

## **RUSSIAN BASES ABROAD: SECURITY POLICY OR POWER PROJECTION?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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After the collapse of the bipolar system, the Soviet Union, and then its heir, the Russian Federation, lost its position as a global player in favour of US hegemony. The arms race was abandoned, reduction of military spending began, and Russian troops were withdrawn from most bases outside the country. The changing conditions of Russia's security, NATO enlargement, and loss of influence in many regions of the world have prompted the Russian authorities to change their security policy and restore the former balance. The security policy of the Russian Federation aimed at rebuilding its superpower position in the world is implemented, among others, through their military presence outside its borders. The use of this instrument in foreign policy serves both to regain a dominant role and to pursue particular interests – including internal ones. A critical analysis based on the literature on the subject, strategic documents of the Russian Federation, and reports and articles available on the Internet confirms the assumption that the Russian Federation successfully strengthens its position

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in the world, thus strengthening not only the security of the state, but also manifesting its power.

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#### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary international relations, military security policy remains an important, and perhaps even the most important, expression of the international activity of the state, which, while building its own security environment, takes actions both in the internal and external sphere, depending on the needs and identified threats. Particularly important role in the field of military security is played by its external dimension, understood as actions not only strictly military, but also those going far beyond their area. The goal of extensive cooperation (also diplomatic) with other participants in international relations, not necessarily state relations, may be: to dismiss the threat and build new alliances, to expand the sphere of influence, to raise the prestige of the state, and to strengthen its international position until becoming a regional or global power. The goals understood in this way determine the forms of military security policy.

The policy of using the military instrument (example of Ukraine, Syria) is pursued by the Russian Federation, which, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, is consistently striving to rebuild a superpower position from the Soviet Union period. An example of changes in this respect is not only the Russian Armed Forces Modernization Program implemented in Russia, but also a demonstration of power, which is expressed by: the occupation of parts of Ukraine, providing military assistance to undemocratic regimes, the presence of Russian soldiers abroad and increasingly bolder plans to establish military bases on other continents.

## 1. RUSSIAN FEDERATION – SECOND CATEGORY POWER

After the collapse of the bipolar system and changes that took place on the political map of the world, the Soviet Union, affected by political, ideological, systemic and economic problems, found itself in a new geopolitical situation. The power lost control over the belt of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and its borders changed. Along with the emergence of new states, territorial disputes revived in the immediate vicinity of Russia and in Russia itself, and newly emerged fragile areas sparked conflicts. As a result of the loss of part of the territory, the borders of Russia moved to the East, which moved this country away from Europe. The Russian Federation has lost its position as a global player in favour of US hegemony. Despite these unfavourable conditions for the state, in the early days of the Russian Federation the policy initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev continued, where the West was not necessarily seen as an enemy.<sup>1</sup> The arms race was abandoned and the reduction of military spending was started. Troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland.<sup>2</sup>

As a method of “strengthening” democratic gains, the West decided to extend the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the borders of Russia.<sup>3</sup> The accession to NATO of countries identifying with the cultural and political values of Western Europe, primarily members of the Visegrad Group, was a matter of time. Their accession finally sealed the loss of influence of the Russian Federation in the belt between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, and pushed the country into the rank of a second-class power. Additional weakening of the country’s position took place, despite the objection raised by the Russian Federation, after Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined NATO. Further NATO enlargement was perceived by Russia as actions aimed at stopping Russia and limiting its independence in both domestic and foreign policy. The end of domination in this part of Europe also coincided with the limited influence of the Russian Federation

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<sup>1</sup> T.W. Grabowski, *Rosyjska siła. Siły Zbrojne i główne problemy polityki obronnej Federacji Rosyjskiej w latach 1991–2010*, Częstochowa 2011, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> On 17 September 1993, the commander of the Northern Group of Forces, General Leonid Kovalev, reported to the President of the Republic of Poland Lech Wałęsa the end of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland. IAR/agkm, *22 lata temu Polskę opuściły wojska radzieckie* (22 years ago Soviet army left Poland), “Polskie Radio.pl”, 16 September 2015, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/156/Artykul/934270,22-lata-temu-Polske-opuscily-wojska-radzieckie> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>3</sup> H. Kissinger, *Porządek światowy*, Wołowiec 2017, p. 91.

in such regions of the world as: Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and also Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in the initial period of existence of the Russian Federation, the authorities of this state focused on the protection of vital interests, which included, among others, maintaining and consolidating influence in the post-Soviet area, i.e. in countries such as: Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Particularly important for Russia were the latter five countries, which became the object of US interest, primarily due to their strategic location and energy resources located in their areas. The growth of the American presence in this region was favoured by the events of 11 September 2001, following which Russia has agreed to build American logistics bases in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.<sup>5</sup>

However, over the time and, above all, facing the improvement of the economic situation in Russia and the changes taking place in international politics, the position of the Russian Federation on the issue of conducting military policy beyond well-established spheres of influence has changed. Russia has taken measures to restore balance of power and return to the status of world power. The first and very important signal was the speech of Vladimir Putin in Munich in February 2007. At that time, the Russian president stated that a unipolar order that leads to unilateral and often illegal activities cannot be acceptable in the modern world. In the opinion of Putin, the abuse of military force does not bring conflict solutions, but even deepens and generates new ones.<sup>6</sup> It was a clear announcement of the upcoming changes in the global policy pursued by the Russian Federation, the policy that went far beyond the current sphere of influence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> W. Malendowski, *Doktryna wojenna Federacji Rosyjskiej w XX i XXI wieku. Cele – zadania – kierunki działania*, "Przegląd Strategiczny", 2017, no. 10, pp. 55–94, DOI 10.14746/ps.2017.1.4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, "President of Russia", 10 February 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (access: 28.04.2019).

<sup>7</sup> W. Rouvinski, *Russian-Venezuelan Relations at a Crossroads*, "Wilson Center", February 2019, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/russia-venezuela\\_report\\_rouvinski\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/russia-venezuela_report_rouvinski_final_0.pdf) (accessed: 28.04.2019).

## 2. DEMONSTRATION OF STRENGTH

In August 2008, the authorities of the Russian Federation, in defence of vital interests and their own sphere of influence, started hostilities against Georgia. The successful military operation, apart from preventing the integration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia with Georgia, first and foremost stopped the NATO enlargement process and significantly limited American influence in the region.<sup>8</sup> Once again, Russia emphasized its international position by using Syria, which has been in a civil war since 2011. Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly transformed political support into military assistance. As early in March 2012, Russian soldiers were sent to the Middle East to support the government. The gradual increase in the country's military presence in Syria, according to J. Daher of the Atlantic Council, was the beginning of Russian military expansion, which included plans to establish military bases, also in other countries.<sup>9</sup> However, it was the use of military force against Ukraine aspiring to join the European Union and the annexation of Crimea that exposed the true face of the military policy of the Russian Federation, which was subjected to international criticism.

Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation No. 683 of 31 December 2015 about the Strategy of homeland security of the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy), where Russia's position on the international arena and, first of all, the importance of the factor of power were indicated, was particularly important for achieving the objectives of ensuring Russia's national security in the modern world.<sup>10</sup> Article 15 of the Strategy pays particular attention to the following:

The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvani-

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<sup>8</sup> T.W. Grabowski, *Rosyjska siła...*, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> J. Daher, *Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria*, Atlantic Council, 27 September 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria> (accessed: 29.04.2019).

<sup>10</sup> *Dekret Prezydenta Federacji Rosyjskiej o Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Federacji Rosyjskiej nr 683 z dnia 31 grudnia 2015 r.* [Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation of 31 December 2015 No.683 About the Strategy of Homeland Security of the Russian Federation], "Ambasada Rosji w Polsce", n.d., [https://poland.mid.ru/web/polska\\_pl/koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-federacji-rosyjskiej/-/asset\\_publisher/x9WG6FhjehkG/content/id/23299928](https://poland.mid.ru/web/polska_pl/koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-federacji-rosyjskiej/-/asset_publisher/x9WG6FhjehkG/content/id/23299928) (accessed: 28.04.2019).

zation of the bloc countries' military activity; the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders create a threat to national security. The opportunities for maintaining global and regional stability are shrinking significantly with the sitting in Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, and the Near East of components of the U.S. missile defence system in the conditions of the practical implementation of the "global strike" concept and the deployment of strategic nonnuclear precision weapon systems and also in the event that weapons are deployed in space.<sup>11</sup>

This Strategy also draws attention to the practice used to overthrow legitimate political regimes, to provoke instability and internal conflicts, and to apply a policy of double standards. The hot spots indicated in the Strategy (Middle East, Africa, South Asia and the Korean Peninsula; Article 18) identify at the same time the vectors of foreign policy pursued by the Russian Federation, aimed at expanding influence and strengthening cooperation primarily in the military sphere. Syria, being at the civil war, was used as an example.

Russia's assessment of the effectiveness of the regional security system based on NATO and the European Union led Moscow to the conclusion that the system was described as "inefficient" and, in the case of Ukraine, recognized as the cause of a deep split in Ukrainian society and the ongoing conflict in that country.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, ensuring national security in accordance with the new Strategy is associated with the defence of the country and its strategic goals – achieved through the implementation of military policy – which have been specified in the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation. It is in this document in Article 31 where a provision was formulated that in order to protect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens and to maintain international peace and security, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation may be employed outside the country in accordance with the generally recognized principles and norms of international law, international treaties of the Russian Federation as well as the federal legislation.

The scope of the possibility of the presence of the armed forces of this country outside the country, is broadened by another article on the defence of

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>12</sup> *Dekret Prezydenta..., op. cit.*

Russian citizens outside the Russian Federation and on ensuring the security of the economic activity of the Russian Federation (Article 32 points j and m).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in December 2016, President Vladimir Putin signed an amendment to Act No. 53 on Military Duties and Military Service, which also allows the deployment outside of the country of members of private companies specializing in the protection of people and property (Private Military Company), in order to strengthen the Russian Federation's forces.<sup>14</sup>

Regulations formulated in such a way clearly indicate that military presence outside the country as well as close contacts maintained in the military sphere are an important factor for Russia determining its position in the world.<sup>15</sup> This reference can be found in the part of the document devoted to the military-political and technical cooperation of the Russian Federation with other countries. In addition to strengthening alliance cooperation under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>16</sup> and the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia, political and military cooperation with the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or with other countries (e.g. Egypt or Syria) are also envisaged regarding the creation of regional security systems with the participation of Russia.<sup>17</sup> In the longer term, therefore, the reactivation of old and the construction of new military bases, as well as the increase in

<sup>13</sup> *Doktryna Wojsenna Federacji Rosyjskiej* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation; draft translation], "Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego", n.d., [https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/03/35\\_KBN\\_DOKTRYNA\\_ROSJL.pdf](https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/03/35_KBN_DOKTRYNA_ROSJL.pdf) (accessed: 28.04.2019).

<sup>14</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 28.12.2016 No. 512F3 "O vnesenii izmenenij v Federal'nyj zakon »O vojskoj obâzannosti i voennoj službe«*", "Oficial'nyj internet-portal pravovoj informacii", n.d., <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201612290092?index=3&rangeSize=1> (accessed: 28.04.2019).

<sup>15</sup> The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation also refers to securing its interests in the Arctic.

<sup>16</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organization – Collective Security Treaty (Tashkent Treaty/Declaration) signed on 15 May 1992 by the Russian Federation, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. On 14 May 2002, at a meeting of the Collective Security Council, six signatory states: RF, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan transformed the treaty into the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Uzbekistan joined the CSTO on 23 June 2006. Three collective security regions operate within the CSTO: Caucasian, Central Asian, and East European. I. Topolski, *Region Wspólnoty Niepodległych Państw*, [in:] *Regiony w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, I. Topolski, H. Dumała, A. Dumała (eds), Lublin 2009, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> *Doktryna wojenna...*, *op. cit.*

arms and military technology exports that would strengthen the country's position in the world, will play a significant role.

### 3. MILITARY PRESENCE OF THE SOVIET UNION ON THE TERRITORY OF OTHER COUNTRIES

Since the Cold War, the Soviet Union has maintained military bases outside the country. Their existence was associated not only with the desire to spread the communist revolutionary idea and to reflect the sphere of influence, but above all to emphasize the role of the country as a global and military power. The Soviet Union maintained its military presence in countries such as:

- German Democratic Republic (among others: Dresden, Magdeburg, Furstenberg, Eberswald, Weimar-Nohra, the nuclear base in Vogelsang);
- Poland (among others: Borne Sulinowo, Chojna, Nowa Sól, Żagań, Świdnica, Świątoszów, Świnoujście, Kluczewo, Legnica)<sup>18</sup>;
- Czechoslovakia (among others: Milovice, Mladá Boleslav, Olomouc, Vysoké Mýto);
- Finland (Hanko);
- Hungary (among others: Veszprem, Estergom, Kecskemet);
- Albania (Vlorë, base of Soviet submarines in the years 1952–1956);
- Egypt (in the years 1969–1972 thousands of Russian soldiers, as part of Operation Caucasus, came to Egypt and remained in that country as part of the so-called “maskirovka”);
- Syria (navy port in Tartus, then in Latakia);
- Ethiopia (access to the base Nokra located on the Red Sea from 1974 to 1991);
- Somalia (from 1964 to 1977, seaport of Berbera);
- Yemen (port of Aden, Socotra, al-Hudaydah, from 1961 until the unification of Yemen);
- Afghanistan (after the takeover of power by the Soviet regime and the outbreak of the rise of the Afghan tribes, the Soviet Union established many military bases in this country, among others in Bagram; in 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, losing 14.5 thousand soldiers in conflict);

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<sup>18</sup> The number of Soviet soldiers in Poland shortly after the war was between 300,000 and 400,000. The headquarters of the command was in Legnica, which in almost a third was occupied by Soviet soldiers. In the 1980s, the number of soldiers stationed in Poland was around 70,000. IAR/agkm, *22 lata temu...*, *op. cit.*



- Angola (from 1975 to 1991, there were approximately 11,000 Russian soldiers and 35,000–37,000 Cuban soldiers in Angola<sup>19</sup>);
- Guinea (the Soviet fleet was stationed in Conakry, and so was the air force from 1970 to 1977; attempts to establish permanent bases failed);
- Libya (port in Tripoli, temporary stay of the army);
- Tunisia (the port in Bizerta occasionally used by the Russian fleet since 1963);
- Yugoslavia (Split);
- Cuba (a Soviet intelligence facility located 155 miles off the US coast. There were about 3,000 people, a platform to support revolutionary movements in Latin America 1962–1989);
- Mongolia (in Mongolia, the Soviet presence dates back to before World War II, after World War II, Mongolia was used by the USSR as a base to conduct a possible offensive against Japan, and after a change in relations with China also against this country. The Soviet Union had a base, air and anti-aircraft forces in Choir; in 1989, Soviet soldiers left Mongolia);
- China (Port Arthur from 1945 to 1954);
- Korea (after World War II to 1948);
- Indonesia (Soviet advisers were stationed at Surabaya naval base – 1962);
- Vietnam (in 1964–1965 about 3,000 Soviet soldiers stayed, trained and fought in Vietnam. In 1975, the Soviet Union leased the remaining Americans base in Cam Ranh for its support. Russian Mig-23, Tupolev Tu-16, 95 and 142 were stationed there.<sup>20</sup> In 1979–2002, the Cam Ranh base (officially known as the Material and Technical Support Point 922) in South Vietnam was a Soviet naval base, whose location was one of the most convenient. In addition to moorings, there was a shipyard and an airport in Ho Chi Minh City. The Soviet Fleet used the Cam Ranh base for twenty five years on a free lease basis.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The first soldiers of the Soviet Union who came to Angola a few days after the country declared independence were military instructors. In total there were from 7 to 11 thousand of soviet military at various levels in Angola. About 7,000 Angolans were trained in Moscow. In total, the Soviet Union provided assistance to Angola worth 4.3 billion rubles. A. Szczepańska, *Przybycie Kubańczyków do Angoli w 1975 r. – reakcja międzynarodowa*, “Meritum – Rocznik Koła Naukowego Doktorantów-Historyków Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie”, 2016, v. VIII, p. 371.

<sup>20</sup> *Sovetskiei rossijskie voennye bazy za rubeżom*, “Ria novosti”, 27 October 2016, <https://ria.ru/20161007/1478745559.html> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

#### 4. RUSSIAN BASES ABROAD

In the early days of the Russian Federation, some bases lost their importance. In 1993, the Cam Ranh base was only used for reconnaissance missions. In 2001, despite the right of using it until 2004, Russia decided to close it. The last soldiers left the base in May 2002. In 2010, Russia announced that Cam Ranh had no use as a military base and could only serve as logistical support for the Russian Navy.

Currently, the Russian Federation has at least twenty one military installations in ten countries outside its borders.<sup>22</sup> According to a “Newsweek” article, which was based on information from the Russian newspaper “Izvestia”, this number includes the following bases:

- motorized division in Armenia and Tajikistan,
- radar base in Belarus and Kazakhstan,
- airport in Kyrgyzstan,
- airport in Syria,
- airport in Armenia,
- the ports in Vietnam and Syria.

In addition, Russia has its bases in Moldova, Georgia and, of course, in annexed Ukrainian Crimea.<sup>23</sup> Russia also participates in nine peacekeeping missions.<sup>24</sup> According to the data presented by “Sputnik” website, Russia’s presence abroad costs their budget 47 billion dollars a year.

TABLE. 1. RUSSIAN BASES ABROAD

| Country                      | Type of forces                   | Number of soldiers/<br>period of stay |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Armenia (Gyumri,<br>Yerevan) | 102nd War Base<br>Air Force Base | approx. 5,000<br>soldiers/until 2044  |

<sup>22</sup> *Rossijskie voennye bazy i mirotvorcy za rubežom*, “Izvestiâ”, 23 February 2017, <https://iz.ru/news/666772> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>23</sup> D. Sharkov, *Russia’s military compared to the U.S.: which country has more military bases across the world?*, “Newsweek”, 6 March 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/russias-military-compared-us-which-country-has-more-military-bases-across-954328> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>24</sup> *Rossijskie voennye bazy...*, *op. cit.*

|                                            |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Belarus (Minsk region, Vileyka)            | “Volga” radar station,<br>2nd Air Base,<br>43rd Russian Communications<br>Centre of the Russian Navy                 | According to “Belsat”,<br>the agreement is in force<br>until 2020. The staff of<br>“Volga” is 1,200 people,<br>the communication<br>centre – 120 people. |
| Georgia (South Ossetia)                    | 4th War Base                                                                                                         | 3,500 soldiers,<br>1,500 border guards/<br>until 2059                                                                                                    |
| Georgia (Abkhazia)                         | 7th War Base: air force, anti-aircraft defence of the naval base, motorized brigade                                  | 3,500 soldiers<br>1,500 border guards/<br>until 2059                                                                                                     |
| Kyrgyzstan (Karabulun, Majluusuu, Kant)    | Air Force Base under the CSTO banner (Kant airport)                                                                  | 500/until 2032                                                                                                                                           |
| Kazakhstan (Balkhash, Kostanay)            | Baikonur cosmodrom,<br>Kapustin Jar rocket training<br>ground, “Dnepr” radio station,<br>transport aviation regiment | no data                                                                                                                                                  |
| Moldova Transnistria                       | Operational Group of the Russian Infantry (soldiers of the former 14th Soviet Army)                                  | 1,500 soldiers (500 peacekeepers)/until 2002                                                                                                             |
| Syria (Tartus, Latakia)                    | Logistics point of the Russian Navy, Khmeimim Air Base                                                               | approx. 4,000 soldiers/<br>49 years                                                                                                                      |
| Tajikisatan (Dushanbe, Kurganteppa, Kulob) | 201st War Base,<br>optical and electronic space<br>monitoring system “Window”                                        | 5,000 soldiers (eventually<br>9,000)/until 2042                                                                                                          |
| Ukraine (Crimea)                           | Black Sea Fleet                                                                                                      | approx. 28,000/no data                                                                                                                                   |
| Vietnam                                    | Cam Ranh,<br>Logistics Base for Russian<br>submarines                                                                | no data                                                                                                                                                  |

Source: own study based on: M. Klein, *Russia's Military Policy in the Post-Soviet Space*, “SWP Research Paper”, January 2019, no. 1, pp. 1–40, DOI 10.18449/2019RP01 (accessed: 10.06.2019), and A. Gnlogaev, *Voennye bazy RF za rubežom: ostatki sovetskogo veličiâ i dostizheniânovyh aktov agressii*, “Belsat”, 1 October 2015, <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/voennye-bazy-rf-za-rubezhom-ostatki-sovetskogo-velichiya-i-dostizheniya-novyh-aktov-agressii/> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

## 5. NEW DIRECTIONS OF MILITARY POLICY

The activation of Russian foreign policy accelerated in 2010. At that time, the vast majority of Russian bases were located in the countries (former Soviet republics) that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, remained in Russia's sphere of influence, and so, *de facto*, the majority of these bases were concentrated at Russia's border. The aim of the actions was both to increase the number of soldiers and to establish military cooperation with countries outside the current area of influence. Countries such as Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Singapore, Venezuela and Seychelles<sup>25</sup> found themselves in the sphere of interest of Russian military policy.

In October 2015, the Russian Duma ratified unanimously an agreement with the Syrian government (President Bashar al-Assad) on the lease of an air base in Khmeimim, near the port of Latakia on the Mediterranean coast.<sup>26</sup> In 2017, after the rebound of Palmyra, some Russian soldiers were also deployed in this place. There has also been unconfirmed information that Russia intends to establish a military base in Kurdish controlled territory in the province of Manbij in the city of Afrin.<sup>27</sup>

However, Syria is not the only area of Russia's military activity in the Middle East. The Russian Federation has reactivated military cooperation with Egypt. Relations between countries improved after General Sisi came to power. At that time, Russia sent a military delegation to Cairo (Rosoboronexport, Federal Service of Military-Technical Cooperation), which initiated talks leading to the signing of a contract for the supply of armaments to Egypt. The contract was worth USD 3 billion. The cooperation also resulted in jointly conducted military maneuvers "Defenders of Friendship" in September 2017. Earlier the same year, soldiers of Russian special forces came to Egyptian bases in the west of the country (Sidi Bar-

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<sup>25</sup> P. Hubiev, *14 stran mira mogu stat' placdarmami dlâ razmesheniâ voennyh baz Rossii*, "Regnum", 23 February 2019, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2579274.html> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>26</sup> R. Nordland, *Russia Signs Deal for Syria Bases; Turkey Appears to Accept Assad*, "The New York Times", 20 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/20/world/middleeast/russia-turkey-syria-deal.html> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>27</sup> *Syrian Kurds say Russia to build base in Afrin*, "AlJazeera", 20 March 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/russia-strikes-deal-syrian-kurds-set-base-170320142545942.html> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

rani)<sup>28</sup> at the border with Libya, whose task was to help general Khalifa Haftar in Libya, also supported by Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The Russian side is also interested in Libya, or rather in establishing closer cooperation with this country, due to the presence of seaports, which the Russian fleet enjoyed thanks to the favour of Muammar al-Gaddafi. Together with the support given to General Haftar, who controls part of Libya's territory, Russia expects access to naval bases located in the Mediterranean. It is worth noting that the overthrown Libyan dictator Gaddafi also considered establishing such bases.<sup>30</sup>

Russia's attention is also drawn to events in Yemen perceived by Moscow as a gateway to the Horn of Africa. Russia, pursuing geopolitical goals, has actively engaged in peace talks. Moscow's interest in the region returned in 2009, when the establishment of bases in this strategic region (Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb) became the subject of public discussion. Former Russian navy commander, Feliks Gromov, appealed for the creation of a Russian naval base in the Gulf of Aden. The Moscow Institute of Eastern Studies, on the other hand, pointed to the island of Socotra as an ideal location. Ultimately, in August 2016 former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh committed himself to help build the naval base. The complicated situation in the country has suspended the implementation of the strategic plan.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps these plans will succeed in Sudan, whose President Omar Bashir personally discussed with the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and Minister of Defence Sergey Shoygu the proposal to open a naval base.<sup>32</sup>

African countries have also been included in the sphere of Russian military policy, which are increasingly looking towards Moscow and see it as a partner in the fight against the Islamic State, al-Qaeda or other armed organizations threatening local regimes. In addition to increasing arms sales in this area, Russia is concluding more and more agreements on cooperation in the field of security and military consultancy. One of these countries is

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<sup>28</sup> Russia is in talks with Egypt regarding the possible lease of bases in Sidi Barrani.

<sup>29</sup> R. Aziz, *Russia's Alarming Attempts to Establish Influence in Egypt*, "The Washington Institute", 24 May 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/russias-alarming-attempts-to-establish-influence-in-egypt> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>30</sup> *14 stran mira...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> S. Ramani, *Russia's Mediating Role in Southern Yemen*, "Carnegie Endowment For International Peace", 12 October 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77482> (accessed: 10.06.2019).

<sup>32</sup> *14 stran mira...*, *op. cit.*

the Central African Republic. The establishment of a Russian base was not ruled out by its minister of defence Marie-Noëlle Koyara. In August 2018, Russia and the Middle East signed an agreement to establish a training base for the soldiers of the Middle East (security forces). Along with light weapons, 175 Russian military and civilian instructors arrived in the Central African Republic. Although the training base is not recognized as the base of the Russian Federation, according to the Minister of Defence, its shape<sup>33</sup> will ultimately depend on the agreement of the governments of the country.

In addition to South Africa, other African countries also cooperate with Russia. In the field of arms supply, combating terrorism and piracy, and joint maritime operations (SAR), an agreement was signed with the Southern African Development Community.<sup>34</sup>

Alternatives to the unipolar order are also sought by Russia by establishing military cooperation with Latin American countries, some of which in 2014 voted against the draft resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea.<sup>35</sup> Countries that did not condemn the Russian annexation of Crimea at that time included: Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Permanent access to airports and air bases in the Western Hemisphere obtained through cooperation with these countries, belonging to the Bolivarian Alliance for Americas (ALBA)<sup>36</sup>, would be a clear projection of Moscow's growing influence and power in the region.

The renewed interest in Latin America began in 2005 with Venezuela, whom Moscow granted financial loans and sold military equipment. An additional impulse to strengthen cooperation was the events in Georgia in 2008, when NATO ships entered the Black Sea. Russia then sent to Venezuela nuclear-capable bombers and *Peter the Great* cruiser, which

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<sup>33</sup> *Central African Republic Open to Russian Military Base*, "The Moscow Times", 10 January 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/10/central-african-republic-open-to-russian-military-base-a64091> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>34</sup> The following countries are included: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, and South Africa. SADC, *Russia sign MoU on Basic Principles of Relations and Cooperation*, "Southern African Development Community", 24 October 2018, <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/sadc-russia-sign-mou-basic-principles-relations-and-cooperation/> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>35</sup> J. Gurganus, *Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America*, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace", 3 May 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>36</sup> Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador.

entered the ports of Cuba and Nicaragua.<sup>37</sup> The then president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev visited Latin American countries, including Venezuela (Hugo Chavez), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega), Bolivia (Evo Morales), Ecuador (Rafael Correa). After the annexation of Crimea, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin also came to Latin America, to visit Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, and Nicaragua. The purpose of the visit was primarily to emphasize Russia's position as a global and not a regional power, as Barack Obama put it. In addition, it was a response to the exclusion of Russia from the G8 after the annexation of Crimea.<sup>38</sup>

Particularly noteworthy are the relations of the Russian Federation with Venezuela, as the latest events in this country caught the attention of Russian specialists in international politics. The weakening of the position of President Nicolás Maduro caused by the catastrophic economic situation in this country led to the takeover of power by Juan Guaidó. Russia's opposition against the unauthorized attack was not a surprise: in the past, the Venezuelan authorities did not hesitate to support Russia in the matter of its refusal to recognize Kosovo's independence, or its intervention in Georgia in 2008. Especially since Venezuela has been the largest recipient of weapons and armaments in the Latin America region since 2000.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the United States and fifty other countries, which decided to recognize the new authorities, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the Russian Federation is opposed to a US-led coup.<sup>40</sup> Shortly afterwards, the Russian government sent two transport aircraft to Venezuela with about a hundred soldiers on board, and military equipment. Although it is not entirely clear what role these units were to fulfil (advisory or operational), Russia gave a clear message that Venezuela was an important partner for them in this region. Venezuelan authorities purchased arms and armaments in Russia

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<sup>37</sup> J. Gurganus, *Russia...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> A year later, Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu went to Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

<sup>39</sup> Moscow has earned more than USD 11 billion in military equipment supplies to Venezuela. Venezuela owes Russia USD 6 billion from a loan of USD 17 billion. In addition, Russian Rosneft owns two gas fields on the Venezuelan coast. D. Litvinova, *Russia in Venezuela: As Moscow accuses U.S. of "information war", what is Putin's role in the standoff*, "CBC News", 1 May 2019, <https://www.cbcnews.com/news/russia-in-venezuela-why-vladimir-putin-backs-nicolas-maduro-in-standoff-with-donald-trump-us/> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>40</sup> E. Lake, *Russia's Moves in Venezuela Aren't That Ominous*, "The Moscow Times", 27 March 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/03/27/russias-moves-in-venezuela-arent-that-ominous-a64982> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

for over 11 billion USD, which places the country among the largest importers of Russian military equipment. It should also be added that in Venezuela there are two weapons factories that produce Kalashnikov rifles and ammunition for them.<sup>41</sup> It is not known to what extent the unstable situation in Venezuela works in favour of Russia. Even if Russia fails to establish permanent bases in Venezuela, the very appearance of its troops in the Western Hemisphere confirms the thesis that Moscow should be seen as a power capable of at least limiting or keeping US power under control. This response has already been triggered by the arrival of two strategic Tu-160 bombers in Venezuela and plans to establish a semi-permanent air base on the Venezuelan island of Orchilla in the Caribbean Sea.<sup>42</sup>

Nicaragua, which is next to Venezuela and Cuba, is also one of the so-called “three tyrannies”, and another country in Russia’s military interest zone. It is worth emphasizing that, like Venezuela, Nicaragua was one of the few countries that supported Russia in recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Earlier, the Russian presence in Nicaragua was primarily limited to technical and military support mainly in the field of servicing military equipment supplied by Moscow. The military cooperation was renewed in 2002 and 2007, when the army chiefs developed the scope of the cooperation. In 2008, the Russian ambassador announced that one of the priorities for cooperation between the countries would be the military area: maintenance, modernization and equipment of the Nicaraguan army.<sup>43</sup> The signing by the defence ministers of the Cooperation Convention – which concerned the exchange of information on security, the purchase of equipment, and Russian support within the framework of crisis response forces – further strengthened the relations between countries. In 2012, cooperation was expanded to include training of Nicaraguan military personnel in Russian military academies and military-technical cooperation. The next stage was Russian support in combating drug smuggling and the supply of military equipment (tanks, anti-aircraft weapons, patrol boats *Project 14310* and *Project 12481.8*, and Yak-130 aircraft) as well as

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<sup>41</sup> D. Litvinova, *Russia in Venezuela...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> *Press review: Russia to set up Caribbean base and meet Israeli brass to discuss Iran*, “TASS Russian News Agency”, 12 December 2018, <https://tass.com/pressreview/1035596> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>43</sup> A. Chaguaceda, *Russia and Nicaragua: Progress in bilateral cooperation*, “Global Americans”, 28 March 2019, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2019/03/russia-and-nicaragua-progress-in-bilateral-cooperation/> (accessed: 28.05.2019).



the GLONASS Satellite Navigation System.<sup>44</sup> In February 2018, Russia handed over two AN-26 to Nicaragua, which were to increase military mobility and, above all, enable rapid transfer of military to various regions of the country. Relations between countries peaked, which meant that Russia gained another valuable ally in this region (President Daniel Ortega), who not only shares the same position on the Crimea, Donbass or Caucasus, but also temporarily provides his ports to the Russian fleet.<sup>45</sup>

Cuba has returned to the focus of Russian policy. For this country, Moscow is considering reopening the Lourdes intelligence facility, which had been in operation since 1967 and was closed in 2001. For the Russian Federation, according to the former head of intelligence services, Vyacheslav Trubnikov, opening the base would be just as valuable as it was in the USSR. Subsequent visits in 2008, 2013, and 2014 by Russian leaders resulted in the reduction of Cuban debt and in signed agreements regarding the modernization of Cuban weapons. As in Nicaragua, the GLONASS system was made available to Cuba. According to some observers of Russian policy in Latin America, even if the opening of the base in Cuba was symbolic, it would still have its PR dimension, such as a manifestation of defiance.<sup>46</sup> In 2016, Russia and Cuba signed a cooperation program between countries until 2020. The agreement provides for assistance in the modernization and repair of equipment that was previously delivered.

## 6. ARCTIC AND NORTHERN SEA TRAIL

When describing the military presence of Russia, it is worth paying attention to the bases that were established by the country in the Arctic. Russia's activity in this region is an expression not only of the country's policy of "flexing muscles", but also Putin's personal ambitions, which made the region an arena of military rivalry.<sup>47</sup> The policy change in relation to this region was associated with the introduction of *Basics of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period till 2020 and for a further per-*

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<sup>44</sup> This project in particular raised concerns in the USA about its actual purpose.

<sup>45</sup> A. Chaguaceda, *Russia and Nicaragua ...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> A. Luhn, *Russia to reopen spy base in Cuba as relation with US continue to sour*, "The Guardian", 16 July 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/16/russia-reopening-spy-base-cuba-us-relations-sour> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>47</sup> M. Ilyushina, F. Pleitgen, *Inside the military base at the heart of Putin's Arctic ambitions*, "CNN", 5 April 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/04/europe/russia-arctic-kotelny-island-military-base/index.htmlv> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

*spective*, as well as the *National Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020* by Vladimir Putin. In both the first and the second document, attention was drawn to the importance of the Arctic for the Russian economy as well as to its sea routes (Northern Sea Route, which is a passage between the Pacific and the Atlantic). Undoubtedly, certain restrictions related to expansion in this area are imposed on the Russian Federation by 1984's *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* with related agreements. However, taking into account the possibilities of exercising the law of the sea and multilateral agreements concluded by Russia, the country will seek to limit the operations of third countries in this area, all the more so as the climate change reduces the thickness of the Arctic ice cover and opens the northern passage for commercial ships from Europe to Asia.<sup>48</sup> The Northern Sea Trail shortens shipping times and enables the supply of oil, gas and minerals to customers in both regions.<sup>49</sup>

An important role in Russian expansion in the Arctic is played by the Lomonsov Ridge, which is 1,800 km long, stretches from the Ellesmere Islands to the New Siberian Islands, and crosses the Arctic at the height of the North Pole. Settling its affiliation (as a continental shelf) in favour of Russia would give that country control over much of the Arctic, for which Russia is striving.<sup>50</sup>

The spectacular setting of the flag on the underwater ridge of Lomonosov in 2007, which was compared to the period of colonial conquests, was one of the first signals informing about Russian plans for the Arctic.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> P. Mickiewicz, *W poszukiwaniu teoretycznych podstaw rosyjskiego myślenia strategicznego ery W. Putina*, "Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego", 2018, vol. 12, no. 2, [http://www.rocznikbezpieczenstwa.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/user\\_upload/wydawnictwo/RBM/RBM\\_artykuly/RBM\\_2018\\_02.pdf](http://www.rocznikbezpieczenstwa.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/wydawnictwo/RBM/RBM_artykuly/RBM_2018_02.pdf) (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>49</sup> The United States estimates that the Arctic is an area with at least 15% of the world's oil reserves, 30% of gas reserves, and about 20% of liquefied natural gas reserves. C.L. Biron, *U.S. Unveils Military Strategy for Arctic*, "Inter Press Service", 26 November 2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/u-s-unveils-military-strategy-arctic/> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>50</sup> Russia lodged a claim with the Continental Shelf Frontier Commission in accordance with the Convention on the Law of the Sea in December 2001. The Commission has neither accepted nor rejected the Russian application. J. Wojas, *Koncepcja statusu prawnego Arktyki*, "Adam Mickiewicz University Law Review", 2015, vol. 5, pp. 39–53, DOI 10.14746/ppuam.2015.5.03.

<sup>51</sup> G. Faulconbridge, *Russian sub plants flag under North Pole*, "Reuters", 2 August 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-28784420070802> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

According to information provided by the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Sergei Shoigu, in total Moscow has established 475 different types of military infrastructure facilities in the Arctic, which were deployed on the islands of Kotelny (until 1996, there were observation posts there), Alexandra Land and Wrangel, and on Cape Schmidt.<sup>52</sup>

The military base on Kotelny Island (Novosibirsk Islands) was one of the first reactivated bases. In September 2013, a base with a runway for An-72 transport aircraft was restored and modernized, and in the future there are plans for Il-76 runway and for mooring stations for medium and smaller warships. According to Shoigu, it is a modern and necessary facility equipped with all essentials that allow the crew to survive throughout the year without help from the outside. The Russian Northern Fleet reached the island in 2016. Earlier, in 2014, President Putin announced the creation of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command in Murmansk, whose task is to coordinate all units in the Arctic.<sup>53</sup>

In 2015, Russia began works related to the construction of the airport on Alexandra Land, which in fact is located only 900 km from the North Pole. There is a base in this area, which was established in the 1950s for the needs of Russian strategic aviation. The island had a runway for Russian bombers. After a period of oblivion, it is currently gaining importance, primarily due to Moscow's aspirations to rebuild its position in the world, but also because of the likely deposits of natural resources located under Arctic waters. The plans of Russia also assume the creation of a military district and expansion of the atomic icebreaker fleet (*Project 22220*), which in the future is to enable navigation along the Northern Route throughout the year.<sup>54</sup> The plan also provides for the reconstruction of icebreakers so that they could act both as icebreakers and as patrol ships (Club-K missile system and A-190 naval artillery system)<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> N. Aliyev, *Russia's Military Capabilities in the Arctic*, "International Centre For Defence and Security", 25 June 2019, <https://icds.ee/russias-military-capabilities-in-the-arctic/> (accessed: 30.06.2019).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> mk\mtom, *Rosjanie rozpoczynają wielki projekt w Arktyce. Przetarg na wyjątkowe lotnisko*, "TVN 24", 14 May 2015, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/budowa-lotniska-na-ziemi-aleksandry-rosyjska-baza-na-ziemi-franciszka,542454.html> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>55</sup> N. Aliyev, *Russia's Military Capabilities...*, *op. cit.*

There was a military base too on Wrangel Island during the period of the Soviet Union, which was closed with the collapse of the USSR. Despite the fact that the area of the island has the status of a reserve, the island in 2014 again became the center of military interest of the Russian authorities and in just a few months military installations were created in its area.<sup>56</sup>

Reinforcements were also made at the former Soviet base at the Finnish border in Alakurtti. Currently, motorized brigade and 61st Sea Brigade are deployed there, which are under the command of the Northern Fleet. Ultimately, it is planned to retrofit the motorized brigade with T-80BVM tanks. However, in the Murmansk region of Monchegorsk there are air bases whose task is to protect airspace and control the region.<sup>57</sup>

One of the priorities of the Russian command was also the restoration of the Temp air base, which was used during the times of the Soviet Union, and the construction of a base in Tiksi. Bases for units of the Northern Fleet Air Force and Air Defence Forces are being built in this city, whose task will be to protect and secure airspace in the area of the Northern Sea Trail. These bases will also be equipped with Tor-M2DT air-to-air missile systems, typical for the Arctic region.

Additionally, Russia has military installations in the near vicinity of the United States (600 km). There is Anadyr military base on the Chukchi Peninsula, in which Russian strategic Tu-160 bombers land. Other bases are located in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, and on the New Earth, and another base is under construction on Franz Josef Land.<sup>58</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, Russian military expansion is limited by financial means and, of course, further developments in Syria or Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> However, it was the United States that created an expansive policy that caused a significant

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<sup>56</sup> B. Węglarczyk, *Rosja otworzyła pierwszą nową bazę wojskową w Arktyce*, "Rzeczpospolita", 22 October 2014, <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/1151170-Rosja-otworzyła-pierwsza-nowa-baze-wojskowa-w-Arktycy.html> (accessed: 28.05.2019).

<sup>57</sup> N. Aliyev, *Russia's Military Capabilities...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>59</sup> Since 2010, the Russian Federation has been systematically increasing arms spending. In 2010, Russia allocated USD 32.37 billion for reinforcement. In 2018, spending almost doubled to USD 61.4 billion. *Russia Military Power. Building a military support great power aspiration*, "Defense Intelligence Agency", 2017, <https://www.dia.mil/portals/27/documents/news/military%20power%20publications/russia%20military%20power%20report%20201> (accessed: 29.04.2019).

part of countries, especially those struggling with internal problems and not complying with democratic rules, to turn to Russia in the search for support and legitimacy of their policies. Economic problems, mass migrations and ubiquitous populism are circumstances that have helped Russian politicians achieve their goal. Russia has adopted forms of military policy that have proved effective. Power projection, increased arms sales<sup>60</sup>, military cooperation, security cooperation, bilateral and multilateral relations and trade have a visible effect. Russia is back in the game and is certainly no longer the country Barack Obama once called a “second class power”.

Authorities in Russia perceive the problems of the modern world only through their influence on the interests of their own state. Moscow opposes its network diplomacy, based on flexible forms of participation in multilateral structures, to traditional military-political alliances (which are unable to provide a counterweight to new challenges and threats of a cross-border nature) and to the bloc approach to solving international problems. The actions taken so far are increasingly reassuring the Russian authorities in the belief that their country is particularly responsible for maintaining security in the world, both at the global and regional level. By setting a role for itself as a stabilizer, and for countries that are undecidedly allied with the West or opposing it – as an alternative choice, the Russian Federation is building footholds in various parts of the world. How they will use them – only time will tell. There is no doubt that the list of countries that are seeking rapprochement with Moscow is getting longer.

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<sup>60</sup> In 2013–2017, the Russian Federation supplied weapons to forty seven countries, including rebels in Ukraine, and was the second largest arms exporter after the United States. According to a study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russian arms exports accounted for 22% and the US for 34% of arms sold during this period. The main recipients of Russian weapons were: India, China, and Vietnam. However, according to the division into regions, it is Asia that has bought the majority of weapons (66%), the other regions are: Africa (13%), Middle East (11%), Europe (6.2%), and America (4.2%). P.D. Wezeman, A. Fleurant, A. Kuimova, N. Tian, S.T. Wezeman, *Trends in international arms transfers, 2017*, “SIPRI”, March 2018 r., [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri\\_at2017\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf) (accessed: 29.04.2019).

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