

COMPETITION IN 2028: ANTICIPATING RUSSIAN EXPLOITATION OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The future strategic landscape will be characterized by a persistent state of competition where global competitors seek to exploit conditions of the operational environment to gain advantage. Adversaries perceive that the application of any or all elements of national power in competition, just below the threshold of armed conflict, is an effective strategy against the United States. Russia, in particular, uses the international system to advance its own interests while trying to distract and constrain its competitors, including the U.S. Simultaneously, Russia seeks to change the international system from within in order to better accommodate its objectives.



Exploitation of Strategic Conditions

TRADOC G2 identified a set of 24 conditions that actors could exploit during competition to gain an advantage over the United States. Understanding these conditions, how the various actors may exploit them, and the implications of these actions will be critical for the U.S. Army to plan, organize, train, and equip the future force for success.



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RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO EXPLOITATION

Russia's approach is primarily the enactment of Putin's plan to make the country a global power by eroding the established liberal world order. His plan involves the integration of multiple types of soft power (political, economic, and information), the threat of conventional forces, and engagement in opportunistic, transactional, and non-binding partnerships that increase Russia's influence and position.

PREFERRED CONDITIONS

New International Cooperation Models

Multi-polar World

Resource Competition

Interdependent Economies (Economic Specialization)

Infrastructure Capacity Challenges

PREFERRED METHODS

Russia uses less conventional, non-binding agreements with similar minded or vulnerable stakeholders.

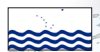
Russia presents itself as a viable partner at a time when political, economic, military or similar strengths can be distributed among multiple, significant poles and effectively reduce the influence of legacy powers.

Russia exploits contests between actors to secure needed or desired resources—especially for energy or weapons development.

Russia looks for opportunities to capitalize on economic specialization and global interdependency and, when possible, usurp or block Western partnerships.

Russia provides capital investments, especially in the energy and security sectors, to targeted areas that can promote it as the partner of choice while reducing their attraction to its competitors.

CASE STUDIES



ARCTIC

Russia has as many, if not more, national interests in the Arctic than any other country. Russia will employ all instruments of national power to advance its interests in the Arctic, preferring information, intelligence, and diplomatic power. Russia will wield military, law enforcement, financial, and economic power as needed, but primarily in support of the other instruments.



ISRAEL

While Russian-Israeli relations have been tumultuous and inconsistent, both countries continue to pursue opportunities for their respective benefits. Russia carefully seeks advantageous leverage points but is cognizant of acting too brashly because a misstep could lead to large and enduring consequences—especially as Russia and Israel become more economically tied.



GEORGIA

Russia understands rebuilding a Soviet Union-like system is unfeasible, but Moscow is interested in reestablishing pockets of influence in former Soviet states like Georgia. Russia uses its patronage to exploit cultural divides within Georgia and establish itself as the preferred government in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.



VENEZUELA

Venezuela's lack of a coherent foreign policy is ideal for Russian interests and means Russia can more easily operate outside the confines of any formal agreements. Russia's growing interest in Venezuela is directly connected to its desire to exploit the global energy market while serving as a convenient spoiler to the United States, undercutting U.S. interests, and reinforcing Russia's role as an arbiter of international security.



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic (CAR) receives security and industry assistance in the form of Russian military advisors, industry experts, and equipment in exchange for the country's rich natural resources. Increasing the CAR's capacity to extract and sell its natural resources makes Russia a welcome partner and increases Russia's influence and access. This extension of soft power will garner the CAR's loyalty and enable Russia to project its influence farther into Africa.



IRAN

Although Russia has more influence over Iran than any other entity does, Russia and Iran use each other in pursuit of their own objectives. Specifically, Russia undercuts U.S. pressure on Iran through transactional agreements to boost its energy sector, including fossil fuels and nuclear power. Furthermore, Russian weapons proliferation and military collaboration with Iran create interoperability and upgrade the capabilities and capacity of Iran and its partners.



INDIA

India's global power is rising as a self-styled non-aligned political actor. However, Russia likely considers a meaningful strategic partnership with India to be a major goal of its new-era diplomacy—particularly to counter recent developments suggesting a strengthening of U.S.-India ties. Russia likely calculates that a strong partnership with India would provide a massive export market and deny the United States a powerful military ally.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

- Russia will use information operations and influence tactics to weaken NATO by fomenting internal discord within select members and partners, limiting the willingness and ability of NATO to act in unity either in Europe or globally.
- Russia will continue to exert pressure and influence on its dependent energy consumers by threatening their oil and gas supplies. U.S. allies and partners that depend on Russian energy imports may be compelled to withhold specific areas of support for key U.S. interests in exchange for energy security.
- Evolving Russian relationships with current U.S. partners could compromise the availability and security of strategic locations for projecting, employing, and sustaining U.S. forces.
- Proliferation of Russian weapons systems will complicate U.S. endeavors to train and improve interoperability with select partner states.
- Russian and Chinese cooperation is growing as a result of mutual economic interests and geographic proximity, which is resulting in a united front against the United States in international disputes.
- Russia exerts influence in competition through ethnic Russians and other Slavs, mutual legal and illegal business interests, and sympathetic political and civic groups. Competition may lead to conflict, particularly in Russia's near abroad and other periphery countries that have expressed interest in partnering with NATO, and these avenues of influence will play a substantive role in this conflict.