

Russia's New Generation Urban Warfare

Russia's New Generation Urban Warfare

By

Umer Khan and Muhammad Ali Baig

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Russia's New Generation Urban Warfare

By Umer Khan and Muhammad Ali Baig

This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2025 by Umer Khan and Muhammad Ali Baig

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-4530-0

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-4531-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Preface	viii
Abstract	x
About the Authors	xi
Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	15
The Russian Military Approach since the End of the Cold War: New Strategic Challenges 1991-2020	
Chapter 2	37
The Russian Experiences and Lessons Learnt in Chechnya and Georgia: 1994-2008	
Chapter 3	59
The Russian New Generation Urban Warfare: From Reforms to Contemporary Operations in Urban Areas 2008-2020	
Conclusions	94
Bibliography	98
Index	117

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Allah Almighty for the wisdom he bestowed upon us. Countless blessings on Allah Almighty's last messenger Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

We are truly thankful to our families for their support. The primary author of this book extends heartfelt felicitations to his wife and children for their support and love.

The secondary author would like to dedicate this book to his father and mother. Their enduring prayers, love, and affection turned every impossible into possible. A good friend Ms. Emily Thompson from the United States of America also encouraged and extended moral support.

We dedicate this book to our families. May you all live peacefully and a blessed life, Ameen.

The authors would like to thank a couple of people in particular. The interviews of Justin Bronk and Emily Ferris at Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) were extremely useful in identifying useful books on the subject. Conversations on ResearchGate with Maryna Kucheruk from Odesa National Polytechnic University, Ukraine was also very useful in understanding the Russian way of war. The email conversations with Daria Platonova and later her review of the entire manuscript was also very constructive.

Lieutenant General John Thomson, Major General John George, Major General Maurizio Ricco, Colonel Marc Espitalier, Major Ola Petter Odden, Phil Froom, and Pasi Niemela gave useful insights on the changing character of war and Russian Army's modernization.

The Ukrainian Defence Attaché was quite helpful. A formal interview with the Ukrainian Defence Attaché was also requested but was not facilitated by the Ukrainian Embassy. Similarly, the Russian Embassy also did not approve the request for a formal interview with the Russian Defence Attaché. However, during the International Armoured Vehicle Conference 2020, conversation with Colonel Slyusar Vadim, Principal Research Fellow at Arms Institute of Ukraine Armed Forces, was quite beneficial. Conversations with the Russian as well as Ukrainian diplomats and Defence Attachés here at Islamabad, Pakistan, were quite fruitful and helped understanding many strategic issues. The names of such people are not mentioned here, citing research ethics and professional conduct.

Umer Khan
University of Buckingham
United Kingdom

Muhammad Ali Baig
Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan.
National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

PREFACE

The authors grew up in an era where Russia was facing enormous domestic catastrophe. The vast empire was devoid of any international prestige and power. Economically, the country was in tatters and its military generals were eager to sell the huge stockpiles of military hardware to the highest bidder. The country was recovering from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the wounds of a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Afghan Mujahedeen were still fresh. In a nutshell, the empire was desperately struggling to discouraging further successions and was actively looking for a new battleground to restore its lost pride. Unfortunately, Chechnya became the first battleground where the Russians failed miserably. That was the turning point in Russia's strategic history and from that time onwards, Russia has remained in a constant state of war. Resultantly, its strategic thought is constantly evolving.

Once Russia's predecessor the Soviet Union was Pakistan's neighbour, only to be separated by the narrow strip of Wakhan Corridor that was roughly 18 kilometres wide at the narrowest point. The Wakhan Corridor was a part of the British Empire and was only given to Afghanistan in 1893 with the aim of creating a continental buffer zone between the then Tsarist Empire (Russia) and the British Empire. Hence, the set of events happening in the Soviet Union had an impact in Pakistan. Likewise, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Soviets tried to infiltrate into Pakistan multiple times and even Pakistan Air Force shot down multiple Soviet fighter jets inside Pakistan's airspace. These events and Pakistan's frontline role in the War in Afghanistan made Russia a permanent subject of our memories.

Later, Russia's military operations in Chechnya, Abkhazia, Georgia, South Ossetia, Syria, and Ukraine kept on reigniting our interest in its armed forces and left an indelible mark on our curiosity to study and analyse Russia's military operations.

The authors of the book hope and pray that their research on Russia's New Generation Urban Warfare could serve as a pedestal for further research. We are also hopeful that this book would elevate our knowledge and enlighten our understanding of warfare and war.

Umer Khan and Muhammad Ali Baig

January 2025

ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the Russian military approach has been developing like its evolving strategic challenges. The period under study 1991-2020 is important for Russia as it witnessed its Western rivals' transition from the Cold War to Global War on Terror to the one of Great Power Competition. Western interference in Russia's neighbouring countries and the surfacing of colour revolution against autocratic states were concerning to the Russian Federation.

The Russians also shifted their focus from high intensity to low intensity conflict as they participated in urban battles in Chechnya from 1994 to 2000. After the war in Georgia in 2008, the Russians started to realise that their old Soviet style military was obsolescent in keeping up with the realities of modern war. The Russian Army started to transform itself through its 'New Look' military reforms, initiated by Anatoly Serdyukov in the year 2008. The impact of modernization in terms of organization, fighting methods and weaponry and doctrine on the Russian Army was profound and caught world attention from its operations in Crimea, Syria, Libya, and Eastern Ukraine. The successes also owe to a revival of revolutionary thinking, mentored by Gerasimov. This approach became popular as 'New Generation War or Non-linear War' in Russia.

This study intends to probe the Russian approach to urban warfare in the context of new strategic challenges, since the end of the Cold War 1991-2020. In this research, the Russian strategic challenges and threats, and the evolution of Russian military doctrine and thinking pertinent to fighting in the urban areas will be explored. The study will also investigate Russia's past urban warfare experiences, particularly in Chechnya, and will reconnoitre the Russian modernization in urban warfighting capability, since the 2008 Military Reforms. The research will analyse the efficacy of Russian Military's 'New Generation Approach' in contemporary urban battlespace as demonstrated in recent conflicts. However, the study does not include the present crisis in Belarus and Ukraine, as it is currently unfolding, and it is too hard to keep track of it in this research.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mr. Umer Khan is a seasoned military technologist, defence analyst, and author with deep expertise in urban warfare, intelligence-based operations, and military systems engineering.

Mr. Khan holds multiple advanced degrees, including an MA in Modern Warfare and Contemporary Military History from the University of Buckingham (UK) with distinction, an MSc in the Art and Science of Warfare and a Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering.

His scholarly contributions reflect a blend of academic rigor and field experience.

With a strong background in both operational and strategic domains, Umer Khan continues to contribute to the evolving discourse on conflict, technology, and security in the 21st century.

umershaukatali@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6229-8123>

Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig is serving as a Research Officer (BPS-18) at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, Pakistan. Previously, he served as a Research Fellow (BPS-18) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Pakistan, for more than 3 years. He is a distinguished graduate of National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, Pakistan. He possesses an M.Phil. in International Relations from NDU with Distinction and a Merit Certificate from the President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He also holds an M.Sc. in International Relations (Distinction) from NDU. Moreover, he holds master's degrees in Political Science, English (Linguistics and Literature), and History. He also writes for *Strathea*, *The Nation*, *Daily Times*, *Pakistan Observer*, *Pakistan Today*, *Global Village Space*, and *Hilal Magazine*.

Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig authored and published the book *US-China Strategic Competition: Military Strategy and Contemporary Doctrine* (2025) from the prestigious publisher Routledge (Taylor & Francis) in New York, United States.

He can be contacted at mmab11@gmail.com

Scopus Author ID: 57214911280

Web of Science Researcher ID: AAI-4298-2020

Semantics Scholar ID: 50028790

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9818-2532>

Google Scholar:

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=p-dJPvYAAAAJ&hl=en>

Academia:

<https://nationaldefencenduislamabadpakistanu.academia.edu/AliBaig>

Publons: <https://publons.com/researcher/3485976/muhammad-ali-baig/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/m-ali-baig/>

Exaly: <https://exaly.com/author/2307334/muhammad-ali-baig/>

ABBREVIATIONS

CBRNE	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
ECM	Electronic Countermeasures
EW	Electronic Warfare
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service - <i>Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti</i>
OGV	Joint Group of Forces
GLONASS	Russian Global Navigation Satellite System - <i>Globalnaya Navigazionnaya Sputnikovaya Sistema</i>
GPS	Global Positioning System
GRU	Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation
IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle
OAF	Operation Allied Force
MLRS	Multi Launch Rocket System
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Russian Naval Infantry - <i>Morskaya Pekhota</i>
MPC	Military Provider Company
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PMC	Private Military Contractor
PNT	Positioning, Navigation and Timing
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RUSI	Royal United Services Institution
SOF	Special Operations Force
TOS	Russian Heavy Flamethrower System - <i>Тяжёлая Огнемётная Система</i>
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

VDV

The Russian Airborne Forces - *Vozdushno-Desantnye*
Voyska Rossii

INTRODUCTION

For a long time since the end of the Cold War, the Russian political leadership remained reluctant to determine the role of its armed forces. The Russian Army faced the challenge of not only building a national military from the remnants of the Soviet Army, but also reconstructing its political system and rescuing a shattered economy.¹ Besides that, the collapse of the Soviet Union questioned the relevance of its military in the national security system and the society. The economic crisis of the 1990s barred the Russian leadership from framing the military strategy, as the state lacked the resources for the development of its armed forces.²

A change in the Russian strategic thinking started to emerge after its engagement in Chechnya and in South Ossetia.³ The current Russian strategy is drafted as the Russian National Security Strategy 2015. This document elaborates the Russian Federation's national interests and strategic national priorities. It figures out a serious threat of 'western instigated colour revolutions' to the Russian national security.⁴ According to the document, at times these revolutions are physically supported by enemy's military force for e.g., Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011.⁵

The threat of colour revolutions is also emphasised in the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, which sets out the military policy,

¹ Bettina Renz, "Russian Responses to the Changing Character of War," *International Affairs* 95, no. 4 (2019): 819.

² Valery Konyshev and Alexander Sergunin, "Modern Military Strategy of Russia," *Ozlib*, 2014,

https://ozlib.com/844107/sotsium/sovremennaya_voennaya_strategiya_rossii.

³ Sergey Kortunov, *Contemporary Russian Foreign Policy: A Strategy of Selective Involvement* (Moscow, Russia: Higher School of Economics, 2009), <https://id.hse.ru/en/books/24092650.html>.

⁴ "English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy," *Russia Matters*, 2015, <https://www.russiamatters.org/node/21421>.

⁵ Isabelle Facon, "Russia's National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and Their Implications for the EU," *European Parliament*, 2017, 10–11, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578016/EXPO_IDA\(2017\)578016_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578016/EXPO_IDA(2017)578016_EN.pdf).

objectives, risks and threat to the Russian Federation, attributable to a military action.⁶ Russia's military doctrine has merged internal and external threats into one framework.⁷ The emerging Russian strategic approach appears to allow Russia to use the military for strategic effects around the globe to counter the colour revolutions and protect Russia during 'an unpredictable, transitional period in global security'.⁸ According to the latest Russian military doctrine, the Russian General Staff envisions less large-scale warfare; more operations in urban terrain; a melding of offense and defence; and a general decrease in the differences between military activities at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.⁹

The present Russian leadership criticises the role of the U.S. and its allies for creating hotbeds of international instability and for illegitimate use of force. Russia opines that the West should share international power and leadership with rising economic powers. The Russian foreign policy intends preventing military interventions and outside interference, contrary to the International Law, under the concept of 'responsibility to protect'.¹⁰ In the recent years, Russia's foreign and security policy has relied massively on its military muscles. Russian military operations in Georgia (2008), in Ukraine (2014) and Syria (2015) were practical manifestation of this approach.¹¹

Russia's strategic documents emphasize the importance of military force in international relations. They claim Russia's legitimate right to develop military potential to respond to changing trends in conflict. The Russian military reforms since 2008 are considered as a turning point in

⁶ "English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy."

⁷ Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016), 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2016), xiv, https://community.apan.org/cfs-file/_key/docpreview-s/00-00-00-78-27/2000_2D00_04_2D00_01-Russian-Lessons-Learned-From-the-Battles-For-Grozny-_2800_Thomas_2900_.pdf.

¹⁰ Facon, "Russia's National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and Their Implications for the EU," 10–11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

Moscow's international strategy. The modernization of its military force is considered as a key behind its diplomatic and security prestige in the world stage.¹²

In their strategic interests, the Russians applied an aggressive approach in Ukraine and Syria to avoid the political and geopolitical changes. Russia considers that acting from a position of strength is the right response to the Western initiatives, contrary to its interests.¹³ In conflicts like Syria, Russia has demonstrated its ability to safeguard independence and territorial integrity of its compatriots abroad. Presently, Russia seems eager to play its role in resolving international issues and settling military conflicts for its own strategic stability.¹⁴

The Russian influence abroad is growing with the use of paramilitary forces and proxies, interference in political processes, economic, espionage, media, and propaganda. Blended application of military and civilian capabilities is done to achieve the desired results.¹⁵ General Gerasimov maintains that the Russian military should learn from its experiences in Syria.¹⁶ Russia used a variety of military, paramilitary, and non-military assets in hybrid operations in Ukraine and Syria. The intelligence agencies acted as force multipliers to create enabling environment for overt or semi-overt operations. These units mislead the adversary and shaped the public opinions.¹⁷

Ukrainian nationalists in Kiev were assembled from Western areas of Ukraine, where they were training for years in urban combat. Once deployed, they controlled the capital by besieging government authorities and capturing strategic sites. They were facilitated by the Russians to carry out

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Ibid., 14–15.

¹⁴ “English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy.”

¹⁵ John Arquilla et al., “Russian Strategic Intentions” (Fort Eustis, Virginia: U.S. Army Training Doctrine and Command, 2019), 8, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/62483>.

¹⁶ Timothy D. Conley, “Protecting the Status Quo: The Defense against a Russian Color Revolution” (Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), 24, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/56895/17Dec_Conley_Timothy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹⁷ Arquilla et al., “Russian Strategic Intentions,” 37.

large-scale ideological indoctrination; information war; supply of the rebels with operational gear, food and funding to pay for mercenaries and agents.¹⁸

Within this geopolitical context, urban operations have inadvertently reoccupied the attention of the Russian military men particularly since their engagement in Chechnya. The international attention on urban operations, due to growing urbanisation, have also convinced the Russians about the prospects of fighting in the cities. According to Konaev, the Russian strategists have realized that much of the fighting in future conflicts will take place in the cities. Moreover, the recent Russian investments in emerging technologies are also helping its soldiers to counter the physical, cognitive, and operational challenges of urban warfare.¹⁹

Urban Areas as Future Battlegrounds

During the Cold War years, the challenge of co-ordinating operations in a maze of streets was characterised by heavy casualties, massive destruction, and the dreadful toll on the inhabitants.²⁰ Moreover, urban areas with communication zones and command centres were considered as possible targets for nuclear attacks.²¹ The Soviets' experience in battle, such as Berlin, taught them that urban areas slowed down the advance and is costly in terms of men. These factors led to an implied understanding that fighting in cities should be avoided.²²

On the other hand, the proponents of urban warfare think that it is no longer realistic for armed forces to avoid cities. According to Alexandre, the explosion of population in urban areas is forcing armies to return to the drawing board.²³ A United Nations (UN) report highlighted some

¹⁸ Manoylo A.V., "Color Revolutions: Theory And Practice of Modern Political Regimes Dismantling," *Conflict Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 45, doi:10.7256/2014.1.13519.

¹⁹ Margarita Konaev and Samuel Bendett, "Russian AI-Enabled Combat: Coming to a City Near You?," *War on the Rocks*, July 31, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/russian-ai-enabled-combat-coming-to-a-city-near-you/>.

²⁰ Alexandre Vautravers, "Military Operations in Urban Areas," *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, no. 878 (June 2010): 439.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 438.

interesting facts about increase in urban population of the world. The world's urban population has increased from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018. According to the report, about 2.5 billion people are predicted to be added to the list of world cities by 2050.²⁴ Louis highlighted in his book 'Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare from Stalingrad to Iraq' that the trends of military history, increasing decisiveness of urban combat and the population demographics support the idea that warfare in the 21st century will be dominated by the operations in the urban environment.²⁵

As the urbanization process continues, the role of cities in armed conflict increases not due to the cities themselves, but the way its residents interact. Belligerents use megacities as strategic sources of influence rather than advantageous tactical battlefields. The support of the population is a decisive factor in the outcome of a conflict operating in a metropolis.²⁶ Since the mid-1990s, Russia has deployed troops to urban areas in Chechnya, Dagestan, Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria for conventional offensive operations, counterinsurgency, and counter-terrorism missions.²⁷

Modern megacities are large areas, with huge population density. The defence of a metropolis depends on the size of the force necessary to control the citizens inside it. Amid the hostile population in megacities, the strength requirements for urban combat are proportional to the population, and not the enemy's strength.²⁸ Therefore, urban residents become the centre of the strategy for urban combat. Due to the enormous size of the population, urban fighters inflict higher losses on adversaries by mobilizing the inhabitants of the city against enemy forces. Extreme violence in cities leads to widespread uncertainty and the collapse of administrative services, resulting in citizens fleeing the city. The decrease in the urban population reduces the number of soldiers needed to control the population. Yet, it

²⁴ "World Urbanization Prospects 2018 - Population Division," *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, 2018, <https://population.un.org/wup/>.

²⁵ Louis A. DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2012), 1–5.

²⁶ Prien Gunter, 'City Personality', *SGS-Mil Combat Training Center* (10 February 2017) <<https://sgs-mil.org/war-theory/strategiya/239-individualnost-goroda.html#hcq=Q3qAeRr>> [accessed 8 February 2020].

²⁷ Konaev and Bendett, "Russian AI-Enabled Combat: Coming to a City Near You?"

²⁸ Gunter, 'City Personality'.

increases the effectiveness of weapon systems, allowing the rivals to replace soldiers with technology.²⁹

The combat in urban areas is known to be complex and casualty intensive; however, it has enabled weaker forces to fight against a superior enemy. For example, in the Battle of Stalingrad, manoeuvre capabilities of the Germans were neutralized by the Russians close-quarter combat.³⁰ Olikier commented that the Second World War experiences became the basis of the Soviet planning and training for urban terrain and the same later influenced the Russian approach to urban warfare.³¹

Definition of Urban Warfare

The Soviet tactical doctrine for urban warfare defined urban warfare as combat operations by and against regular military forces in the cities. According to Scharfen, the doctrine included combat in built-up areas, city-fighting, street-fighting and house to house combat. However, Scharfen is of the view that the definition does not include terrorist and guerrilla operations as principal considerations.³² On the other hand, a RAND definition suggests that the urban warfare can take many forms, from guerrilla attacks, to militia patrols, to gang violence.³³ Unfortunately, there is no specific definition of urban warfare in the official Russian military dictionary.³⁴

Historiography

Scharfen commented that Russia emerged as a dominant power of the Northern Europe after Tsar Peter successfully relieved the fortified town of Poltava. He argued that, 'the defence of Sevastopol, Stalingrad and Leningrad and the capture of Berlin are some of the historical accords that

²⁹ Gunter, 'City Personality'.

³⁰ Scott Gerwehr and Russell W. Glenn, *The Art of Darkness: Deception and Urban Operations* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2000), 3.

³¹ Olga Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2001), 6–7.

³² John C. Scharfen and Michael J. Deane, *Soviet Tactical Doctrine For Urban Warfare* (California: Stanford Research Institute, 1975), 1.

³³ <<https://www.rand.org/topics/urban-warfare.html>> [accessed 16 October 2019].

³⁴ <<http://dictionary.mil.ru/dictionary/>> [accessed 03 January 2020].

have conditioned the Soviet soldiers to take on urban warfare seriously'.³⁵ Writers like Rácz³⁶ and Scales³⁷ are convinced that the modern Russian thinking on urban warfare owes to Lenin, who advocated uprising by urban proletariats, use of close combat, use of propaganda and terrorist methods in urban combat.

Analysts on Russian urban warfare like Isaev highlighted the role of Russian artillery and sappers in the assault on Budapest.³⁸ Writers on the Soviet conduct of urban war in Stalingrad like Major Dale R. Smith argued that the excessive use of force, acceptance of casualties and collateral damage characterised the Soviet way of war.³⁹ Soviet writings on Stalingrad, narrated usefulness of snipers, spotters, and tanks in direct firing role in urban combat. Whereas, Soviet writers like Semenov quoted historical accounts that profess resilience and sacrifice as a major factor in a city fight.⁴⁰

³⁵ Scharfen and Deane, *Soviet Tactical Doctrine For Urban Warfare*, vii–viii.

³⁶ András Rácz, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist* (Helsinki, Finland: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 2–5.

³⁷ Robert H. Scales, "Urban Warfare: A Soldier's View," *Military Review* 85, no. 1 (February 2005): 9–18.

³⁸ Isaev Alexey, "Assault on Budapest," *Russian Military Historical Society*, February 13, 2019, <https://histrf.ru/read/articles/shturm-budapieshta>.

³⁹ Dale R. Smith, "Commonalities in Russian Military Operations in Urban Environments" (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 15–20.

⁴⁰ Semyonov Sergey, "Saved by My Teeth. Deadly Feat at Stalingrad," *Russian Military Historical Society*, October 25, 2017, <https://histrf.ru/read/articles/spas-svoimi-zubami-smiertelniyi-podvigh-pod-stalingradom>.

The contemporary Russian and Western writers (Dick⁴¹, Johnson⁴², Sukhankin,⁴³ and Wither⁴⁴) debated the evolution of new concept and force structure in the Russian military, since the 2008 Military Reforms. Many of these writers attributed the Russian use of proxy forces, private military companies, Special Forces and expeditionary capabilities in Ukraine and Syria to the emergence of new hybrid force concept. These writers also argue that the Russians are inclined to use campaigns in the information, political, diplomatic, and non-military space in conjunction with calibrated military operations to achieve strategic objectives. The argument of this new school of thought is assisted by some other writers of the evolution of Russian military doctrine (Braun,⁴⁵ Renz,⁴⁶ and Ivanov⁴⁷). They frequently refer to the Russian ‘New Look’ reforms initiated by Serdyukov and the ‘New Generation / Non-Linear War’ concept mentored by Colonel General Gerasimov.

⁴¹ Charles Dick, “Russian Ground Forces Posture Towards the West,” *Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, April 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/04/russian-ground-forces-posture-towards-west>.

⁴² Dave Johnson, “Russia’s Approach to Conflict – Implications for NATO’s Deterrence and Defence,” *NATO Defense College*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=797>.

⁴³ Sergey Sukhankin, “‘Continuing War by Other Means’: The Case of Wagner, Russia’s Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 13, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/continuing-war-by-other-means-the-case-of-wagner-russias-premier-private-military-company-in-the-middle-east/>.

⁴⁴ James K. Wither, “Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 2 (2016): 80–86.

⁴⁵ Thomas Braun, “The Russian Military in 2020: Russia’s Way Back to Power Projection? Implications for NATO,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 11, no. 2 (2012): 67–78.

⁴⁶ Renz, “Russian Responses to the Changing Character of War,” 819.

⁴⁷ Pavel Ivanov, “Russian Ground Forces Receive Revolutionary Combat Doctrines,” trans. J. Hawk, *South Front*, 2018, <https://southfront.org/russian-ground-forces-receive-revolutionary-combat-doctrines>.

There are other streams of writers (Galeotti⁴⁸, Sutyagin,⁴⁹ and Trenin⁵⁰) who have written on the Russian modernization and how these advancement in organization, methods and weaponry effect the future Russian urban battlespace. The commentators (Oliker⁵¹, Thomas⁵², Tan⁵³, Grau⁵⁴ and Rosenau⁵⁵) of the battles in Chechnya, Ukraine and Syria also cement the utility of modern forces and weapons in urban operations.

There are a few works that analyse the Russian urban warfare by exploring both the Russian thinking and capabilities. Works like Scharfen, 'Soviet Tactical Doctrine for Urban Warfare'⁵⁶ and a later work of Stone, 'Stalingrad and the Evolution of Soviet Urban Warfare'⁵⁷ reviewed not only the Russian doctrine and thinking but also discussed their modernisation in force and weaponry. These works also drew lessons from the Russian operational and tactical experiences in urban warfare.

This book will take the work of Scharfen and David further ahead to match the realities of contemporary Russian approach to urban warfare in the context of new strategic challenges. This study argues that the Russian new generation warfighting approach in urban battlespace is shaped by new strategic challenges to the Russian security, its military doctrines and concepts, experiences and reforms, employment of hybrid forces, and the use of modern urban warfare weapons.

⁴⁸ Mark Galeotti, *The Modern Russian Army: 1992–2016* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2017), 38.

⁴⁹ Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk, *Russia's New Ground Forces: Capabilities, Limitations and Implications for International Security* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge/Royal United Services Institute, 2017), 11.

⁵⁰ Dmitri Trenin, "The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (June 2016): 24.

⁵¹ Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat*, 6–7.

⁵² Timothy L. Thomas, "The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat," *Parameters* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 92.

⁵³ Tabitha Y. Tan, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare – A War of Nerves* (Singapore: Sea of Star Publishing, 2018), p. 39.

⁵⁴ Lester W. Grau, 'Russian Urban Tactics: Lessons from the Battle for Grozny', *National Defence University Washington DC Institute For National Strategic Studies*, 38 (1994), p. 1-4.

⁵⁵ William G. Rosenau, 'Every Room is a New Battle: The Lessons of Modern Urban Warfare', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 20/4 (1997), 371-394 (p. 382).

⁵⁶ Scharfen and Deane, p. 4.

⁵⁷ David R. Stone, 'Stalingrad and the Evolution of Soviet Urban Warfare', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22/2 (2009), 195-207 (p. 196).

The Russians in Urban Warfare Since the End of the Cold War

The Russians got the real taste of modern urban warfare in the First Battle of Grozny in 1994 (Grozny-I). During the urban operations in Grozny, the Russians evolved their concepts, force structures and weaponry. The same was reflected in its fighting in Chechnya, during the Second Battle of Grozny in 1999 (Grozny-II) and later in East Ukraine and Syria. After the military reforms in 2008, the modern Russian Army demonstrated to the world its capabilities through the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and its operations against Ukrainian forces in Donbas region. According to a Chatham House paper published in April 2019, Russia has evolved a coherent concept and force structure of a new generation war which dictates preparedness to fight despite relative weakness in military terms.⁵⁸

According to Sutyagin and Bronk, the Russian Army of today is a compact and high-tech force which is optimised for small, short, and intense conflicts. Russia's military involvement in Ukraine and Syria, has demonstrated its General Staff's ability to conduct complex military operations outside of its soil by using integrated conventional and sub-conventional capabilities and tactics.⁵⁹ The annexation of Crimea and subsequent destabilization in Eastern Ukraine, and the intervention in Syria showcased the willingness of Russian political leadership in the use of military capabilities outside its frontiers.⁶⁰ At present, there might not be an immediate threat of a Russian invasion in the Baltics, yet its possibility may be irresponsible for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to ignore.

The Russian military has published its military doctrine from time to time; however, unlike the Western militaries, a formal Urban Warfare doctrine is either not published or is unavailable to the public. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to conclude that the modern Russian Army, lacks the urban war fighting capabilities. On the contrary, Russia has learnt its lessons in Grozny and has successfully conducted urban operations throughout recent history. The Russian Army possess organizational capability,

⁵⁸ Dick, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Sutyagin and Justine, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Sutyagin and Justine, p. 12.

experience and weapons to be a formidable urban warfare force, thanks to the military reforms in 2008 and the modernization that followed it.

The Russian Army of today, lays emphasis on a professional military with high combat readiness and ability to deploy rapidly. The employment of the Spetsnaz (special forces - often operating covertly), conventional airborne troops and the Private Military Contractors (PMC) like 'Wagner' (which have been deployed in Donbas, Syria, Libya and Central African Republic) is a testament of its improved employment concepts. The Russians possess a range of capabilities that enable it to deploy its forces in complex operations - the studies show that these forces are well equipped to operate in urban environments.⁶¹ Major General Sergey Kanchukov⁶² is of the view that the 'combination of advanced technical equipment and high professional skills, directly controlled by the state, allows the Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs) to take on tasks usually performed by the regular Russian armed forces'.⁶³ Sergey adds that 'unlike the regular Armed Forces, these structures are free to choose any means to achieve their specific objectives'.⁶⁴

Besides, the previous urban warfare experiences from Chechnya to Eastern Ukraine, fighting in Syria provided the Russians the real essence of modern war. In Syria, Russia experienced combat that employed unmanned systems, military robotics, precision-guided munitions, robust Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (C4ISR), and information operations. Russia is actively investing in certain technologies and adjusting its tactics by employment in Syria and Eastern Ukraine. If the Russians confront the West in an urban war, its weapons would be already battle tested and refined in urban conditions.⁶⁵

The Russian urban battlespace is reflective of the overall patterns of modern Russian thinking and concepts. According to Bob Seely, the contemporary Russian conflict is underpinned by the concepts of

⁶¹ Dick, p. 6.

⁶² Former head of Siberian Military District intelligence and a veteran of the military intelligence service (GRU).

⁶³ Sukhankin, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Sukhankin, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Konaev and Bendett, 'Russian AI-Enabled Combat'.

‘asymmetry’. These concepts have been influenced by the writings of the Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov, but in reality, date back to many years.⁶⁶

As we study the engagements in Syria, Libya and East Ukraine, the Russians have employed a variety of forces and a mixture of methods. These forces are an amalgam of conventional forces, proxy forces, Military Provider Companies (MPC), special forces etc. As far as the methods are concerned, other types of different warfare (like electronic warfare, psychological warfare, information warfare, guerrilla warfare, irregular warfare, non-linear warfare, underground warfare etc.) also take their due share in the urban battlespace. These hybrid forces and overlapping methods are in line with the latest Russian Military Doctrine and its ‘New Generation War’ concept.

This book analyses the Russian approach towards urban warfare, as it matured over time in response to new strategic challenges and experiences in actual combat. This research is not about any specific aspect of urban warfare (like conventional, asymmetric or both). Rather, it evaluates the Russian modernization in urban warfare that came with evolved thinking and development of capabilities under military reforms. In this pursuit, strategic challenges to Russia after the cold war and the Russian military doctrine pertinent to urban warfare is explored. The research investigates the Russian experience in urban warfare in Chechnya and beyond.

Research Questions

The key question of this research is to analyse the Russian approach to urban warfare in the context of new strategic challenges, since the end of the cold war. The Russian approach is framed by the Russian military thinking (i.e., the Strategy, Doctrine, and Experience) and its capabilities (i.e., the Modernisation in Organization, fighting method and weapons) in urban warfare. To achieve this, three main questions are addressed in the chapters: What is the Russian military approach in the context of new strategic challenges since the end of the Cold War (1991-2020); What are the

⁶⁶ Bob Seely, *A Definition of Contemporary Russian Conflict: How Does The Kremlin Wage War?* (Russia and Eurasia Study Centre, 2018), p. 2.

experiences and lessons learnt from Urban Warfare in Grozny (1994-2000) and Georgia (2008); and what are the Russian military modernizations relevant to its New Generation Urban Battlespace (2008 - 2020) and how it was demonstrated in the contemporary battlespace?

Research Methodology

Accessing Russian sources were not easy due to restricted content, filters, and layers of cyber security on the Russian content. During the research, it was interesting to note that most of the Russian websites remain obscure on normal internet search engines like Microsoft Edge, Google, and Yahoo. Initially, the authors of the book got a wrong message that the desired Russian content was not available. To overcome this issue, the Russian search engine 'Yandex.ru' was used. It is also interesting that the search results, even on Yandex, remained unsatisfactory if the query is typed in English. However, surprisingly, the search gives out valuable information, once the query is typed in Russian language in the Yandex search box. The Russian websites accessed with this technique were then translated by using the Google Translate plugin on the Internet Explorer and Google Chrome. It is also interesting to note that the access to these websites is also restricted for certain countries as well. While visiting Kharkiv in Ukraine, one of the authors personally tried to open Yandex.ru, but the site was inaccessible.

In this study, the Russian Federation Security Strategy 2015, the Russian military doctrines (1993, 2000, 2010, and 2014), official websites of the Russian President, the Government, and the Armed Forces served as the primary source material. Numerous books, doctrinal reviews, journal papers, articles, and newspaper archives on Russian Urban warfare were also studied as useful secondary sources. Getting hands on Russian operational and tactical manuals were difficult. Therefore, this book will discuss tactical matters not in much detail.

The study of the Russian Army's urban warfare experiences and reforms was done from the primary sources like the Radio Company of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Also, the secondary sources like the articles in Russian Military Historical Society, Russian Military Review, Russian websites, and newspapers were also consulted.

One of the authors was fortunate enough and travelled to the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Germany, and some other countries, and did some field research. In this regard, the interviews of Justin Bronk and Emily Ferris at Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) were extremely useful in identifying useful books on the subject. Conversations on ResearchGate with Maryna Kucheruk from Odesa National Polytechnic University, Ukraine was also very useful in understanding the Russian way of war. Email conversations with Daria Platonova and later her review of the entire book was also very constructive.

This study also benefitted itself from many military conferences. Presentations of Lieutenant General John Thomson, Major General John George, Major General Maurizio Ricco, Colonel Marc Espitalier, Major Ola Petter Odden, Phil Froom, and Pasi Niemela gave useful insights on the changing character of war and Russian Army's modernization. Visits to Russia, Ukraine and Germany during the research tenure also developed understanding of the subject through informal discussions with the local military personnel and hosts.

During one of the conferences, an informal side meeting with the Ukrainian Defence Attaché was quite helpful. A formal interview with the Ukrainian Defence Attaché was also requested but was not facilitated by the Ukrainian Embassy. Similarly, the Russian Embassy also did not approve the request for a formal interview with the Russian Defence Attaché. However, during the International Armoured Vehicle Conference 2020, conversation with Colonel Slyusar Vadim, Principal Research Fellow at Arms Institute of Ukraine Armed Forces, was quite beneficial.

CHAPTER 1

THE RUSSIAN MILITARY APPROACH SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR: NEW STRATEGIC CHALLENGES 1991-2020

At the end of the Cold War, the Russian Army was configured for a large-scale conventional war or strategic defence against existential external threats. The Russians were militarily, doctrinally, and politically unprepared for dealing with wars at the lower end of the conflict spectrum.⁶⁷ Throughout the 1990s, the Russian strategic thinking stressed on the number of professional soldiers, permanent readiness, mobility, and rapid reaction.⁶⁸ However, since the beginning of the millennium, threats to internal order and regime stability also started to occupy the Russian mind.⁶⁹ The Russian Chief of General Staff, Colonel General Gerasimov, pointed out that a healthy state can become a victim of foreign interference and get immersed in chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and most importantly a civil war.⁷⁰ Uprisings in the Russian neighbourhood (Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004-05), forced the Russian regime to think about the implications of the colour revolutions on the Russian security.⁷¹ General Gerasimov predicted new typical wars in future that start with a colour revolution like event. He signified the importance of ‘the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals’. According to him, these new wars initiate with the ‘use of political, economic, information, humanitarian, and other non-

⁶⁷ Renz, “Russian Responses to the Changing Character of War,” 819.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 821–22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 819.

⁷⁰ Facon, “Russia’s National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and Their Implications for the EU,” 10–11.

⁷¹ Nicolas Bouchet, ‘Russia’s “Militarization” of Colour Revolutions’, *CSS Policy Perspectives*, 4/2 (2016), p. 2.

military measures' and are 'completed with military measures of a covert nature'.⁷²

Colour revolution, according to a Russian source, is a delegitimized war in which urban areas are targets and citizens are shields.⁷³ The so-called Arab Spring of 2011 reinforced the Russian fear about the impact of chaos and conflict in cities.⁷⁴ The Russian military believes that the colour revolutions in the former Soviet space have strategic consequences. The Russian strategists think that the colour revolution model combined with the employment of advanced weapons could have a negative impact on the security of Russia and its allies.⁷⁵ According to Papert, in such a conflict criminal, terrorist forces, and private military companies are used by the belligerents and commonly accepted rules of warfare are ignored. He also advised that to defeat a colour revolution in urban areas, counter-guerrilla warfare tactics are required.⁷⁶

Since the end of the Cold War, an important strategic trend in the Russian military, complementing the colour revolutions, is information warfare. According to Friedman, the Russian government and the armed forces believe that, with the advent of the information revolution, there is a change in the character of war. Friedman considers information warfare enough to achieve 'political goals commensurate with war without recourse to military means'.⁷⁷

The present Russian thinking does not consider war and peace as binary entities but as a hybrid equation. Use of information warfare shape up the environment for use of other military and non-military means within

⁷² Facon, "Russia's National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and Their Implications for the EU," 16.

⁷³ Anthony Cordesman, 'Russia and the 'Colour Revolution'', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* 28 (2014): 308-328, p. 24.

⁷⁴ Bouchet, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Covington, pp. 23-24.

⁷⁶ Tony Papert, 'Moscow Conference Identifies 'Colour Revolutions' as War', *E-International Relations Publishing* (2014)

<https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2014/eirv41n24-20140613/07-25_4124.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2020], p. 11.

⁷⁷ Bernard A. Friedman, 'The Russian Understanding of War', *Real Clear Defence* (24 March 2020)

<https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/03/24/the_russian_understanding_of_war_115142.html> [accessed 24 Mar 2020].