

# The Russian Globalization Project in the XX Century. Anatomy of a Military-Political Strategy

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**Abstract.** The article discusses the main components of the military-political strategy of Russia in the «short» 20th century – from 1900 to 1991. Special attention is paid to how the foreign policy and the use of Armed Forces were planned. Reconstructing the intellectual ideas that created the framework of the foreign and military policy of the Russian state at that time, the author focuses on the elements that unite the leaders of Russia of the 20th century from Nikolai Romanov to Mikhail Gorbachev. Such issues as the «globalization» of the USSR in world affairs, relations with neighboring Asian centers of power, such as China and Iran, the sphere of «special state interests» of the USSR in Eastern Europe are discussed in the work. The evolution of Russian military strategy in the 20th century is studied: from betting on victory in the World War in the first half of the century to focusing on the actions of expeditionary groups during the Cold War. The article analyzes in detail the strategic deterrence measures carried out by the Armed Forces of the USSR in the 1950–1970. The issue of the resources of military-political strategy is considered separately.

**Keywords:** Russian Empire, USSR, globalization, Asia, foreign policy planning, the use of armed forces.

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## Introduction

We often search for the “image of the future” in the past. Thus, the “Putin consensus” was formed at the beginning of the 21st century, as a return to the Soviet tradition interrupted in 1991. At the beginning of the century, they tried to complete what the Politburo headed by Gorbachev failed to do in the second half of the 80s. Now the concept of “Historical Russia” is based on rethinking the legacy that the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union left us, including the military-political sphere, in the “short” twentieth century (1900–1991).

This, as evidenced by the strategic planning documents of this period, corresponds to the minimum “operational memory” of the state administration.

Let’s try to figure out what the last Russian tsar and the Soviet Politburo were trying to achieve in world affairs? How the goals of foreign and military policy were determined, what were the “desirable foundations of the future world”? And, of course, how significant was the continuity in the military–political sphere during the “short 20th century”.

## Materials and methods

The article is based on the research methodology of the “grand strategy” laid down in the E. Lutvak work “Strategy. The logic of war and peace”, and continued by A. Vess Mitchell, as well as prominent representatives of the Russian school of strategy, such as A.A.Svechin (23) and A.A.Kokoshin(7).

The source base for the study was, first of all, the archival funds of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, the Foreign Policy Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, related to the activities of the highest authorities in Russia in the 20th century.

## Results

### **“Tsargrad” mirage. Continuity of foreign policy goals of the Russian Empire and the USSR**

Continuing the tradition established during the reign of Alexander III, the leadership of the Russian Empire at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries determining the goals of foreign and military policy proceeded from the fact that Russia acquired her borders in the 18th century and the further expansion is inexpedient. It was believed that the current military–political tasks were connected with the struggle for dominance in Asia – in Persia, Manchuria and Korea. What about Europe, the goal was to save the status quo.

The views of the leading circles in St. Petersburg on the goals of the foreign and military policy of the Russian Empire were most fully set out in the report of the War Minister A.N.Kuropatkin in 1900. The “historical tasks” of Russia in the 20th century were: the need to take control of the Bosphorus and ensure free access to the Mediterranean Sea through the Dardanelles, firmly consolidate its position on the Great Ocean (in addition to Port Arthur, get a naval base in southern Korea) and gain access through Persia to the Indian ocean (to create a naval base in Chakhbar, similar to Port Arthur). As it was noted in the report, holding in its hands the railway lines between the Pacific Ocean and the Baltic Sea, and having “tentacles” in the Straits, Indian and Pacific Oceans, Russia will be a “formidable

industrial rival to the great powers of the whole world" (8)<sup>1</sup>. These tasks were planned by Kuropatkin for the future, for children and grandchildren, for a state whose population was to reach 400 million in the 20th century ("God bless," Minister of Finance S. Witte commented on the program outlined by Kuropatkin) (8:250–284)<sup>2</sup>. The War Minister was well aware that these "very modest" tasks (in comparison with what was achieved by the Russian army in the 18th–20th centuries) "deeply affect the interests of the whole world", therefore, we must prepare for their "joint opposition in mastering the Bosphorus, access to the Indian Ocean and to the possible difficulty of our activities on the Great Ocean". Actually, this was happened (8:250–284).

According to D.Lieven, these Russian ambitions "should be viewed in the context of the era of imperialism, when Britain seizes Egypt to get the Suez Canal, and the United States occupies the Isthmus of Panama to control a key military and trade route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific" (11:22). The tsarist government wanted to create an "infrastructural empire" similar to the British one, but not a maritime one, but a continental one. In practice, the solution of "historical tasks" by the tsarist government was initially viewed as a long-term project that did not involve significant military–political efforts. As Nicholas II believed, "it is possible only to outline the goals of our policy on the issue of the straits, and the capture of the Dardanelles, of course, as the most desirable. But when and how this goal can be achieved – it is impossible now to say. It depends entirely on the circumstances"<sup>3</sup>.

The stake was placed on bilateral agreements with weak neighbors and multilateral diplomacy among the great powers. Russia was not preparing for decisive operations in the event of local conflicts in the East. Japan was preparing, that predetermined the unsuccessful outcome of the Russian-Japanese war of 1904–1905 for Russia. As A.A.Svechin wrote: "The tragedy of the tsarist army in 1904 was that it was preparing to fight in the West, but had to act in the East" (22:105). The defeat in this war and the delimitation of spheres of interest in Asia (1907) achieved with England determined that there was only one region left where it seemed possible to change the status quo – the zone of the Black Sea straits. The tsarist government was prompted to intensify actions in this direction by fears that the progressive weakening of Turkey could lead to its disintegration or transformation into a German protectorate, like British Egypt (33:154). And "the straits are in the hands of a strong state – this means the complete subordination of the economic development of the entire south of Russia to this state," wrote Foreign Minister S.D.Sazonov to Nicholas II November 23, 1913<sup>4</sup> Attempts to resolve the issue of the functioning of the Black Sea

1 Kuropatkin A.N. The Most Submissive Report of the Minister of War in 1900 March 14 (26), 1900. Russian Federation State Archive. Fund 601. Inventory file 1. File folder 445. Paper 66-67; Kuropatkin's report actually summed up the discussion that unfolded at the beginning of 1900 between the Foreign Ministry, the military and naval departments and the Ministry of Finance on protecting the paramount interests of "Russia in connection with the Boer War".

2 Ibid.

3 Resolution of Nicholas II on a note by F.F. Martens about the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits ... Russian Federation State Archive. Fund 543. Inventory file 1. File folder 668. Paper 70.

4 Sazonov's report to Nicholas II, November 23, 1913. MOEI. Moscow. 1931, Vol.I:397.

straits through diplomacy were unsuccessful (26)<sup>5</sup>. By 1914, the tsarist government was convinced that it would be possible to resolve the issue of the straits only in the event of a pan-European war<sup>6</sup>.

Many contemporaries understood the danger of such a scenario. As the former Minister of Internal Affairs P.N.Durnovo wrote: "the main burden of the war will fall on Russia", "the war, regardless of its outcome, will weaken Russia and divert its attention [from solving its historical tasks] to the West", "Russia will be plunged into hopeless anarchy, the outcome of which is difficult to foresee"<sup>7</sup>. For Russia, participation in the First World War ended approximately as Durnovo predicted in his famous note (11:7). However, despite the collapse of the Russian Empire in February 1917, the tasks laid down by the tsarist government at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries was surprisingly resilient. The idea of a world revolution was buried near Warsaw in August 1920, but the discussion on foreign policy initiated by I. Stalin in February 1924 points to a gradual return to traditional approaches.<sup>8</sup> One can speak of an almost complete coincidence of the military-political goals of the USSR and the "historical tasks" of Russia at the beginning of the century by the time the Soviet Union entered World War II.

This is evidenced both by the maps found in the Stalin fund in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History with outlines of the Soviet security zone from the Barents Sea to the Persian Gulf made by his hand in August 1939, and by the directives for the trip of V. Molotov to Berlin in November 1940<sup>9</sup> Stalin's geopolitical projects were developed in the documents of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs related to the planning of the post-war world order. The task of guaranteeing the security of the USSR was associated by Soviet diplomats for a long time with the need to exit the war with advantageous strategic borders (based on the 1941 borders), with the weakening of Turkey's role as a "sentinel on the straits", as well as use of transit routes through Iran to the Persian Gulf. At the same time, it was proposed to maintain the existing Anglo-Soviet agreement on Iran (in fact, on its division into spheres of influence). The main tasks of the USSR policy in the Far East were the return of South Sakhalin, Port Arthur, and the Chinese military railway, ceded by Russia

5 We are talking about the negotiations of A.P.Izvolsky with A. Erengel (1908) and the so-called "demarche" by N.V.Charykov (1911). Izvolsky's proposals assumed the right of free passage through the Straits for the military ships of Russia and other coastal states, while they would be closed to the military ships of other countries. In the same direction, it was proposed to Charykov to negotiate with the Turks (the Ottoman government "obliges ... not to impede the passage of Russian military ships through the straits", as it was said in the draft Russian-Turkish agreement sent to Charykov by the Foreign Ministry). Neiratov – Charykov October 2 (September 19), 1911 MOEI. Series II. Vol. 18(2):61. It should be noted that the idea of a strong alliance with Turkey, as an option for resolving the issue of the functioning of the Black Sea straits, was considered preferable by the Foreign Ministry and Nicholas II, as the best, as is evidenced, among other things, by published documents related to Charykov's demarche (MOEI. Series II. Vol. XVIII and XIX).

6 Journal of the special meeting, February 21(8), 1914. MOEI. Moscow, 1931; Series II. Vol. I:376.

7 Note by P.N.Durnovo [February 1914] *Krasnaja nov'*. November-December 1922:187, 197.

8 The discussion materials are in Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. Fund 82. Inventory file 2. File folder 1139.

9 Political maps of Europe marked by I. Stalin [August 1939]. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. Fund 558. Inventory file 11. File folder 511. Some directives for the Berlin trip, November 9, 1940. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History F. 82. Inventory file 2. File folder 1161. Paper 149.

to Japan. It can be said that the main documents of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, related to the planning of the post-war world order, continued the "historical tasks of Russia" formulated in Kuropatkin's report (19)<sup>10</sup>.

In an effort to expand Soviet influence in the zone of the Black Sea straits and in the Mediterranean, Moscow has been increasing pressure on Turkey since the spring of 1945. On March 19, 1945, the USSR denounced the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality of December 17, 1925, as inconsistent with the new situation. During negotiations in Moscow in June 1945, the Soviet side demanded to change the mode of operation of the Black Sea straits. The USSR sought the recognition of the Black Sea as closed to warships of non-Black Sea countries with the provision of the Black Sea countries with complete freedom of passage of their warships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and the right to participate, together with Turkey, in controlling the functioning of the straits by providing it with a naval base in the straits zone<sup>11</sup>. Stalin actively raised this question to the allies in Potsdam (21:335–336). At the same time, the USSR sought bases in the Mediterranean, demanding in negotiations with the allies the provision of guardianship over Tripolitania (part of modern Libya) and a base on one of the Dodecanese islands. In the autumn of 1945, the Soviet leadership stepped up pressure on Iran. It sought to grant oil concessions in the north of Iran (on the model of the Anglo-Iranian agreement of 1933), supported the struggle for autonomy in Iranian Azerbaijan and refused to confirm the timing of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the northern part of the country (21:335–336).

Thus Stalin began to implement the project of an infrastructural empire. However, resistance from the United States and Great Britain did not allow these intentions to be realized. "If you come to the goal exhausted and can hardly stand on your feet, then you get the appropriate attitude," Khrushchev described the situation that had developed for the USSR weakened by the war in one of the tape recordings of his memoirs<sup>12</sup>. Stalin's hopes for the possibility of continuing constructive cooperation with the allies in the anti-Hitler coalition were not realized<sup>13</sup>. The security border of the USSR was determined by the line of advance of the Red Army.

10 The evolution of the military goals of the USSR in the Second World War is fully shown in the works of M. Narinsky. For example: Narinsky M. Europe: the problem of borders and spheres of influence (1939-1947). *Svobodnaja mysl'*. 1998; 3:82-93.

11 Kavtaradze, Vinogradov – Molotov, February 6, 1945. Foreign Policy Archive. Fund 06. Inventory file 7. File folder 711. File 47. Paper 1.

12 Khrushchev N.S. *Memories*. Moscow, 1999. Vol. II:604.

13 The correspondence between Stalin and Molotov in 1945-1946, stored in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, testifies that the ongoing negotiations with the allies in the anti-Hitler coalition on the issues of the post-war order of the world at that time served as an important factor for the Soviet leadership, preventing him from to go "through" in Turkish or Iranian issues. Thus, at the moment of the climax of the Iranian crisis in November-December 1946 (when the Iranian government sent troops into Iranian Azerbaijan), Stalin telegraphed Molotov to New York demanding "to make all possible concessions to Byrnes in order to finally end the [peace] treaties" and thus complete the territorial and political reconstruction of post-war Europe. Attempts to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean were also sacrificed to this goal. Druzhkov to Molotov, November 27, 1946; Molotov – Druzhkov, December 14, 1946. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. Fund 558. Inventory file 11. File 103. Paper 26; File 104. Paper 74.

## Globalization of the USSR in the second half of the 20th century

After World War II, Stalin's geopolitical aspirations would only lead to the formation in the early 1950s new "sanitaire cordon". This is a system of military-political blocs along the perimeter of the borders of the socialist camp, created with the leading role of the United States. "We were under siege, to put it bluntly," Khrushchev recalled this period<sup>14</sup>. Since 1957, Khrushchev and Mao Zedong have been contemplating a transition to an offensive strategy: "how to turn the Cold War into a factor unfavorable to the Americans"<sup>15</sup>. The task of "decomposing" the pacts (NATO, SEATO, Treaty of Baghdad) was at the heart of the Soviet-Chinese coalition strategy. Khrushchev planned to solve this problem through "a special way of implementing foreign policy by threatening war to the imperialists"<sup>16</sup>.

It was a series of connected successive regional military-political crises, which since 1958 acquired the character of a coordinated geopolitical offensive: in the summer of 1958, the USSR carried out military maneuvers in the south in order to keep Turkey and Iran from opposing Iraq; in September 1958, during the Second Taiwan Crisis and the "artillery blockade" of the islands of Matsu and Jinning, the USSR was ready to send TU-16 bombers to operate against the ships of Chiang Kai-shek and provide nuclear security guarantees to the PRC; in November 1958, the II Berlin Crisis begins, the most largescale and longlasting (it dragged on until 1962). As the Berlin crisis escalated, the scale of ongoing political and military activities grew. The deployment of a group of Soviet troops in Cuba (Operation Anadyr) can be considered in the context of measures to fetter the United States on the eve of the resolution of the Berlin issue.

The Shah of Iran was the first of the American allies to flinch when in 1962 he gave assurances that American missile bases would not be located on his territory (28:423-444). After the outbreak of the Cyprus crisis in 1964, a similar agreement was reached with Ankara<sup>17</sup>. The balance of power along the perimeter of the Soviet borders began to change in favor of the USSR, which freed Moscow's hands to go to the ocean. Khrushchev set about transforming the Soviet Navy into an ocean fleet. Since 1959, a military shipbuilding program has been implemented, according to which it was planned to build 700 large surface and submarine ships by 1965. In 1958-62 attempts were made to organize a permanent base for the Soviet Navy in the ports of Albania, Indonesia, Cuba and on the Pacific coast of China. Khrushchev paid special attention to Egypt and Indonesia, where the bulk of Soviet economic and military aid to third world countries went. There in the early 1960s. Expeditionary groups of Soviet troops operated. Realizing the impossibility of realizing the dream of the straits, Khrushchev decides to "jump over" them, trying to gain a

14 Khrushchev N.S. The specified work. Vol. III:451.

15 From Antonov's diary. Recording of a conversation with Mao Zedong, October 14, 1959. Foreign Policy Archive. Fund 0100. Inventory file 52. Folder file 443. File 11. Paper 228.

16 The wording of the so-called report of "Polensky" – Report of the Presidium of the Central Committee at the October Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU [No later than October 13, 1964]. Nikita Khrushchev. 1964. Moscow, 2007:197.

17 Gromyko – Podgorny, with the project application, an indication of the delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR sent to Turkey, December 28, 1964. Foreign Policy Archive. Fund Ref. on Turkey. Inventory file 76. Folder file 354. File 12. Paper 46.



foothold in key points along the sea route from Europe to the Far East, primarily in the area of the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca (24).

In the second half of the 1960s the Politburo confidently formulates the tasks of “loosening” the northern and southern flanks of NATO and puts forward a strategy for improving relations with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, tying them economically in order to transfer them “to positions of non-alignment” and thus create a buffer security zone along all the southern borders of the USSR. Since the second half of the 1960s the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is beginning to attribute Egypt, Syria and Algeria to the “sphere of vital interest”, just as “the United States is trying to do this in relation to the countries of Latin America”. However, the process of creating a “sphere of vital interest of the USSR” was difficult. As a result of the two-time military defeat of the Arab allies of the USSR (in 1967 and 1973) and A. Sadat’s reorientation to a separate deal with Israel, the goal set by Stalin “to wedge into the Mediterranean, having achieved bases and bridgeheads there”, was not achieved. As a stronghold in the Middle East, the USSR was left with Syria only.

The USSR approached the goal of creating an “infrastructural empire” only in the second half of the 1970s. The first step was the unexpected success of the Cuban project in Africa (Angola 1975; Ethiopia 1978) (36). The real breakthrough came in 1979 after the conclusion of a military-political alliance with Vietnam. The USSR received the Cam Ranh naval base, which allowed it to control the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Cam Ranh, where the 17th operational squadron of the Navy was based, became the largest naval base of the USSR abroad (16). This was followed by the signing of agreements on the establishment of similar bases in Tartus (1981) and Aden (1983). This is how the world chain of Soviet naval bases developed near to the main sources of oil and other resources for the economies of Western countries, strategic straits and sea lanes from the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean to the Far East (4:292–293).

As A. Solzhenitsyn wrote in a personal letter to L. Brezhnev: “Who would have thought that the eternal dream of the straits, without coming true, would become, however, not needed – Russia will step so far into the Mediterranean Sea and into the oceans”<sup>18</sup>. By the mid-1970s, a system of views had developed in the so called Andropov Doctrine in the military-political circles of the USSR. It was based on the thesis that nuclear parity made a direct clash between the USSR and the USA insane. It was believed that in conditions when the boundaries of confrontation in Europe and the Far East were strictly delineated, the struggle was now being waged where a direct clash could be avoided – in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, the USSR needs bases and a fleet in the World Ocean as strongholds for rendering assistance to the peoples fighting against imperialism (4:32). This system of views was based on the ideas of the First Main Directorate of the State Security Committee, which proposed focusing on a limited number of strategically located states that would be economically «low-intensive». At the same time, reference was made to the experience of Great Britain, which, by controlling only a few points on

18 Solzhenitsyn A.I. – Brezhnev, September 5, 1973 President Archive. Fund 3. Inventory file 67. File 245. Paper 3 (Then it was made public and known as the “Letter to the Leaders of the Soviet Union”).

the map – Gibraltar, Malta, Suez, Aden, Singapore – secured dominance on the sea route from Europe to India (9:112).

The world communist movement served as an outer shell, inside which the Soviet project of globalization was placed, and the core of the “world system of socialism” was outlined by the contours of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Inside, the “world socialist system” was divided into the USSR and its sphere of “special interests” in Eastern Europe, united by membership in the Warsaw Pact, and independent centers of power allied to Moscow – Cuba and Vietnam, each of which had its own sphere of interests – respectively in Africa and Indochina.

“Globalization” made the USSR vulnerable to US military and political pressure in the Caribbean (Cuba, Nicaragua), Africa (Angola) and the Middle East (Syria). Syria became the main front of the confrontation in the early 1980s. After the start of Israel’s aggression in Lebanon in the summer of 1982, Assad turned to the USSR for military support. The Politburo decides to send an air defense and air force expeditionary group to Syria. But a year later, under the new General Secretary – Andropov, the Politburo, fearing a repeat of the Caribbean crisis, refuses to actively use military force to expand the Soviet sphere of interests and switches to geopolitical defense (4:335–342).

Understanding the vulnerability of the external contour of Pax Sovietica forces Gorbachev’s Politburo to make the program for resolving regional conflicts the center of gravity of counteracting the American policy of “neo-globalism”<sup>19</sup>. Appropriate decisions were made on Afghanistan and Kampuchea in 1986, and on Angola in 1988. By the end of 1989, Moscow had achieved a settlement of the main regional crises, retaining its position in the third world. Gorbachev did not plan to abandon Pax Sovietica. However, unlike Brezhnev and Gromyko with their stake on the Arab East, M. Gorbachev staked on “Asia” (the Indo-Pacific region), believing that “civilization in the 21st century will go in the East”<sup>20</sup>. The elements of Gorbachev’s Asian strategy were: the desire to deal with India as a “world power”, including support for its regional aspirations and naval ambitions, an emphasis on interaction between India and the strategic ally of the USSR in the Asia-Pacific region – Vietnam, with the possible involvement of Indonesia, the completion normalization process with China. The turn of the USSR to Asia was supposed to lead to the formation of a new architecture of international relations, which assumed the strengthening of the role of the UN (to constrain US foreign policy) and the formation of “open” regional organizations, such as “USSR – India – China”, with the possible involvement of Brazil (modern RIC (Russia – India – China) and BRICS). New “network” structures were to become a counterbalance to such military-political alliances as NATO. And access to the emerging markets of the Indo-Pacific region was supposed to provide the Soviet economy with a leading position in the world economy (42:310–311).

The “historical tasks” of Russia formulated by Kuropatkin were basically solved by the end of the Brezhnev period. The main braces of Pax Sovietica were completed during

<sup>19</sup> About measures to strengthen our opposition to the American policy of neo-globalism. Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU, September 4, 1986. *Istochnik*. 1995; 2:70-72.

<sup>20</sup> Politburo, December 4, 1986. In the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Moscow, 2008:110.



the globalization of the USSR in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s. The USSR successfully withstood the last “siege” of the socialist community during the President R. Reagan period. The economic foundation of Pax Sovietica was formed. In contrast to Soviet trade with Western countries, which was mainly an exchange of Soviet raw materials for technology and food, trade with developing countries consisted of the exchange of industrial equipment produced in the Soviet Union for industrial and agricultural raw materials. If we add the arms trade, then the position of the USSR in the world economy in the late 1980s, especially its economic position in the third world, looked impressive.

## **The USSR and the rise of Asia in world affairs in the 20th century**

Historically, Russia’s security was determined by the situation, which became significant in connection with the “rise of Asia” in world affairs in the 20th century. At the beginning of the XX century Russia’s neighbors in Asia were three empires that were in a state of decline – Turkish, Persian and Chinese. When Kuropatkin formulated the historical tasks of Russia, economic and political penetration into them was conceived as an ordinary colonial affair. For 100 years the situation has fundamentally changed – in the East and South, Russia now has the neighbors that are dynamic centers of power: Japan, China, Iran, Turkey. This situation matured gradually, and the task of adapting to the changing geopolitical landscape arose before the military-political leadership of the USSR only in the second half of the 20th century. Stalin’s theses about the emergence of a revolutionary situation in East Asia after the victory of the Chinese revolution and the shift of the center of the world revolutionary movement from West to East laid the foundation for the Soviet approach to the problem of the rise of Asia<sup>21</sup>.

It was on this basis that at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s there was a delimitation of spheres of interest between Moscow and Beijing, and the inertia of these agreements operated throughout the entire period of the Cold War and continues to operate today. The Chinese call the emerging model of relationships “back-to-back”. A very elegant description of it was given by analysts of the First Main Directorate of the State Security Committee in the mid-1970s: “The USSR and the PRC turned their backs to each other, i.e. the least developed and remote from the center regions. The USSR is turned to face Europe, to the West, China – to the Pacific Ocean and Southeast Asia. The economies of the two countries are not competitors to each other, they naturally complement each other. ... China’s strategic interests lie in Asia” (9:118–119).

The back-to-back model gave the USSR colossal geopolitical advantages in strategic competition with the United States. Despite the escalation of the struggle for leadership in the world communist movement between Moscow and Beijing, during the negotiations

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<sup>21</sup> These ideas were voiced on July 10 in their original form – in the form of Stalin’s toast during the reception of the Chinese delegation headed by Liu Shaoqi. As K. Kovalev recalled, the Chinese leaders were inspired by Stalin’s statements that the Chinese communists should become the head of the peoples of East Asia and lead them (Goncharov S. Stalin’s dialogue with Mao Zedong. Problems of the Far East. 1992; 1-2-3:80.

between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong in the summer of 1958 and the negotiations between A. Kosygin and Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in February 1965, the agreements of 1949–1950 were confirmed, including readiness for coordination in the military-political sphere. In February 1965, the USSR and China agreed on the goals of the coalition strategy in Asia: to help the “Anglo-American bloc” get bogged down in Southeast Asia. It was supposed to strategically forge the “Anglo-American bloc” by supporting the “special war” of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the territory of South Vietnam; to give continued assistance to Indonesia in its confrontation with Malaysia, which was supported by the British; to strengthen the air defense of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The main thing at the same time was to prevent the escalation of local conflicts into a world war<sup>22</sup>. It should not be forgotten that the Soviet Union considered the war in Vietnam (and before that – in Korea) in the context of the struggle between the US and China for predominant influence in Asia. Having bound the USA in Indochina, the USSR got the opportunity to strengthen its positions in the Middle East, in the Arab countries and India, which were of great political, economic and military interest to it<sup>23</sup>.

The crisis of the back-to-back model was caused by internal processes in China associated with the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966). In 1969, Mao Zedong’s fear of possible Soviet intervention in the Chinese unrest, under the influence of the Czechoslovak events, led Beijing to the decision to launch a preemptive strike, provoking a series of major clashes on the border (Damansky, Dulaty, Zhalanashgol). For 10 years after the “border war” in 1969, the “Chinese” policy of the Politburo was reduced to unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the Chinese from a position of strength, which became one of the reasons for the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington. The result was a positional impasse and an increase in fear of military danger in the East (6:77–109)<sup>24</sup>. When the expectations of changes after the death of Mao Zedong are not justified and Brzezinski begins to play the “Chinese card”, the Politburo in the summer of 1978 finds a way out through a military-political alliance with Vietnam. Planned as a fleeting operation of the Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea turned into a regional war between China and Vietnam, which lasted for a decade (1979–1988). The USSR, carrying out strategic deterrence measures in the Far East (the largest of them is the military operation Vostok-79), de facto became a participant in its active phase (18). The unpreparedness of the Chinese army for a large-scale military conflict on two fronts at the same time – with the USSR and Vietnam, the economic problems of

22 Recordings of negotiations between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong July 31 – August 2, 1958. Russian State Archive of Contemporary History. Fund 52. Inventory file1. File 498; Chinese transcripts of Kosygin’s talks in Beijing have been translated into English and are available on the Cold War International History Project website: Record of the Fifth Contact between Premier Zhou, Chen Yi and Kosygin, 10 February 1965. Available from: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/165486>; Minutes from Conversation between Kosygin and Mao Zedong, February 11. 1965. Available from: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118039>; Record of Conversation with V. D. Moskovsky, February 16, 1965. Available from: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114980>.

23 Gromyko A. In the Central Committee of the CPSU. About our further line and some measures in relations with the USA. April 6, 1970. Russian State Archive of Contemporary History. Fund 3. Inventory file 68. File folder 1242. Paper 59-91.

24 Kapitsa M.S. On different parallels. Moscow, 1996:77-109.

China, created the prerequisites for the normalization of Soviet–Chinese relations (32)<sup>25</sup>.

The “secret” contacts between the USSR and the China on the issue of improving interstate relations that began after Brezhnev’s Tashkent speech (March 1982) led to a revival of economic and cultural ties with the understanding that China would be ready to normalize political relations only if the USSR ceased military the political encirclement of the China (the so-called “three conditions” – to withdraw Soviet troops from the Chinese border and withdraw them from the Mongolian People’s Republic, to stop military assistance to Vietnam). With Gorbachev coming to power, already in 1986, the Politburo made a decision on the transition to a full-fledged normalization of relations with the China. In the Cambodian question, the strategic line of the Politburo was determined in March 1987 (the goal is national reconciliation according to the Afghan model). The turning point came a year later, when the Vietnamese leadership decided to withdraw Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, removing the main obstacle to the normalization of Sino–Soviet and Sino–Vietnamese relations. In turn, the Chinese leadership decides to normalize completely the relations with the USSR. Already in January 1989, Moscow informed Beijing about the planned reduction in the troops in the East in 1989–1990 and decides on the withdrawal of the 39th Army from Mongolia. On May 15–18, 1989 M. Gorbachev traveled to Beijing. A line under the past was drawn (6:110–115; 42:33–46, 100–102, 196).

The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran was the beginning of the emergence of another center of power in Asia. Faced with the formation of an “arc of crisis” in the Persian Gulf, the Politburo faced a choice: either to improve relations with the new regime in Tehran, considering it as one of the varieties of the national liberation movement, or, fearing an outbreak of “Muslim fanaticism” in the southern “underbelly” of the USSR, go to the policy of containment. Iraq’s attack on Iran in August 1980 indicated a false way out of the situation of uncertainty – the Politburo decided to balance in Iranian policy, but “toward Baghdad”. The same time, Brezhnev hesitated on the Iranian issue almost to his death. In October, at his insistence, the Politburo decides to deploy a Soviet air defense group in Syria. The relationship between the confrontation between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel (backed by the United States and France) and the situation in the Persian Gulf, where Iraqi troops were defeated during successful offensives by Iranian troops, was no secret to the Politburo. At the talks in the Kremlin on June 26, 1982, H. Assad explained that if Syria held out, with any change in the regime in Iraq, after Saddam, either pro–Syrian or pro–Iranian forces would come to power. In any case, the new regime will be anti–American. This is where the geographical factor can play its role. According to the Syrian leader, through Iran and Iraq, Syria will receive direct access to the Soviet Union by land. In November 1982, Brezhnev dies, not having managed to form a consensus in the Politburo on policy towards Iran, as he succeeded in the Chinese situation. The concept of a “land bridge” to the Mediterranean was shelved until the second decade of the 21st century.

25 On the understanding by the main command of the People’s Liberation Army of China of their unpreparedness for a large-scale conflict with the participation of the USSR: Chen L. Operational Idealism: Doctrine Development of the PLA under Soviet Threat. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 2017;5:663-695.

Gorbachev did not dare to change the direction of Iranian policy, despite the existing in 1986–1987 “window of opportunities”. The Iranians offered the USSR to establish a strategic partnership against American penetration into the region. Diplomatic contacts took place on the background of gaining by the Tehran strategic initiative at the front. However, the “balanced, equidistant line” in the Iran–Iraq conflict won in the Soviet leadership. As a result, the United States, which teetered on the brink of war with Iran for much of the 1980s, avoided a new Vietnam. The settlement of relations with Iran took place only at the end of the Gorbachev period, in January–February 1989 (27:103–108; 40; 34)<sup>26</sup>.

The rise of Asia presented the Politburo with a dilemma: how to build policy towards new centers of power along the perimeter of the USSR, by delimiting spheres of interest or balancing. Stalin chose the first option and delineated “spheres of responsibility” with the leadership of the new China in 1949–1950. Brezhnev had to resort to balancing after the “border war” of 1969 and an unsuccessful attempt to resolve relations with China from a “position of strength”. The result of the balancing policy was a long period of military confrontation. The balancing policy turned out to be economically unprofitable, which seriously complicated the position of the USSR in its confrontation with the West. The situation began to stabilize only after the start of the military conflict, and in fact – the regional war between China and Vietnam in 1979. By the turn of the 1980s – 1990s, the situation “as if by itself” returned to the “back to back” model, first of all, due to the lack of a counterweight to China. The situation was approximately the same in the Middle East, where the Soviet leadership also initially opted for a balancing strategy. However, Iraq was first exhausted by the war with Iran, and then defeated by the United States. The Soviet leadership had to build bridges with Tehran. The practice of relations with new centers of power in Asia in the second half of the 20th century showed that the delimitation of spheres of interest or the model of “strategic partnership”, in the language of modern diplomacy, is the least expensive way to build relations with strong neighbors.

## Vienna system 2.0

The creation of a sphere of “special state interests” of the USSR in Eastern Europe was not originally planned by Stalin and was the result of the devastating consequences of the Second World War. After the defeat of Germany, the weakening of France and Italy, the USSR turned out to be the only strong “land” power in Europe. A similar situation arose on the European continent after the Napoleonic Wars. At that time, its international legal design was the Vienna system, which was based on the unity of the great powers, behind which was a bipolar system, the poles of which were the Russian and British empires (43).

<sup>26</sup> Shevardnadze E. When the iron curtain collapsed. Moscow, 2009:103-108. Soviet-Iranian relations during the Gorbachev period are covered in detail in the article: Nunan T. Doomed to Good Relations. *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 2022; 1:39-77. “Twilight war” between the US and Iran in the 80s, brinkmanship in the second half of the 80s – see the study based on declassified American documents Crist D.. *The Twilight War*. N.Y. 2012.

The desire to use the experience of the XIX century when planning the post-war world order was typical for the diplomacy of the “big three” countries. Therefore, Soviet diplomacy proposed restoring the Vienna system under new conditions “on the basis of an amicable delimitation of security spheres in Europe on the basis of the principle of immediate neighbourhood”. Britain’s interest was seen in ensuring the balance of power in Europe and eliminating the “prerequisites for a third world war”. The USSR, in turn, was interested in keeping England as a powerful power, “because we may need such an England to balance in the face of US imperialist expansion”<sup>27</sup>. That turned out to be wrong. Already in September 1946, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, N. Novikov, stated an agreement between the United States and Great Britain “on the partial division of the world on the basis of mutual concessions, close coordination of their policies at international conferences”<sup>28</sup>. The “foundations of the future world” project in the form in which it was conceived in the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs during the war years, was not realized. The position of the USSR as the strongest power in Europe was challenged by the United States almost immediately after the end of World War II. Since Stalin was not going to share the role of European hegemon with anyone after the end of World War II, in the summer of 1946 the USSR shifted from betting on the preservation of the anti-Hitler coalition to a policy of strategic rivalry with the United States<sup>29</sup>. From that moment, the key goal of Soviet policy was to oust the United States from Europe. All Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev fought for this.

Nevertheless, the system-forming elements of the “Vienna System 2.0” – the United Nations and its core, the Security Council, laid the foundation for a sustainable world order. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the scales gradually tipped in favor of the USSR, especially after the US defeat in Vietnam. The 1970s is the heyday of the “Vienna System 2.0”. After the US defeat in the Second Indochina War, the USSR dominated Europe in military-strategic terms (44). To consolidate the new balance of power, the Politburo is taking steps to neutralize the factor of American nuclear weapons in Europe. The topic of disarmament is becoming the core of negotiations with the United States. At the same time, the Politburo relied not so much on negotiations on strategic offensive weapons, but on the conclusion of an agreement between the USSR and the USA on the non-use of nuclear weapons against each other, hoping that it would undermine America’s influence in Europe. The conclusion of such an agreement would bind the United States in such a way, Gromyko liked to say among his employees, that it would not be clear whether they would come to the aid of the Europeans or not. Leonid Brezhnev negotiated this with Nixon, Ford and Carter. In parallel, there were attempts to consolidate the Soviet military-political hegemony in Europe through political actions aimed at “loosening” the northern and southern flanks of NATO<sup>30</sup>.

27 Litvinov M. Note On the prospects and possible basis for Soviet-British cooperation, November 15, 1944. Foreign Policy Archive. Fund 06. Inventory file 6. File folder 143. File 14. Paper 37-38, 81-86.

28 Novikov N.V. US foreign policy in the post-war period. September 22, 1946. Foreign Policy Archive. Fund 06. Inventory file 8. File folder 45. File 759. Paper 15.

29 The key moment here was the discussion by the Soviet leadership in May 1946 of the American draft treaty with Germany. The materials of the discussion were published in the collection: The USSR and the German Question. 1941-1949. Moscow, 2002. Vol. II.

30 He writes in detail about the significance of the initiative on the non-use of nuclear weapons in his memoirs: Alexandrov-Agentov A.M. From Kollontai to Gorbachev. Moscow: 1994:232.

The USSR, however, turned out to be “tied” to its sphere of special interests in Eastern Europe, which Khrushchev was already beginning to perceive as a political and military burden. By the time of Brezhnev’s death the attitude to the socialist countries as “let them do what they want” was already widespread on Staraya Ploshad’ (so called The Old Square)<sup>31</sup>. And by the time Gorbachev was elected General Secretary, they began to prevail. In 1986, the Politburo assesses the existing trade and economic relations in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance as a burden on the Soviet economy<sup>32</sup>. By the beginning of 1989, Gorbachev’s formula had developed: to deal with Eastern Europe as with China<sup>33</sup>. And in the military-political field, the thesis inherited by Gorbachev from Khrushchev is reinforced: the most effective way to oust the United States from Europe is a mutual, phased withdrawal of Soviet and American troops, in which the Americans go overseas, and the USSR withdraws troops for several hundred kilometers<sup>34</sup>. This is the geopolitical meaning of the idea of a “Common European Home”, which was more important than the treaties on the elimination of intermediate and shorter-range missiles and strategic offensive weapons. Protracted disarmament talks pushed European security issues, including the future of Eastern Europe, to the very back of the Soviet-American agenda. The Politburo did not feel the shift in the worldview of the Reagan administration that occurred in the fall of 1987 – the readiness to deal with the Soviet Union “as with China”<sup>35</sup>. The “Chinese mode” invented by J. Schultz opened the way to some serious agreements, but the Politburo was in no hurry – the “big deal” was thought to be possible only with the next administration.

The Soviet peace offensive announced by Gorbachev in his UN speech in December 1988, aimed at resolving European security issues has stalled. George W. Bush, after his election as the President of the United States, took a pause in the negotiations, which lasted until May 1989. Nevertheless, until late autumn, the Politburo was sure that, despite the unrest in Poland and Hungary, the situation in Eastern Europe was developing acceptable. The priority for Moscow was to avoid getting involved in the internal political crisis of one of the Eastern European countries. Appropriate decisions excluding the use of military force were made by the Politburo in March 1989. The prospects of a “new Yalta” with the Americans were seen as real not only on Staraya Ploshad’ (so called The Old Square): March 30, 1989, Scowcroft proposed to Bush a complete withdrawal of Soviet and American troops from Central Europe as the best variant of the European settlement for the USA. Veterans of American politics, Kissinger and Brzezinski, spoke about the same during their meetings with Gorbachev<sup>36</sup>.

Everything changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 and G. Kohl’s bet on the destabilization of the Krenz-Modrow government and the forced unification of

31 Chernyaev’s diary, entry dated November 11, 1982. National Security Archives Fund. 2. 1982. Paper 50.

32 Ibid., July 3, 1986. Paper 69.

33 Notes by Chernyaev at a meeting of the Politburo on January 21, 1989. Available from: [https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/text\\_files/Masterpiece/1989-01-21.pdf](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/text_files/Masterpiece/1989-01-21.pdf)

34 Dobrynin A.F. Purely confidential. Moscow, 1997:607.

35 Non-paper Prepare of by the Secretary of State. Nov. 18. 1987. FRUS. 1981-1988; Vol. VI:530.

36 From a conversation with H. Kissinger, January 17, 1989. Answering the challenge of time. Moscow, 2010:221-223; Recording of M.S. Gorbachev with E. Krenz November 1, 1989. Available from: [https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/text\\_files/Masterpiece/1989-11-1.pdf](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/text_files/Masterpiece/1989-11-1.pdf)



Germany through the “Anschluss” of the GDR. The meaning of what was happening was understood in Moscow immediately. Kohl’s rejection of the Ostpolitik model and the return to Adenauer’s paradigm of “change through force” after some hesitation was supported by the United States, which had a decisive influence on the positions of other Western powers. The logic of the Bush administration has changed, as the American analysis of the prospects for perestroika pointed to a high probability of its failure and the removal of Gorbachev. The risk of a repeat of “Hungary” in the GDR, as it became clear during the summit in Malta in December 1989, was minimal (45:174).

At a meeting in the Kremlin on January 26, 1990, the Soviet leadership, which had previously abandoned the use of military force as an instrument of influence on the situation, decides to bet on delaying the process of German unification. The decision looks justified. If the German issue had “survived” in limbo until August 2, the invasion of Iraqi troops into Kuwait would have radically affected the balance of power in Europe. But Gorbachev did not have enough patience and steadfastness – for the first time he faltered in Washington on May 31, agreeing in principle to the membership of a united Germany in NATO (much to the surprise of the Americans and the Soviet delegation), and finally “surrendered” in July at negotiations with Kohl in Moscow and Arkhyz on July 15–16. After that, in fact, only the amount of compensation for the withdrawal of a group of Soviet troops from Germany was discussed with the Germans (46:118–119,124).

What were the consequences of the loss of Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany for the fate of the USSR and the project of “Russian globalization”? After all, Gorbachev already wanted to get rid of the sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and do business with it as with China. It seems that the main consequences were associated with the expansion of NATO to the East, and they began to threaten Russia’s military security only in connection with attempts to drag Ukraine and Georgia into the North Atlantic Alliance. Not the retreat from Europe, but the collapse of “Historical Russia” and the policy of the US and NATO aimed at taking advantage of the temporary weakening of the Russian state in their interests, have created problems that affect the security of our country so seriously that “there is nowhere to retreat further”.

## **Planning for the armed forces use**

Strategic planning in the field of defense in Russia since the end of the 19th century. and in the 20th century, focused on the Great (World) War. There are three groups of plans related to Russia’s entry into World Wars I and II and planning for its participation in a world conflict during the Cold War.

The main idea of the operational plan of the Russian high command for the First World War was that by going on the offensive of the Northwestern Front in East Prussia and the Southwestern in Galicia, create a situation for a decisive offensive into Silesia and further to Berlin (38). The slogan “to Berlin” went against the goals of Russia in the war and the realities of the military strategy of that period. As A.A.Svechin wrote, the tsarist

government, which dreamed of the Bosphorus, was hardly on the politically correct path, believing that the keys to the Bosphorus were in Berlin (23:242).

The unsuccessful experience of Russian participation in the First World War led to a rethinking of the goals of military planning. The plan for the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR approved on October 5, 1940. The Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks assumed: "in the West, the main group should be in the South-Western Front, so that with a powerful blow to the directions of Lublin and Krakow, and then to Breslau in the very first stage of the war cut off Germany from the Balkan countries. The strategic goal of the operation planned in the West stemmed from the political goals of the war, as they were determined by the Soviet leadership, was limited in nature – it lacks the task of completely mastering the territory of any state, capturing any capital – primarily Berlin (3:63).

A detailed analysis of the USSR preparation for war, which laid the foundation for the modern approach, was carried out by the USSR Ministry of Defense at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s under the leadership of Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky. The main conclusion was that the planning of the use of the armed forces by the Soviet General Staff as a whole was adequate in that political and military situation, and it is advisable to use this experience in the development of modern operations. The reasons for the June tragedy of 1941, the USSR Ministry of Defense was sure, should be sought in the qualitative state of the Red Army, as well as in the specific circumstances of military operations. It can be said that approaches to planning the armed forces of the USSR after the war were formed on the basis of understanding the concept of the strategic offensive operation of the Red Army to the West in 1940–1941 (7:207-208).

The views of the Soviet General Staff on the use of armed forces in the war in the West, as they developed by the end of the 70s deserve special attention. After the 1960s, when the world war was conceived as an exchange of nuclear missile strikes, formed at the turn of the 70s and 80s. approaches to the use of the Armed Forces is the result of the hard work of the General Staff, aimed at finding such an option in which the first and subsequent strategic operations can be completed without the use of nuclear weapons.

The Soviet General Staff hoped to win the initial period of the war (and the war as a whole) without giving NATO any time to decide on the use of nuclear weapons. To do this, the first strategic operation had to be carried out in a short time with jewelry accuracy. Its goal is to defeat the first (and only) strategic echelon and the nearest reserves of the NATO armed forces. The operation was planned to a depth of 600–700 kilometers. The General Staff believed that the defeat of the main NATO forces on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and the occupation of the main ports on the North Sea and in the Benelux countries would make the further continuation of the war with the prospect of the massive use of nuclear weapons senseless for the United States (29:212–217; 37; 41). The concept of Marshal N.V. Ogarkov was no less risky than the plans of the General Staff of the Red Army in 1941, if only because the fighting would have to be carried out under the constant threat of the use of nuclear weapons by the enemy. If the Blitzkrieg failed, there was also the risk of a transition to a long conventional war, in which the superiority of the US military and economic potential would play an important role against the USSR.

Russia's military doctrine throughout much of the Soviet period was radical. It was only at the very end that Gorbachev began to break this tradition. In his opinion, the task of ousting the United States from Europe was easier to solve through a mutual phased withdrawal of American and Soviet troops. This meant abandoning the pronounced offensive nature of the Soviet military strategy. The transition to a defensive military doctrine looks justified in the specific conditions of the second half of the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> However, Gorbachev went further. In the context of the conflict with the military, dissatisfied with the disarmament initiatives of the political leadership, its doubts grew in the ability of the military in general to ensure the achievement of political goals by military means. In these doubts, Gorbachev was strengthened by an unsuccessful experience in Afghanistan<sup>38</sup>. Gorbachev began to fear the use of military force, its use as a strategic deterrence, which influenced the course of events in Eastern Europe in 1989, and then the internal crises in the USSR in 1990-1991.

## Korean model

After the Second World War, the central task of the Soviet military-political strategy was defined as follows: the efforts of the USSR in "spheres of its vital interest" should not lead to conflict with the "atomic powers" and, especially, to a world war. Although Soviet military planning continued to be oriented towards a "big war", Khrushchev already understood its perniciousness in modern conditions. Hence it was the stake on the model of the Korean War, which assumed the participation of the USSR in regional wars and local conflicts by expeditionary groups. This approach was fully accepted by Brezhnev. From the second half of the 1960s, the creation of expeditionary groups, which were based on the Air Force and Air Defense, went on, as a rule, in unity with the deployment of operational squadrons of the Navy on the main sea lanes. This created the framework of the strongholds of the Soviet infrastructure empire in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Soviet expeditionary groups participation in local conflicts of the second half of the 20th century pursued clear military-political goals. The military efforts of the USSR during the Korean and Vietnam Wars were associated with the task of tying down the United States in the Far East in order to ease their military and political pressure in Europe, to create conditions for strengthening the positions of the Soviet Union in areas of its state interests – in the Middle East. In the Middle East, during operations Kavkaz and Kavkaz-2, the goals of the USSR were to consolidate its permanent military presence in Egypt and Syria and create bases there to support the activities of the 5th operational squadron. That made it possible to control the approaches to the strategically important Bosphorus and Gibraltar (1).

A special case is Afghanistan. This was a special operation of the USSR State Security Committee to change the regime in Kabul, carried out with the support of the Armed Forces. And the opposition of Marshal Ogarkov to the introduction of troops into Afghanistan was

<sup>37</sup> The Defense Council approved the main provisions of the new defensive doctrine in December 1986.

<sup>38</sup> To the Politburo November 13, 1986 Answering the challenge of the time:605.

connected, first of all, with the unwillingness to weaken the groups in the main, from his point of view, theaters of war – in the West and in the East (12; 5)<sup>39</sup>. The “introduction” of troops to Poland was prepared according to the same model: it was planned to mobilize only one army to support the Polish Army during the announcement of a state of emergency <sup>40</sup>.

## Measures of strategic deterrence

During the Cold War, the USSR sought to avoid a grand war with nuclear powers, relying on strategic deterrence measures. And the Soviet leadership succeeded at least three times. The first measure that had geopolitical consequences was carried out in 1956 as part of the so-called “suppression of the counter-revolutionary rebellion” in Hungary<sup>41</sup>. The United States and NATO did not have military-political opportunities to intervene in the Hungarian events. So for all administrations in Washington, the thesis that Western interference in the Soviet sphere of interests in Eastern Europe can only provoke a new “Hungary” has become an axiom. Therefore, the goal that was set in Washington in relation to Eastern Europe until 1989 was its “Finlandization”.

The second measure of strategic deterrence was connected with the events in Czechoslovakia. In 1968, the “military alarm” at the beginning of the year, associated with the aggravation of the military-political situation in Vietnam and Korea, ended in August-September with Operation Danube, in which up to half a million troops of the Warsaw Treaty Organization took part. Returning from a meeting of the Politburo at which it was decided to send troops to Czechoslovakia, Minister of Defense A.A. Grechko announced to the leadership of the Ministry of Defense: “This decision will be implemented even if it leads to a third world war” (14:218,223). The entry into Czechoslovakia of a group of Warsaw Pact troops was unexpected for NATO. Military units from the states of the Warsaw Pact countries entered Prague 5 hours after crossing the border. Operation Danube was a successful rehearsal for a strategic offensive operation to the West (1:285–286). It became clear to European leaders, primarily to German Chancellor W. Brandt, that American security guarantees were of a formal nature (44)<sup>42</sup>.

The next measure of strategic deterrence, which had geopolitical consequences, was carried out during the active phase of the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979). In terms of the number of military forces and equipment involved, the Vostok-79 exercises were comparable to Operation Danube (18). The large-scale measures of strategic deterrence carried out by

39 See: Lyakhovsky A. The tragedy and valor of Africa. Moscow, 2004: 201-203, 207, 224, 234-258. The fact that the introduction of troops was considered as a concomitant measure to the elimination of Amin by the forces of the special forces of the KGB and the GRU: Grinevsky O. Secrets of Soviet diplomacy. Moscow, 2000: 307.

40 Suslov, Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, Chernenko in the Central Committee of the CPSU, August 28, 1980 Available from: <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/august28.htm>.

41 On the experience of the Soviet troops fighting in Hungary: a note by G.K. Zhukov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, November 12, 1950 The Soviet Army: years of reforms and trials. Moscow, 2018:64-68.

42 Trachtenberg M. The Structure of Great Power Politics, 1963-1975. Cambridge History of the Cold War. Cambridge. 2010. Vol. 2. The relationship between the Czechoslovak events of “ostpolitik” and detente was well understood by A.A. Gromyko, as he liked to remind his colleagues in the Politburo.

the USSR during this period convinced the Chinese leadership of the futility of military confrontation with the USSR.

Summing up, we should talk about the evolution of Russian military strategy in the 20th century: from betting on victory in the world war in the first half of the century to betting on the actions of expeditionary groups in local conflicts as a special form of strategic actions in the second half of the century. They were carried out by the USSR allied forces with the participation of expeditionary groupings of the armed forces of the USSR itself in order to tie down the forces of the “main enemy” and create conditions for a decisive strike in the main theater of operations, which could take the form of both real hostilities and strategic deterrence measures (demonstration of combat capabilities). The latter became the main form of employment of the armed forces in the West and East.

### **Political and military strategy and resource potential**

To describe the actions of Russia in the world in the XX century the ratio of the dependence of the cycles of rise and fall of the great powers on their industrial and financial potential is not suitable. Starting from the Muscovy, Russia solved the tasks of dominating its immediate geopolitical environment and the tasks of strategic rivalry with other great powers in the West and in the East, without relying on the superiority of its military and economic potential. Russia's economic base in the 20th century was only 9–12% of the world's GNP. At the same time, the ratio of military-economic potentials during the Cold War – when Russia and the Warsaw Pact were strategic rivalry with the United States, Western Europe and Japan at the same time was significantly worse than in the first half of the century – when it acted in an alliance with the United States and Great Britain.

The share of defense spending in the country's economy after the peak during the war of 1941–1945 since the late 1950s was stable and fluctuated within 7–8% of GNP (15:105). For comparison, after a similar peak during the Second World War and the Korean War, the share of military spending in the US GNP was in the 1960s–1970s about 8% and then decreased to 5–6% in the 1980s. (35:393–394). In addition to spending on military needs, it is necessary to take into account the funds allocated for military and economic assistance to the allies. On October 23, 1985, at the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact Organization in Sofia, Gorbachev named the quantity of more than 11 billion rubles of aid to allies in the third world. For comparison with defense spending (63.4 billion), the funds for ensuring national security are not large (about 75 billion rubles, in 1985 amounted to less than 10% of GNP – 777 billion rubles) (15: 108). The funds were certainly considerable, but the Politburo was more concerned about the inefficiency of agriculture and the need to purchase grain from abroad than military spending and aid to the allies. It was not military spending or even a collapse in oil prices, but errors in financial and economic policy that first caused the collapse of the financial system, and then a deep economic crisis that engulfed the USSR in the late 1980s (39:177–183).

## Results

How a great power with limited military and economic resources was able throughout the 20th century to conduct strategic rivalry simultaneously with several, as a rule, economically more powerful opponents? Russia managed to solve this problem thanks to the presence of a political-military strategy, which, on the whole, was of a well-thought-out character. Clear geopolitical goals: the creation of an infrastructural empire similar to the British – united all the leaders of Russia from Nikolai Romanov to Mikhail Gorbachev. The coordinate system laid down by Kuropatkin determined the geopolitical goals of Russia and the USSR in the first half of the 20th century (until the death of Stalin), and in the subsequent period (until the end of the Cold War) – the military goals of the Soviet Union in the event of a third world war. At the same time, the struggle for the freedom of sea communications was transformed from the task of direct control over the straits to the desire to “jump over” them, gaining a foothold in strategic points along the sea route from Europe to the Far East. Given the absolute superiority of the United States in the nuclear field in the 1950s, this path seems appropriate. By the end of the Brezhnev period, the main braces of Pax Sovietica had been created.

The desire to avoid overexertion has played an increasingly important role for the Politburo since the second half of the century. It is no coincidence that immediately after Stalin's death, the Soviet leadership made the first attempt to get rid of the military-political burdens associated with the special interests of the USSR in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev's idea of doing business with Eastern Europe as with China looks, at first glance, reasonable. However, its implementation, underestimation of the importance of the buffer security zone along the perimeter of the borders turned the retreat into a flight, and seriously affected the disorganization of the state administration system in the USSR and the demoralization of its leadership at the time of the acute internal crisis in the country.

The rise of Asia changed the geopolitical context of the construction of the Soviet infrastructural empire. Instead of weak neighbors, dynamic centers of power appeared. The desire to use common interests with China in Korea and Vietnam to shackle the United States in Asia was an important element of the Soviet strategy. The back-to-back model made it possible to use the dynamics of the emerging multipolarity in the world as a multiplier of the military-political potential of the USSR.

The evolution of the Russian military strategy – from betting on a major war in the first half of the century to betting on local wars in the second – led to the emergence of a coherent model of military and political actions, involving the use of absolutely superior forces and means in the framework of rapid military operations (or strategic deterrence measures) in the immediate geopolitical environment of the USSR, and beyond – actions on the model of the Korean War by expeditionary groups, the basis of which was the Air Force and air defense. The creation of expeditionary groups in remote theaters of military operations was, as a rule, in unity with the deployment of operational naval squadrons on the main sea communications. All this created the framework of the Soviet infrastructural empire.



The «Russian Globalization Project» took place at the turn of the 1970s – 1980s. His subsequent crisis and the collapse of the USSR were connected with the specific mistakes of the Gorbachev Politburo in domestic and economic policy, which led to the formation of an alternative political center in Moscow headed by Boris Yeltsin. Nevertheless, the idea of a continental infrastructure empire is still alive. «One Belt, One Road» is Chinese President Xi Jinping's bid to build a Chinese infrastructure empire (30)<sup>43</sup>. The demand for this approach is also evidenced by the political and military strategy of modern Turkey (31).

The creators of projects in the field of long-term foreign policy planning considered the “past as a springboard” for constructing an image of the future. The historical tasks set by Kuropatkin were based on the analysis of the previous 200 years of Russian history. And Stalin's diplomats described the foundations of the future world basing on history. In his turn, Foreign Minister Gromyko based his ideas on the ideas of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs during the war. Thus, in the national tradition, 150–200 years is the operational memory of public administration. The historical experience of Russia and the USSR as a world power in the XX century can become the basis for the development of a model of the political and military strategy of modern Russia in the period of long-term strategic rivalry between the great powers.

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## Contribution of the author

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