echelon while an army reserve—the tank division or separate motorized rifle brigade—would be available to hit the attacker from front, flank, or rear. If the enemy is defeated, the combined-arms army will attempt to

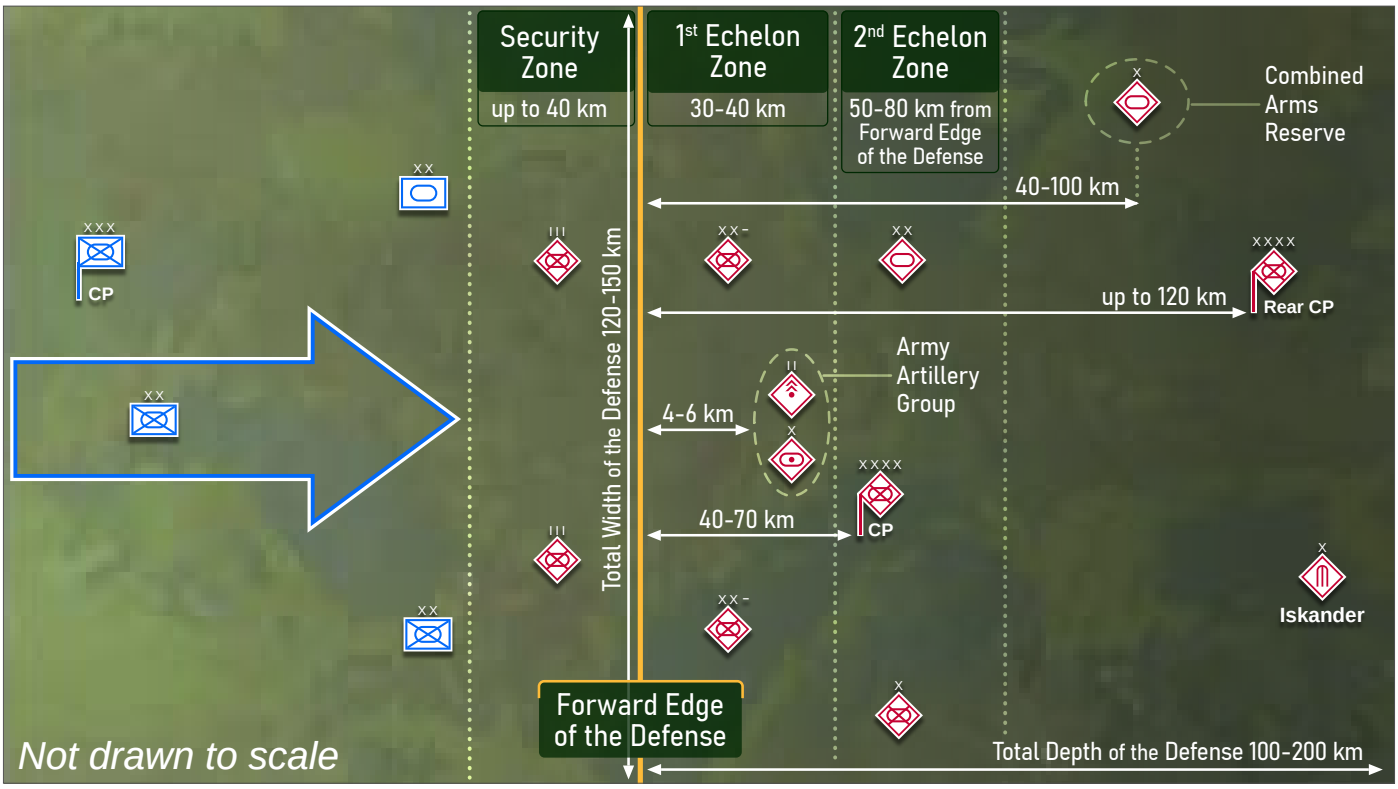


Figure 10: Russian Combined-Arms Army in a Positional Defense (Source: TRADOC G-2)

reestablish a security zone and reoccupy the original defenses or establish a new one. Should the enemy's follow-on forces arrive too soon, the army may conduct a maneuver defense back to a deeper defensive line, trading space for time and attritting the enemy.

Key Advantages and Challenges

Russia enjoys advantages that will likely benefit a combined-arms army positional defense against a NATO corps.

- **Uniformity.** While an attacking NATO formation will be multinational and well-armed, its lack of uniformity may introduce confusion or delays that give Russian forces an edge. While NATO uses Standard NATO Agreements to fight in a uniform fashion, history, individual cultures, customs and home terrain influence their application. Furthermore, the TO&Es—and frequently the equipment capabilities—differ among NATO countries.
- **Sustainment and Troop Morale.** The attacking force's logistics will likely be taxed the further it advances, whereas the Russian force will likely be better supported the further it retreats. Although an attacking force can regenerate and return to the fight if defeated, Russian forces will believe they are fighting for their nation's survival, which can be expected to contribute to a deep-seated will to fight.
- **Depth.** The Russian Ground Forces' will benefit from its larger and better equipped artillery forces, as well as the strength of its main defensive line and a fresh counterattack force.

Despite these advantages, a Russian combined-arms army will face challenges in a positional defense.

- **Mass.** If the attacking enemy can effectively mass forces and means quickly and decisively, Russia may be hard-pressed to regain the offensive given the combined combat power of NATO Allied forces.
- **Coordination of Fires.** Russia's coordination of long-range fires will become more difficult after defeating the initial attacking force and reconstituting the original defense and security zone. Initial artillery firing positions will be compromised and much of the combined-arms army's drone surveillance and attack capability will be lost in the initial enemy attack, making comprehensive coverage and response difficult.

Russian Combined-Arms Army Attacking

The second scenario involves a Russian combined-arms army conducting an attack against a NATO defense (see Figure 11). The Russian group army will conduct the attack as part of a broader offensive front, in close coordination with adjacent armies, against an immediate objective and subsequent objective, potentially advancing 40-60 kilometers per day on average.

Russian Formation

In this scenario, a Russian combined-arms army will have two motorized rifle divisions, a tank division, a tank brigade, and a motorized rifle brigade. The combined-arms army will attack with two motorized rifle divisions forward, as well as a tank division and motorized rifle brigade in the second echelon. A tank brigade will follow in the north as a combined-arms reserve. One or two additional motorized rifle divisions will follow since this is the main attack. Before hostilities commence, additional tank or motorized rifle regiments will be added to any divisions that are understrength.

NATO Formation

NATO will defend with an armored division and a mechanized infantry division forward, as well as a mechanized infantry division in the second echelon.

The Attack

The Russian attack will be designed to capitalize on the element of surprise, exploit weaknesses in NATO's frontline defenses, and move quickly to seize territory. It will be based on the combined power of the army artillery group, division artillery groups, and brigade artillery groups to eradicate enemy forces defending the enemy's breakthrough sectors, destroy deeper defensive strong points, destroy enemy artillery positions, and oppose enemy counterattacks. The army artillery group will consist of a 300-mm MLRS battalion and a self-propelled artillery brigade, with an Iskander missile brigade targeting deeper enemy reserves, airfields, missiles and logistics sites. Artillery will drive the advance, with division artillery assets massed against targets in the breakthrough sectors so that tank and motorized rifle formations can eventually attack

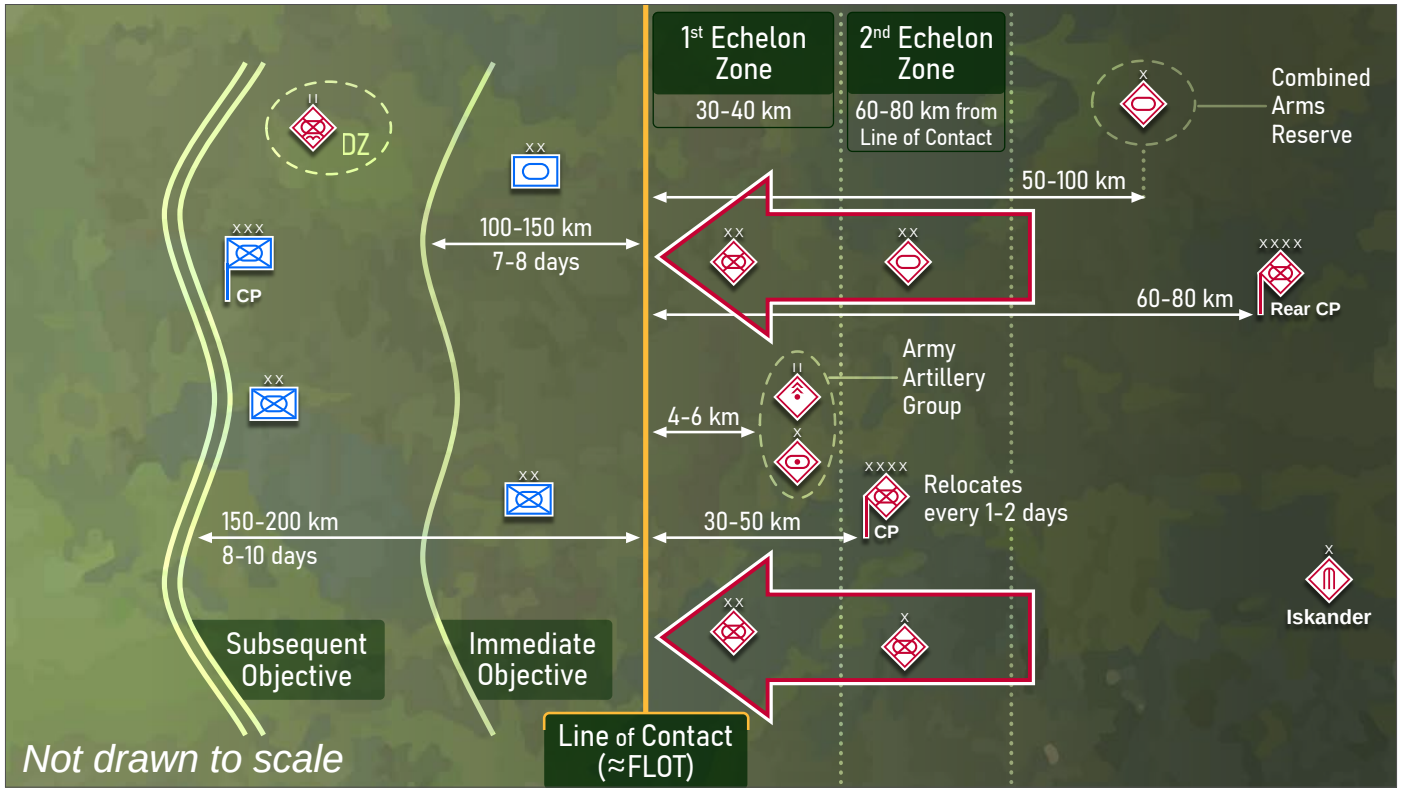


Figure 11: Russian Combined-Arms Army Attacking (Source: TRADOC G-2)

through them. Air defense forces will concentrate cover over the massed vehicles moving to and through these sectors. The combined-arms army will simultaneously conduct supporting artillery fire in other sectors. Additionally, it will attempt to achieve an airborne insertion of a mechanized infantry battalion near the defending corps headquarters, possibly while the main attack forces move to the immediate objective located 100-150 kilometers from the line of contact. At the immediate objective, the army will continue to advance on up to three axes toward the subsequent objective located 150-200 kilometers from the line of contact. The divisions may conduct meeting battles against remaining or newly discovered forces, while the army continues its mission, leaving the final destruction of them to follow-on forces.

Key Advantages and Challenges

Russia enjoys a key advantage that will benefit a combined-arms army attacking a NATO defense, which may be hastily prepared. However, the longer NATO forces have time to prepare their defenses, the more this advantage will wane.

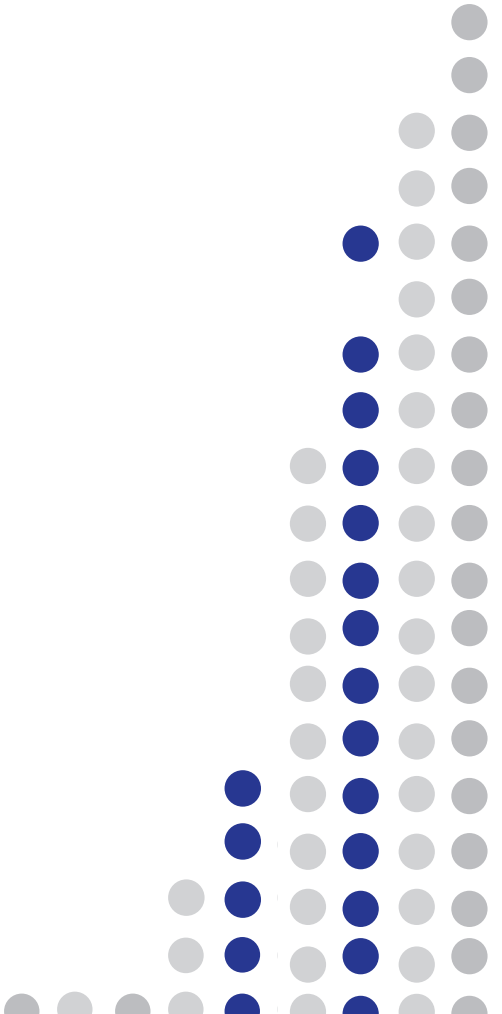
- **Mass.** As in a scenario involving a positional defense, the Russian advantage in using this formation in an attack will be its artillery and massing of power, which will likely allow it to overwhelm a lightly manned defense. The success of the attack will depend on the combined-arms army's coordination of artillery with maneuver; its ability to forecast enemy reactions; and its ability to efficiently resupply on good roads to facilitate a rapid advance.

Despite this advantage, Russia will face challenges in a combined-arms army attack.

- **Sustainment.** In a reverse from the positional defense scenario, the logistics of the Russian force will likely be taxed the further it advances, whereas the defending force will likely be better supported the further it retreats. The Russian force will need to exploit its advance quickly to avoid the buildup of deeper enemy resistance.

- **Synchronization.** Effective coordination between artillery and maneuver forces will be critical to the success of the Russian attack. Similarly, Russian airborne/airmobile operations are potentially high reward but carry a high level of risk if not synchronized properly.

- **Concentration.** The Russian combined-arms army's massed breakthrough of forces against any defense will leave it vulnerable on a battlefield where high concentrations of UAVs are almost certain.



Conclusion

This assessment aligns with and expands upon the judgments presented in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, *The Operational Environment 2024-2034: Large-Scale Combat Operations*, particularly regarding the complexity of the OE and the multidomain nature of contemporary LSCO involving peer or near-peer adversaries. To achieve victory, the U.S. Army must know the enemy. Knowing the enemy starts with the OE.

Russia's emphasis on territorial defense, strategic depth, and a coercive military posture continues to shape its modernization efforts and way of warfare. While Russia remains primarily a regional power with limited expeditionary capabilities, its evolving approach to LSCO—grounded in historical precedent, lessons from Ukraine, and enduring rivalry with the West—poses a grave danger to the United States and NATO. The Russian military's integration of layered defenses, long-range fires, and uncrewed systems—combined with its practice of conscription and national mobilization—underscores its preparation for high-intensity warfare in contested and adjacent regions.

For the U.S. Army, the centrality of ground forces to Russia's concept of operations in LSCO cannot be overstated. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the Russian military's proven ability to adapt for survivability, mobility, and sustainment in protracted land campaigns and wars of attrition like the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Moscow's use of asymmetric tools, including cyber and information operations, to shape the OE and deter Western intervention is integral—not ancillary—to Russia's approach to future conflict. Finally, understanding Russia's operational focus on maneuver warfare, disruption of logistics and C2, and deep penetration strikes is critical. Russia's battlefield strategy emphasizes attrition, denial of access, and political offramps through rapid territorial gains. The potential use of tactical nuclear weapons remains a feature of its escalatory framework, particularly under conditions perceived as existential.

The paper's discussion of Russia's ongoing adaptation throughout the war in Ukraine illustrates key trends that will likely shape LSCO through 2034. These include the increasing use of massed artillery, low-cost and abundant uncrewed systems, and battlefield automation. Russia's approach to future war will be characterized by a blend of traditional heavy armor formations and modernized C2 and ISR integration, supported by robust EW intended to degrade Western precision and connectivity. As a result, the U.S. Army must prepare for the reality of fighting in a battlespace marked by contested electromagnetic environments, near-peer artillery duels, and adversary resilience enabled by mobilization and an increasingly self-sufficient defense-industrial base.

The U.S. Army remains the backbone of European security, critical to sustaining deterrence and achieving decisive outcomes should deterrence fail. The Army's ability to operate in complex terrain, contested airspace, and disrupted communications environments will be vital in countering Russian aggression. A comprehensive understanding of Russia's evolving strategic calculus, military doctrine, and force structure is crucial to defending U.S. interests, supporting NATO allies, and ensuring victory in any conflict in the European theater.

Appendix A:

The LSCO Conditions and Russia

Russia, like the United States, will have to contend with Operational Environment conditions that will define LSCO for the foreseeable future. This section details how the 12 conditions identified in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92, *The Operational Environment 2024-2034: Large-Scale Combat Operations*, will shape Russia's ability to operate in LSCO.

All-Domain Competition and Warfare: Russia will exploit internal fiber-optic networks while denying adversary communications and logistics by targeting satellites, ports, pipelines, and key infrastructure nodes.

Antiaccess/Area Denial: Russia will deny access by targeting ports, airfields, and mobility corridors while leveraging civil unrest, deception, and sabotage to disrupt U.S. movement.

Mass vs. Precision: Russian artillery will combine mass fires with precision capabilities, leveraging remote targeting, firing, and reloading to strike high-value targets.

Contested Logistics: Russia will exploit geographic proximity, forward stockpiling, and civil disruption tactics to strain adversary sustainment and resupply.

Proliferation of Uncrewed Systems: Russia is fielding unmanned aircraft and ground vehicles for a wide range of tactical tasks, institutionalizing their use down to the battalion level.

Homeland Defense: Russia will seek to disrupt force deployment, before it begins, through interdiction, civil disruption, and strategic influence operations.

Magazine Depth and Range: Russian forces will sustain high rates of fires through massed and precision artillery enabled by dedicated production, deep strike capability, and logistical redundancy.

Dense Urban Warfare: Russia will likely avoid direct open battle and instead force engagements in complex terrain to offset U.S. Army advantages—urban, forested, or mountainous—while employing thermobaric weapons for close urban combat.

Transparent Battlefield: While lacking full satellite coverage, Russia will use robotic surveillance and sensor networks to rapidly identify, track, and target enemy forces.

Information Advantage: Russia will use AI-enabled propaganda, false flags, and social media manipulation to shape public perception and exploit ethnic or political divisions.

Increased Lethality: Artillery will remain central to Russian maneuver warfare, not just supporting but enabling offensive and defensive action.

Weapons of Mass Destruction: Russia's acceptance of first-use tactical nuclear strikes under "escalate to deescalate" doctrine poses a challenge in LSCO planning.

Appendix B:

Key Historical Developments Influencing Russian LSCO

(1237-1814)

From the Mongols to Napolean

The Primacy of Ground Forces

Russia's defensive strategy has its beginnings in the Mongol invasion of 1237-1240, which fractured Kievan Rus, the antecedent of modern-day Russia. Subsequent wars with Turkey (1676-1878) and Sweden (1590-1809) established Russia's need for two armies—one for a southern/eastern enemy, and another for a western enemy. When Napoleon's army of 600,000 soldiers invaded in 1812, Russia lost every initial major battle, including the fight for Moscow. However, precision raids on Napoleon's logistics networks turned the tide, and by 1814 the Russian army and its allies occupied Paris.

(1914-1918)

World War I

The Need for Standing, Modern Ground Forces

Tsarist Russia entered World War I without the corresponding industrial power and rail network necessary to support its forces. As a result, Germany destroyed two of Russia's armies.[25] After the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, Russia sought to build up the Red Army and weighed the merits of the leading two schools of thought—that of offensive warfare vs. attrition warfare. Proponents of the offensive strategy argued that an enemy attack should swiftly be met with a decisive, mechanized response driving deep into enemy territory.[26] Conversely, proponents of the attrition strategy emphasized that Russia had no major cities on its borders and, as a result, could lure the enemy deep within friendly territory, overextend him, and capitalize on maneuver space and established defense in depth to launch counterattacks.[27, 28]

(1939-1991)

World War II and the Cold War

Eventual Victory and Nuclear Weapons

The emerging Soviet Union was militarily weak, so its newly adopted offensive strategy failed in a series of minor counterattacks against Nazi Germany.[29] Soviet leadership insisted on a forward defense, stretching Soviet logistics and forcing Russian ground forces back to the gates of Moscow in 1941/42. However, the Red Army held the line and rebuilt as it transitioned to offense against retreating German forces when the prewar emphasis on deep operations came to the fore. After the war, the potential mounted for LSCO between Russia and the West in a new nuclear age. The Red Army evolved to become 100-percent mechanized, with 10 airborne divisions as well as a preponderance of armored and artillery forces, which retained LSCO-oriented formations even while involved in a series of small conflicts in other regions.[30]

(1991-Present)

Post-Soviet Union

Disorganization and Reorganization

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it took Russia 20 years to rebuild its military forces. Russia's initial efforts to keep the military intact, under the auspices of a Commonwealth of Independent States, failed to meaningfully integrate Soviet successor states.[31, 32] Military production facilities and equipment were scattered among 15 countries, three of which—Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus—possessed 3,200 strategic nuclear warheads and at least as many tactical nuclear warheads.[33] Meanwhile, Russia's southern and western buffer zones, a belt of territory that provided strategic depth, had weakened or disappeared.[34] Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, were attempts to remedy vulnerabilities created by the Soviet Union's collapse. Russia views the ongoing LSCO in Ukraine as a proxy war with NATO, characterized by protracted trench warfare involving small tactical units.[35, 36]

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