

# The military dimension of a more Militant Russia<sup>☆</sup>

Julian Cooper<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies, University of Birmingham, UK

<sup>b</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Solna, Sweden

---

## Abstract

The article analyses the development of the military dimension of Russia's economy over the past decade or more, including the significant growth of military expenditure and its principal driver, spending on the ambitious state armament programme to 2020. For the first time for almost twenty-five years Russia once again possesses capable armed forces. With greater economic and military strength Russia's leadership now feels able to be more assertive, even militant, on the world stage. These developments threaten to be constrained by the poor performance of the economy, facing the government with a policy challenge. However, for Russia and the main Western powers there can be no going back to the status quo ante.

© 2016 Non-profit partnership "Voprosy Ekonomiki". Hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

*JEL classification:* F51, F52, H56, L64.

*Keywords:* Russia, economy, military expenditure, defence, sanctions, economic performance.

---

## 1. Introduction

There is no dispute that present-day Russia is a more assertive power than it was a few years ago. This assertiveness and willingness to stand firm in the face of Western criticism and sanctions has become especially evident since the onset of the crisis and conflict over Ukraine. However, it could be argued that this turn to a more assertive, indeed militant, stance began before 2014. Perhaps the Ukraine crisis simply served to accentuate a trend of development that was already present. This article explores the issue by looking in some detail at the military dimension of what can be termed Militant Russia.

---

<sup>☆</sup> An abbreviated version of this article was published in Russian as: Cooper J. The military face of "Militant Russia". *Rossiia v Globalnoi Politike*, 2015, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 92–100.

*E-mail address:* [j.m.cooper@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.cooper@bham.ac.uk)

Peer review under responsibility of Voprosy Ekonomiki.

## **2. The rapid growth of military spending**

A good starting point is to explore the changing priority of the military in Russia as manifested in the resource commitment to its development, from late Soviet times to the present. The exact share of gross domestic product (GDP) devoted to the military in the USSR was, and remains, a contested issue, with a wide range of estimates, all high by international standards in the post-1945 world. In the author's own assessment, by the late 1980s it was approximately 15% (see Cooper, 1998, p. 246). In the same year the military share of GDP in the USA was 5.8% (Deger and Sen, 1991, p. 174). The USSR had a vast defence industry employing more than 8 million people (6 million in RSFSR), including almost 1.5 million in research and development (R&D) (1.3 million in RSFSR), accounting for almost a fifth of total industrial employment. The defence sector was granted top priority in resource allocation in the planned economy and its personnel enjoyed relatively high monetary, and non-monetary, reward.

With the collapse of the USSR, communist rule and the planned economy at the end of 1991 the situation rapidly changed. With troubled transition to the market the Russian economy contracted sharply and the military began to be starved of resources and, as a consequence, the defence industry, deprived of orders, began to shrink, being kept alive mainly by obtaining a few export orders (see Cooper, 2013, pp. 98–107). By 1997 military spending was only 4.3% of GDP and defence industry employment had fallen to 2.8 million, including 600,000 in R&D, i.e. a contraction to less than half its former scale.<sup>1</sup> The armed forces, in an increasingly demoralised state, received hardly any new weapons. For some among the country's leadership this was a humiliation. True, the former superpower still retained nuclear weapons, but its conventionally armed forces were weak and this gave rise to a deepening sense of insecurity. This sense was heightened in 1998 when the already fragile economy experienced a serious financial crisis. Output contracted sharply and military spending fell to 3% of GDP.

With Vladimir Putin as president from May 2000, aided by pro-market reforms and rising prices of oil and natural gas, the country's principal exports, the economy revived and there began almost a decade of growth of GDP at an annual average rate of almost 7%. Government finances strengthened and it became possible to spend more on defence. However, the government was committed to macroeconomic stability and the share of spending on the budget chapter "national defence", financing the Ministry of Defence (MOD) armed forces, was held stable at approximately 2.5% of GDP. This improved conditions and morale in the military but was not enough to fund any meaningful re-equipment with new armaments and other military hardware. The country was regaining economic strength but militarily was weak, with armed forces attempting to cope with increasingly aged weaponry dating back in the main to the 1980s or earlier. A sense of resentment began to mount, a feeling that in less than twenty years a once great power had suffered a humiliating loss of strength and influence on the world stage. By the mid-2000s there was a growing body of opinion that the West was at least partly to blame for this state of affairs, perceived to be acting

---

<sup>1</sup> SIPRI military expenditure database, [http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/research/armaments/milex/research/armaments/milex/milex\\_database](http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/research/armaments/milex/research/armaments/milex/milex_database); Cooper (2013, p. 102).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/987756>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/987756>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)