

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC REPRESENTATIONS OF NATO AND THE EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract:

This article examines how the Russian Federation has progressively redefined its strategic positioning toward NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community across four key periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. The aim is to identify patterns in how official strategic documents portray NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community, with a focus on threat perception, security discourse, and the legitimacy of force. The methodology consists of qualitative content analysis of national security strategies, foreign policy concepts, and military doctrines issued in each period, using a chronological approach. Findings indicate a shift from a predominantly defensive posture to an increasingly assertive and confrontational stance. In the early 2000s, NATO is depicted as a potential challenge, but cooperation remains possible. By 2008 and especially after the war in Georgia, the tone becomes more critical, portraying NATO as a destabilizing actor. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 consolidate this trend: Western actors are now described as direct adversaries, and the use of force is legitimized by references to existential threats. The study highlights how Russia has embedded strategic and ideological elements into its official doctrine, reinforcing a discourse of defensive sovereignty while enabling offensive operations.

Keywords: *Russia, NATO, strategic documents, threat perception, Euro-Atlantic security.*

Introduction

Understanding how the Russian Federation formally constructs its perception of NATO is essential for grasping the evolution of its strategic posture and external orientation. In the context of intensifying geopolitical competition, the way NATO is framed in official Russian

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documents reflects deeper shifts in security priorities, regional ambitions, and institutional threat perceptions. Given the role official documents play in legitimizing foreign policy decisions and military actions, analysing their content over time provides critical insight into Russia's evolving international outlook.

This research seeks to address the following research question: How has the representation of NATO changed in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation between 1999 and 2022? The study focuses on identifying how NATO has been portrayed over time by the Russian Federation, in strategic documents issued during moments of geopolitical shift.

The study proceeds from the assumption that changes in the portrayal of NATO are driven by shifts in the regional security environment and in Russia's interaction with the Euro-Atlantic community, which are subsequently reflected and formalized in official strategic documents.

The analysis is based on a qualitative, inductive content analysis of twelve strategic documents—national security strategies, foreign policy concepts, and military doctrines—issued during four key periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. These periods were selected due to their significance in the trajectory of Russian foreign and security policy: the consolidation of centralized power, the conflict in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The theoretical and conceptual foundation treats strategic documents as official instruments that reflect not only policy priorities but also external positioning.

The structure of the paper integrates four main sections, beginning with a review of relevant academic contributions that examine how official documents define security priorities, frame external threats, and articulate strategic objectives in the Russian context. This is followed by a presentation of the methodological framework applied in the inductive analysis of selected strategic texts. The subsequent section analyses the representation of NATO in official documents issued during four critical periods, in relation to their political and military context. Finally, the paper concludes with a

synthesis of the main findings and an evaluation of their implications for understanding the evolution of Russia's strategic posture.

Throughout the analysis, contextual elements are included only as they clarify shifts in how NATO is represented in official Russian documents. The focus of the study remains on the evolution of this representation, rather than on a broader assessment of Russia's domestic or foreign policy dynamics.

This study does not seek to identify all the factors that influence Russia's perception of NATO, nor to determine whether domestic, international, or leadership-related elements prevail. Questions related to individual decision-making, including Vladimir Putin's personal motivations or worldview, fall outside the scope of this analysis. Instead, the paper is limited to examining how NATO is represented in official strategic documents. By focusing on this level of analysis, the study avoids speculative explanations and concentrates on what is explicitly stated and institutionalized in formal policy texts.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Academic research on the evolution of Russian foreign and security discourse has consistently emphasized the role of structural uncertainty, national interests, and historical memory in shaping strategic behaviour. Researchers such as Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979, 118) have argued that states act to preserve sovereignty and ensure survival in the absence of a central authority, a view that continues to frame interpretations of Russian strategic conduct in international affairs.

In particular, the perception of NATO as a destabilizing presence against Russia has gained increasing prominence in both academic and political analyses of Russian behaviour. Mearsheimer (2001, 5-8) discusses how great powers are likely to view military alliances on their periphery as threats, especially when those alliances expand toward their borders. This logic has often been used to interpret Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement and its military posture in Eastern Europe.

Pevehouse and Goldstein (2017, 107-111) underline that power, measured in both military and economic terms, remains a key element in

a state's ability to shape external outcomes. In Russia's case, research has drawn attention to the anti-NATO stance employed in official documents, which often frame NATO actions as illegitimate or threatening to regional stability (Ungureanu 2006, 179-181; Miroiu 2006, 31-34). These framings are embedded in a broader logic of strategic deterrence and influence projection.

A number of studies also highlight the dual role of strategic documents as instruments for both internal coordination and external justification (Hanami 2003, 163-178; Elman 1994, 87-103). Such texts serve not only to formalize institutional priorities, but also to construct adversarial images, reinforce perceptions, and legitimize policy responses. Layne (1994, 5-49) and Zakaria (1998, 19) suggest that these mechanisms are especially evident during periods of geopolitical tension, when external actors are increasingly portrayed as direct threats.

While military capabilities remain a central reference point, recent research points to the growing presence of value-based components of strategic planning. For example, Rosenboim (2023, 140-145) notes that leadership perceptions and internal political constraints can determine how external threats are defined and prioritized. This is especially relevant in the Russian case, where official documents often combine language about national sovereignty, cultural values, and external pressure into unified constructs depicting strategic vulnerability.

The relevance of identity and threat construction is further explored by authors such as Hansen (2023, 180-186) and Wolfers (1962, 9-17), who show that official discourse not only reflects but also reproduces state perceptions of the international environment. This perspective supports the need to treat strategic documents as discursive acts that perform political functions.

Building on these insights, the present study contributes to the literature by tracing how NATO is represented in Russian strategic documents issued during four critical time periods—1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. These periods were selected based on their significance in shaping Russia's foreign and security policy: the rise of Vladimir Putin, the war in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Each moment marks a shift in Russia's international behaviour and offers a relevant context for examining potential changes in strategic documents. Rather than focusing on static concepts of

alignment or opposition, the analysis explores how terminology and threat framing evolve in response to shifting political and military contexts.

This study does not adopt a single theoretical lens, but combines elements of offensive realism and constructivism in a structured manner. Offensive realism is used to contextualize why the expansion of NATO and the presence of military infrastructure near Russia's borders are consistently framed as security concerns. At the same time, constructivism guides the analysis of how these concerns are expressed in official documents, by examining the language and recurring formulations through which NATO is represented over time. The author's approach therefore consists in using realism to explain the persistence of security-driven interpretations, while employing constructivist tools to analyse how these interpretations are articulated, stabilized, and transformed within strategic texts.

The present analysis is anchored in a conceptual approach that treats official strategic documents as both expressions of institutional intent and instruments for projecting state identity and strategic orientation. From a theoretical standpoint, the analysis draws on the understanding that state-issued policy texts are performative in nature—they do not merely reflect foreign policy, but actively contribute to the construction of national priorities, external perceptions, and international positioning. Accordingly, changes in tone and content across these documents offer critical insights into how a state defines its security environment, allies, and adversaries over time.

This research starts from the premise that the Russian Federation employs strategic documents not only to articulate internal policy frameworks, but also to shape external perceptions of its geopolitical posture. In this context, the portrayal of NATO serves as a key indicator of Moscow's evolving international vision. These documents function as structured discourses that legitimize political and military actions and define the boundaries of acceptable strategic behaviour.

The conceptual framework centres on three interrelated dimensions: the representation of external actors, the framing of national security threats, and the strategic positioning of the Russian state in relation to global power structures. These dimensions guide the inductive analysis of recurring themes and discursive shifts related

to NATO, allowing for the identification of patterns and moments of rhetorical escalation across the four key-moments analysed.

Methodological approach

The research relies on a qualitative, inductive content analysis of twelve official strategic documents published by the Russian Federation, covering four distinct time periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022.

These periods are selected based on major turning points in Russia's political and military trajectory, which also correspond to significant shifts in its interaction with NATO and the Euro-Atlantic security environment. The appointment of Vladimir Putin in 1999-2000 marks the consolidation of centralized authority and the beginning of a more coherent strategic outlook, formulated in the context of NATO's post-Cold War enlargement. The 2008 period, associated with the Russo-Georgian War, reflects the first direct military confrontation in the post-Soviet space linked to NATO's prospective expansion toward Georgia and Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 represents a decisive break in Russia-NATO relations, leading to the suspension of cooperation and the redefinition of NATO as a direct threat in official documents. Finally, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine marks the transition to a fully confrontational posture, in which NATO is consistently portrayed as a central adversary. These moments are therefore selected not only for their internal significance, but because they coincide with shifts in the regional security environment that are subsequently reflected in Russia's strategic documents.

The analysis is conducted on the following documents: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2000, 2009, 2015, 2021); Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2000, 2008, 2013, 2023); The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2000, 2010, 2014, 2021).

The selection criteria for these documents are based on temporal relevance, strategic significance, and comparability across periods. These documents are considered formal expressions of Russia's national priorities and strategic orientation, which makes them suitable for examining how perceptions of NATO are shaped within Russia's official documents. The documents are downloaded from official government websites and analysed in their original language.

The analysis does not apply a pre-established coding scheme. Instead, it follows an inductive, grounded theory approach, allowing categories and themes to emerge directly from the text. The unit of analysis is the paragraph or segment that contains meaningful references to NATO or related strategic formulations.

Based on the research question: *How has the representation of NATO changed in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation between 1999 and 2022?* the research objective is to identify changes in the representation of NATO in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation from 1999 to 2022.

Accordingly, the analysis does not aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of these documents, but selectively examines those segments that refer to NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community, in order to trace patterns of representation across time.

The article starts from the hypothesis that strategic documents issued by the Russian Federation in 2014 and 2022 portray NATO increasingly as a direct threat to national security, in contrast to a more reserved stance in previous periods. Through this analytical design, the study aims to identify shifts in tone, content, and strategic framing related to NATO, with attention to how such representations evolve in relation to broader geopolitical developments.

This study does not undertake a systematic analysis of NATO's institutional development, such as summit decisions or enlargement processes. Instead, it focuses exclusively on how NATO is represented within Russian strategic documents. References to external developments are included only when they are explicitly reflected in these documents, in order to clarify the context in which particular representations emerge.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the official strategic documents issued by the Russian Federation during the four key periods, selected for their geopolitical relevance and impact on Russia's foreign policy orientation. The aim is to trace how NATO and the broader Euro-Atlantic community are represented in

these texts, with a focus on identifying shifts in language, tone, and strategic framing over time.

The analysis is structured around four critical moments in recent Russian history—1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022—each associated with major developments in the country’s leadership and external behaviour: the rise of Vladimir Putin, the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Prior to the analysis of each set of strategic documents, a brief contextualization of the corresponding period is provided in order to clarify the domestic and international dynamics that influenced the formulation of the official documents. This step ensures that shifts in the representation of NATO are interpreted in relation to the broader context specific to each juncture.

The 1999-2000 period marks the consolidation of centralized authority under Vladimir Putin following years of institutional instability and the 1998 financial crisis (Tsiganok 2008; Sakwa 2005, 56-62). It also coincides with the Second Chechen War, which reinforced the perception of internal and external threats to national sovereignty (Trenin 2007, 124-138). In this climate of acute vulnerability, Vladimir Putin’s political ascent unfolded rapidly. Appointed Prime Minister in August 1999, he assumed the role of acting President on December 31, 1999, following Boris Yeltsin’s unexpected resignation. His legitimacy was subsequently reinforced through a political campaign focused on restoring domestic order and reasserting Russia’s status as a regional power.

The *2000 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* articulates a comprehensive vision of Russia’s internal and external security posture in a context marked by political instability, economic decline, and perceived encirclement. It begins by reaffirming the role of the “multinational people” as the foundation of Russian sovereignty (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1), underscoring the necessity of a strong central authority to counter secessionism and fragmentation.

The international environment is described through two divergent trends: the consolidation of new power centres, such as China and the EU, and the imposition of a unipolar order by the United States, which is portrayed as advancing unilateral interests (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1). Russia’s strategic position is

defined in opposition to this order, as it asserts a multipolar vision in which its sovereignty and global influence are to be acknowledged (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

National interests are outlined across multiple domains – political, economic, military, social, and informational – reflecting an integrated approach to state security. Internally, emphasis is placed on maintaining constitutional order and territorial integrity, combating extremism and terrorism, and preserving political and economic stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2). External priorities include strengthening ties within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and resisting “double standards” in international affairs (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

The strategy highlights the importance of protecting national information space and developing domestic technological capabilities to reduce strategic dependencies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3-5). Russia’s military posture is shaped by the goal of deterrence, ensuring sufficient force to prevent aggression against itself or its allies.

Internal vulnerabilities are addressed in detail, including economic stagnation, brain drain, and technological dependence, all seen as weakening Russia’s global status (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 5). These economic issues are linked to rising separatism, radicalism, and loss of federal control in peripheral regions. Terms such as “ethnoegoism” and “chauvinism” are used to describe internal divisions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 5-6).

Organized crime and corruption are identified as structural threats to state stability, with explicit reference to the infiltration of criminal networks in public institutions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 6). Social instability, marked by poverty, demographic decline, and deteriorating health indicators, is seen as a long-term threat to development.

From a military perspective, NATO expansion, foreign military infrastructure near Russia’s borders, and potential territorial claims by NATO are presented as primary security threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 6). The document also advocates

for economic independence through controlled integration into global markets, protection of strategic sectors from foreign capital, and tighter control over financial flows (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 9-11).

In the legal and political sphere, a centralized regulatory framework is emphasized, with restrictions on political or social organizations that undermine state unity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11). Strategic deterrence is reaffirmed through the maintenance of a credible nuclear force and permanent military presence in key regions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14). Defence industry modernization and technological self-sufficiency are also prioritized to reduce dependence on imports.

The *2000 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000) outlines the strategic directions of Russia's external engagements considering global transformations at the turn of the century. It defines foreign policy as a system of fundamental principles and priorities, anchored in the Constitution, federal law, international treaties, and legal norms (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2).

While acknowledging a partial consolidation of Russia's international position, the document emphasizes the need for a renewed strategy that ensures national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and a "prestigious" standing in the global system (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2). It identifies multipolarity, legal cooperation, and internal economic stability as core priorities, alongside safeguarding the rights of Russian citizens abroad and preventing instability near Russia's borders (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

The end of the Cold War is framed as both an opportunity and a risk—particularly due to the emergence of a US-dominated unipolar order and the weakening of the UN Security Council (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3). Russia reaffirms its commitment to international law, sovereignty, and non-intervention, warning against arbitrary external interference and erosion of state

authority in international relations (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3-4).

In the economic sphere, foreign policy seeks global integration under conditions that strengthen national competitiveness and economic security (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 7). Russia aims to expand trade, attract foreign investment, protect its external assets, and engage more actively in regional economic organizations, while also addressing ecological risks (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 10).

The document details regional priorities, with Asia receiving particular attention due to geographical proximity and strategic partnerships with China and India. Russia also seeks to enhance its role in Asian integration platforms (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11). In the Middle East and Africa, Moscow aims to re-establish its economic presence and participate in peacekeeping processes and multilateral projects (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 12). In Latin America, the focus is on expanding political and military-technical cooperation.

While differences with the US are acknowledged, the document underscores the importance of maintaining dialogue on arms control and regional stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11).

The *2000 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000) defines the foundational principles governing the organization and deployment of armed forces. It presents the military dimension as defensive, emphasizing the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The global environment is portrayed as unstable, with the emergence of new regional power centres, risks of nuclear confrontation, and the intensification of ethnic, religious, and national extremism (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1-3). The document highlights crisis management and early stabilization as preventive measures against open conflict. Information warfare is identified as a rising threat dimension (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2).

Risks include the use of military force labelled as “humanitarian intervention” without UN Security Council approval—framed as a violation of international law (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2)—as well as the deployment of information technologies for offensive purposes. Military security is ensured through a combination of forces, resources, and nuclear capabilities deemed necessary to deter aggression, including large-scale conventional threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 7). The doctrine clarifies the conditions under which Russia may employ nuclear weapons and reiterates commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Military security rests on centralized leadership and civilian oversight, early threat detection, and proportional response measures (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 8). Despite emphasizing international stability, the document defends Russia’s right to safeguard critical infrastructure, including abroad and in outer space. In peacetime, military measures focus on internal political stability, territorial integrity, and readiness to neutralize threats, while during crises, total or partial mobilization is envisaged, alongside coordination across diplomatic, economic, and informational domains.

Force development priorities include modernizing deterrence capabilities, creating integrated command systems, and maintaining rapid deployment forces. Emphasis is placed on cooperation within military coalitions, though without explicit reference to partner states (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 10). Military reform is described as a central modernization goal, aiming for a professionalized force and improved planning, logistics, and strategic management (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11-12).

The document outlines the legal and operational roles of the President, Government, Ministry of Defence, and General Staff. It provides detailed classifications of military conflict, distinguishing between “just” and “unjust” wars based on compliance with international law (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14). Wars are categorized as local, regional, or large-scale, with the latter potentially involving global conflict and weapons of mass destruction (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14-16).

The 2008 period reflects a turning point shaped by the Russo-Georgian War and the growing friction over NATO's prospective enlargement, particularly toward Georgia and Ukraine. Russian leadership interpreted these moves as threats to its regional influence and strategic depth (Allison 2013, 260-271; Mankoff 2014, 60-68). The conflict demonstrated a renewed willingness to use military force in the near abroad and marked a departure from the rhetoric of cooperation with the West.

The 2009 *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*) introduces an expanded concept of security, encompassing military, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. National security is defined as "the condition ensuring the protection of the individual, society, and the state from internal and external threats, enabling the defence of constitutional rights, territorial integrity, and sustainable development" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 2). A national security assurance system is outlined, integrating not only the armed forces but also governmental bodies and information control technologies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 2). The document emphasizes social cohesion and the promotion of traditional spiritual and moral values as foundations of internal stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 2-3).

Strategic priorities include enhancing Russia's international standing through adaptation to new geopolitical and economic realities, advocating a multipolar world order, and asserting national interests (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 3). Globalization is viewed as a process of interdependence and competition for resources, positioning Russia as a proactive actor in regional crisis management (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 6). The concept of a multivector foreign policy, grounded in pragmatism and energy leverage, is articulated alongside ambitions for global economic leadership.

Emerging threats include the unilateral use of force, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and advanced forms of terrorism, especially in cyber and biotech domains (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 7-8). The document also underscores the

significance of multilateral mechanisms such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and CIS in counterbalancing Western influence and facilitating regional security (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 8). NATO is briefly noted in the context of a reconfigured Euro-Atlantic security architecture, calling for a balanced legal framework.

Economic security is addressed through the reduction of external dependencies, diversification, and energy security, with emphasis on domestic supply and innovation (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 13). The social component highlights the improvement of living standards, infrastructure, and public services as safeguards against internal instability and radicalism (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 14-15). Social mobility is identified as a critical factor in ensuring equity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 15).

Scientific and technological advancement is linked to defence readiness, with a focus on competitiveness and innovation (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 18), while delays in adopting new technologies and reliance on imports are flagged as potential vulnerabilities (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2009*, 19).

The *2008 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* outlines the strategic directions of Russian diplomacy, reaffirming its commitment to a multipolar international system, the advancement of national interests, and the strengthening of Russia's global influence. Strategic priorities include the development of good-neighbourly relations and the prevention of conflicts in bordering regions (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2008*, 3), alongside the protection of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad, considered a fundamental responsibility of the state (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2008*, 3). The document also highlights the projection of cultural influence through the promotion of the Russian language and civilizational heritage.

A just international order based on the primacy of international law and collective decision-making mechanisms is advocated. The United Nations is designated as the central pillar of the global system (*Concept*

of *Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 2), perceived as the only legitimate institution capable of regulating interstate relations. Emphasis is placed on sovereign equality and mutual partnership, with unilateralism and hegemonic aspirations firmly rejected.

While supporting UN reform to reflect current geopolitical realities, Russia calls for maintaining the status of the permanent members of the Security Council and insists that any changes must be based on consensus (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 6-7). The document expresses concern over arbitrary reinterpretations of international law and unilateral modifications of existing norms.

Strategic stability is addressed through criticism of the US missile defence deployment in Europe, which is labelled as destabilizing. Russia advocates for a collective response mechanism to ballistic threats (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 9), opposes the weaponization of outer space, and stresses the prevention of a new arms race. The document confirms Russia's adherence to arms control and non-proliferation regimes, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and conventions on biological and chemical weapons (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 8-9). Russia signals its willingness to participate in strategic arms reduction negotiations but insists on a multilateral format involving all nuclear powers.

The concept promotes a collective approach to international security, expanding strategic dialogue with other global actors such as China and India. It argues for moving beyond the bilateral US–Russia dynamic and toward a broader configuration of global power centres (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 9).

The document also emphasizes regional integration through the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space with Belarus and Kazakhstan, under the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), with the stated intention of expanding membership to other interested states. Furthermore, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is identified as the primary mechanism for ensuring regional stability and security (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 13-14).

The *2010 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* presents a broad security framework that integrates political, economic, and military dimensions. NATO's expansion near Russian borders is listed as a key external threat, framed as a disruption of strategic balance (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 2-3). The document differentiates between military dangers and threats, defines conflict typologies, and emphasizes preparedness through unified strategic command and scenario-based planning. Modern warfare is depicted as multi-domain, including cyber and informational dimensions, and characterized by precision weaponry, strategic mobility, and short, high-intensity operations (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 7-9).

The maintenance of nuclear deterrence remains a strategic priority, alongside rapid deployment capabilities and aerospace control. The doctrine introduces the right to intervene abroad to protect Russian citizens under attack, without clarifying specific criteria (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 12-13). Peacekeeping under CSTO, UN, or CIS mandates is also addressed. Further priorities include safeguarding maritime interests, enhancing high-precision and strategic nuclear systems, and developing integrated digital command networks (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 13-21). Military-technical cooperation is framed as a geopolitical tool, and partnerships within CSTO, CIS, SCO, and the UN are promoted for both regional defence and global peacekeeping (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 27-28).

The 2014 timeframe centres on the annexation of Crimea and the eruption of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These developments followed the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian leadership and were framed in Russian official discourses as a reaction to Western interference and NATO encroachment (Sakwa 2020, 120-128). The resulting deterioration in Russia-NATO relations was accompanied by sanctions and a discursive shift toward a more hostile tone in official documents.

The *2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* frames national security as inherently tied to political stability and socio-economic development. It reaffirms Russia's role as a central actor in a multipolar world and defines NATO expansion and US missile defence systems as direct threats to strategic stability (*National Security Strategy*

of the Russian Federation 2015, 26). Western support for Ukraine's post-2014 leadership is presented as a violation of Russia's regional interests, with the Kyiv government portrayed as a long-term source of instability.

The document reflects a perception of international disorder, citing regime change, terrorism, and ideological subversion—including historical falsification and manipulation of public consciousness—as key threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 5-6). It highlights risks from US biological labs near Russian borders, uncontrolled migration, and organized crime, calling for the strengthening of societal unity and interethnic harmony. Strategic deterrence remains a military priority, with emphasis on nuclear potential, defence industry modernization, and rapid mobilization capacity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 8-9). Internally, it identifies attempts to overthrow constitutional order, colour revolutions, and foreign intelligence activity as existential dangers.

Information security features prominently, with measures aimed at controlling digital content, countering cyber threats, and limiting external media influence (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 10). In response to sanctions and economic stagnation, the strategy supports domestic food production, infrastructure modernization, and reduced dependence on imports (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 13-14).

It promotes traditional values in education and tight regulation of ideological content, alongside environmental protection policies such as ecosystem monitoring and green technologies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 26). Externally, the document reiterates commitment to a stable, UN-centred world order, introducing new mechanisms for strategic oversight via annual reports to the president (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 26-31).

The *2013 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* frames Russia as a competitive power within an emerging multipolar order, emphasizing sovereignty, equality among states, and the central role of the UN in global governance (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 2-3). It promotes active engagement in

neighbouring regions to prevent and resolve conflicts, reinforcing influence in the post-Soviet space.

Global shifts are acknowledged, particularly the eastward redistribution of power, while NATO's expansion and strategic marginalization of Russia are portrayed as threats to indivisible security (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 3). The document criticizes the "responsibility to protect" doctrine as a justification for illegitimate interventions and reiterates that use of force must occur exclusively within the UN Security Council framework (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 10).

The Concept advocates arms control and multilateralism but expresses concern over the militarization of international affairs. It calls for enhanced information security and counters the political use of digital technologies, including through expanded Russian media influence abroad and the development of tools for shaping foreign public opinion (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 19-20).

Regionally, it identifies the CIS as a stabilizing platform and prioritizes deeper integration via the Eurasian Economic Union and Customs Union, and especially with Belarus and Kazakhstan (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 21). Relations with Ukraine are cautiously framed as a strategic partnership within the CIS (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 22).

The CSTO is reaffirmed as a primary security instrument. Russia also pledges involvement in frozen conflict mediation, including Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, and explicitly supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and neutrality of Moldova (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 22).

The *2014 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* asserts that military force should be used only after the exhaustion of non-violent means, while recognizing an increase in global instability and the emergence of new threats in the informational and internal domains (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 2-3). Although the likelihood of large-scale war is deemed low, the expansion of NATO is identified as a persistent threat (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 3-4).

Russia reserves the right to deploy troops within the post-Soviet space, both through the CSTO and other formats, to protect sovereignty and the security of allies, including the Union State with Belarus (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 9-10). The defence of Russian citizens abroad is also cited as a legitimate rationale for military engagement. The use of nuclear weapons is not limited to nuclear attacks but is extended to conventional threats that endanger the existence of the state (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 12). Peacekeeping is framed as a key function of Russia's role within international structures such as the UN, CSTO, and CIS (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 11-12).

The doctrine emphasizes full mobilization of the economy, defence industry, and governance structures to support military operations, highlighting the need for strategic reserves and advanced weapons systems, including UAVs, electronic warfare, and aerospace defences (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 18-20).

Russia also calls for pragmatic military-technical cooperation with allied states and opposes attempts by other countries to achieve strategic superiority through missile defence systems, space weaponization, or high-precision non-nuclear arms (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 22-23).

The final period analysed, 2022, corresponds to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the emergence of a confrontational geopolitical doctrine. NATO is portrayed not merely as an unfriendly bloc but as a central threat to Russia's sovereignty and security architecture (Gibson 2022). This stage consolidates the securitization of the West in Russian strategic thought and reflects the culmination of a long process of discursive escalation.

The *2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* affirms the link between national security and economic development, emphasizing the economic dimension as a foundation of resilience. It describes the international system as undergoing a transition, marked by "the growth in the number of economic and political centres of power" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 3). Western states are portrayed as seeking to preserve dominance, using economic and informational instruments to undermine competitors, including through sanctions and financial pressure on emerging markets.

The document highlights societal and identity security, asserting growing national cohesion and warning against “propaganda campaigns” targeting Russia’s “spiritual and moral values” (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 6). NATO is explicitly cited as a threat due to its expansion and infrastructure near Russian borders (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 5-6), alongside claims that “some states view Russia as a military threat and even an adversary” (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 6), justifying strengthened deterrence.

Strategic risks include “attempts at military pressure on Russia and its allies” (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 13), with particular concern over US missile systems in Europe and Asia-Pacific, seen as threatening “strategic stability and international security” (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 14). Regional instability near Russia’s borders is attributed to external actors (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 14).

National defence priorities include nuclear deterrence, operational readiness, and modernization of the defence sector (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 16), along with the protection of Russian citizens abroad. Internally, threats such as crime, digital subversion, and social destabilization are linked to foreign influence (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 16-17), with accusations against foreign intelligence services for “sponsoring internal structures” (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation 2021*, 16).

The *2023 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* frames Russia as a distinct civilizational entity rooted in its “historical and cultural legacy,” positioning it within a unique geopolitical realm referred to as the “Russian World” (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2023*, 2). The document embraces a multipolar vision of the international system, advocating a transition toward a “new world order” shaped by the redistribution of economic and geopolitical power. Western states are accused of resisting this shift by “slowing the natural course of history” through sanctions, ideological interference, and political destabilization (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2023*, 2-4).

Russia is depicted as a target of exclusion by the West, which allegedly seeks to marginalize its role in global affairs. In response, the strategy calls for reinforcing Russia's autonomous international presence. The UN is portrayed as weakened by some states who are pushing a biased global agenda (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 3-4). Military power is described as increasingly central in global affairs, with rising tensions in strategic regions and the erosion of arms control mechanisms. The risk of confrontation among great powers is cited as a major threat to global stability (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 4), marking a more proactive posture than previous documents.

National security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are presented as core principles, to be defended against "destructive external influence" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6). Emphasis is placed on preserving Russia's cultural heritage and "traditional spiritual and moral values" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7), consistent with earlier strategic documents. The main foreign policy goals include creating favourable conditions for national development and strengthening Russia's position as an "influential and autonomous" global actor (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7).

The economic dimension includes calls for enhancing Russia's role in the global economy and achieving national development objectives (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7), Russia pursues infrastructure development independent of "unfriendly" states, while deepening ties with neutral or friendly partners (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 16). Russia's intention to exploit oceanic resources is also reaffirmed.

The document highlights the need to "shape an objective perception of Russia abroad and strengthen its presence in the global information space" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 7), thereby legitimizing external propaganda efforts. Counterterrorism objectives include the suppression of terrorism-related ideologies, as well as "neo-Nazism and radical nationalism" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 17-18), continuing a framework used to justify repressive measures both domestically and abroad.

The *2021 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* frames Russia as being “under siege” by the West (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation 2021*, 3-5), with global dynamics marked by attempts to undermine its influence through information warfare, economic sanctions, and NATO’s military presence near its borders. The document explicitly identifies NATO’s eastward expansion and the deployment of Western military infrastructure in Eastern Europe as direct threats to Russia’s national security. While NATO presents these actions as defensive, Russia interprets them as strategic pressure designed to limit its autonomy. US missile defence systems in Europe and the Asia-Pacific are also viewed not as defensive tools but as destabilizing elements that erode strategic deterrence (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation 2021*, 20).

Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons if the existence of the state is threatened, including in scenarios involving conventional conflict. A distinct feature is the concept of “non-nuclear strategic deterrence” (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation 2021*, 5), which includes cyber warfare, hypersonic technologies, and precision-guided munitions—positioning these as viable alternatives to nuclear capabilities within its deterrence doctrine.

The doctrine asserts Russia’s right to protect its citizens abroad, a rationale already used in Crimea and employed in eastern Ukraine in the following year. It introduces the notion of “stabilization operations” (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation 2021*, 5-6), which enables Russian military deployment in areas of interest to prevent escalation, even in the absence of a direct threat. This reflects a preventive and interest-based approach, not limited to conventional self-defence.

Emphasis is placed on developing autonomous military structures capable of sustaining long-term conflict through strategic reserves. The doctrine calls for readiness for attrition warfare (*Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2021*, 17-18), implying a vision of prolonged confrontation rather than limited engagements.

Cyber and information warfare are treated as essential dimensions of strategic rivalry. The document underlines the need to control information flows and resist Western influence operations aimed at destabilizing Russian society (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation 2021*, 18). In this logic, information warfare is not merely

defensive but also offensive—serving to shape international perceptions and disrupt adversarial psychological operations.

Lastly, Russia affirms its right to deploy military forces in neighbouring countries to counter what it perceives as Western-orchestrated regime change attempts (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 18), reinforcing a doctrine that focuses on proactive regional intervention.

Table 1 summarizes the key findings of our content analysis for each coded document and time period. The results clearly show the evolution of Russian portrayals of NATO, UN and Western Europe on one hand and Eurasian partnerships on the other.

Table no. 1. Key findings (author's conception)

	National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation	Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation	The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation
1999-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Defines NATO expansion as a <i>potential security threat</i> but still allows room for dialogue; ➤ Frames Russia as a sovereign pole in a multipolar world; ➤ Focuses on internal stability, economic independence, and deterrence capacity; ➤ Emphasizes state unity and control against separatism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promotes <i>multipolarity</i> and <i>international legality</i> under the UN; ➤ Notes concerns about U.S. dominance but calls for pragmatic engagement and arms control dialogue; ➤ Advocates for non-intervention and sovereign equality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Portrays a <i>defensive military posture</i>, identifying NATO infrastructure near borders as a threat to balance; ➤ Emphasizes nuclear deterrence, strategic stability, and opposition to “humanitarian interventions” without UN approval.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Expands the notion of security to include social and informational stability; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highlights Russia's <i>civilizational identity</i> and promotes good-neighbourly relations; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifies NATO's military infrastructure near Russia as a

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sees NATO expansion and U.S. missile defence plans as destabilizing; ➤ Introduces <i>multipolar order</i> as an alternative to Western dominance; ➤ Promotes national resilience through technological independence and social unity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Calls for a just, law-based international system centred on the UN; ➤ Criticizes U.S. unilateralism and missile defence in Europe; ➤ Promotes regional integration via CSTO and Eurasian structures. 	<p><i>primary external threat</i>;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Defines modern warfare as multi-domain (including cyber and information); ➤ Strengthens nuclear and conventional deterrence; ➤ Introduces right to intervene abroad to protect citizens.
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Frames NATO enlargement as a direct threat to strategic stability; ➤ Connects Western support for Ukraine to regime change and external subversion; ➤ Emphasizes sovereignty, internal cohesion, and information security; ➤ Promotes traditional values and counters ideological interference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Depicts Russia as a <i>competitive global power</i> in a multipolar order; ➤ Criticizes NATO and “responsibility to protect” as tools of Western coercion; ➤ Promotes Eurasian integration and information sovereignty; ➤ Reaffirms CSTO as the core of regional defence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Defines NATO expansion as a <i>persistent military danger</i>; ➤ Reserves right to intervene within post-Soviet space; ➤ Expands nuclear doctrine to include conventional threats; ➤ Calls for full mobilization and strategic self-sufficiency; ➤ Emphasizes asymmetric responses and defence modernization.
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Depicts NATO as a <i>central existential threat</i> undermining sovereignty and stability; ➤ Links Western actions to hybrid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Frames Russia as a <i>distinct civilization</i> and independent pole in a multipolar world; ➤ Claims Western states resist the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explicitly identifies NATO’s expansion and Western military infrastructure as <i>direct threats</i>; ➤ Introduces non-nuclear strategic

	warfare and cultural erosion; ➤ Prioritizes nuclear deterrence, identity protection, and control of information space.	“natural course of history”; ➤ Promotes the “Russian World” concept and information influence abroad; ➤ Legitimizes counterpropaganda as strategic necessity.	deterrence (cyber, hypersonic); ➤ Asserts right to proactive interventions and long-term attrition warfare; ➤ Consolidates information warfare as both defensive and offensive.
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Between 1999 and 2022, Russian strategic documents show a continuous shift in how NATO, the European Union, and the broader Euro-Atlantic community are portrayed. The tone evolved from cautious pragmatism to explicit hostility, reflecting changes in Russia’s internal consolidation and its perception of international power relations. The Euro-Atlantic order, initially regarded as a structure of cooperation and dialogue, came to be depicted as a source of pressure, interference, and instability.

In 1999-2000, strategic texts were dominated by concerns over domestic order, territorial integrity, and economic recovery after a decade of crisis. NATO enlargement and Western interventions were noted as challenges, but not yet defined as direct threats. Russia presented itself as a state seeking balanced engagement, calling for respect of sovereignty and equality among international actors. The documents referred to international law and the United Nations as frameworks capable of regulating global competition. The United States was criticized for unilateral behaviour, yet cooperation with Western institutions was not excluded. Russia’s main objective at this stage was to stabilize its internal system and regain recognition as an autonomous actor in a multipolar environment.

By 2008, the discourse hardened. The expansion of NATO, the recognition of Kosovo, and Western involvement in post-Soviet states were described as actions that weakened international stability. The *National Security Strategy* and the *Foreign Policy Concept* introduced the idea of a multipolar order as an alternative to Western dominance. The

2008 war in Georgia confirmed a change in Russia's approach to the Euro-Atlantic community: dialogue was replaced by competition, and deterrence became the central principle of security. The documents emphasized the need to counter external influence through regional mechanisms such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The European Union was treated with growing suspicion, perceived as aligned with U.S. strategic interests and unable to act independently.

The 2014 phase marked a decisive rupture. After the annexation of Crimea, Russian official discourse began to link NATO and the European Union directly to attempts to limit Russia's regional and global influence. Western states were accused of encouraging regime change and manipulating public opinion in neighbouring countries. The *National Security Strategy* and *Military Doctrine* associated Western activity with ideological subversion and information warfare. Security came to include cultural and spiritual dimensions, while protecting traditional values and social cohesion became strategic goals. The European Union was no longer framed as a pragmatic economic partner but as part of a collective Western bloc acting against Russian interests. Information control, media regulation, and cyber defence were integrated into the national security framework, reflecting a broader perception of encirclement and vulnerability.

In 2022, these tendencies reached their full form. NATO, the EU, and the Euro-Atlantic community were described as coordinated instruments of Western dominance. The *National Security Strategy* and the *Foreign Policy Concept* claimed that Western states sought to maintain global supremacy by restricting Russia's development and isolating it politically and economically. The *Military Doctrine* referred to the deployment of Western military infrastructure in Eastern Europe as a direct threat. The idea of a "Russian World" was institutionalized as a distinct civilizational model, presented as incompatible with liberal values promoted by the Euro-Atlantic community. Strategic deterrence extended to non-nuclear and informational domains, and military interventions were justified as protection of national identity and citizens. The European Union, previously seen as an economic counterpart, was now placed in the same category as NATO—an unfriendly actor supporting U.S. containment policy.

Over these two decades, Russia's representation of the Euro-Atlantic community evolved from conditional cooperation to ideological opposition. The early vision of international law and multilateral stability gave way to a doctrine centred on defensive sovereignty and confrontation. Each generation of documents reduced the space for dialogue and deepened the image of the West as a unified and hostile system. This evolution reshaped Russia's understanding of security: from the protection of borders to the preservation of political autonomy, social cohesion, and cultural identity in the face of perceived external interference. By 2022, antagonism toward the Euro-Atlantic community had become an integral element of Russia's strategic thinking, defining both its external posture and its internal justification for power consolidation.

Conclusions

The analysis of Russian strategic documents issued between 1999 and 2022 reveals a consistent redefinition of how the Euro-Atlantic community is perceived in Moscow's security and foreign policy doctrine. Rather than a series of isolated adjustments, the findings indicate a structural transformation in which the concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and threat became increasingly interconnected. Over time, the Euro-Atlantic framework ceased to represent a model of cooperation and evolved into the principal reference against which Russia defines its identity, interests, and strategic behaviour.

This process confirms that Russia's doctrine operates not only as a set of policy guidelines but as a discursive mechanism through which state identity and power relations are constructed. The notion of security is no longer confined to the military domain but extends to the political, informational, and cultural spheres, where Western influence is portrayed as an existential threat. Consequently, deterrence has acquired both a material and an ideological dimension, legitimizing pre-emptive and coercive measures in defence of what is presented as national and civilizational distinctiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study demonstrates how official strategic documents function as instruments of identity formation and normative resistance. The shift from defensive pragmatism to ideological confrontation highlights the fusion of realism and constructivism within Russian strategic thinking: power and perception operate together to

sustain a narrative of threatened sovereignty. This integration explains why Western actions are interpreted not simply as geopolitical manoeuvres but as assaults on the legitimacy of the Russian state itself.

In practical terms, this evolution carries significant implications for Euro-Atlantic security. The institutionalization of antagonism in Russian doctrine reduces the credibility of cooperative mechanisms and embeds conflictual logic into the regional order. NATO and the European Union are no longer treated as external actors to be engaged diplomatically but as structural adversaries shaping Russia's internal and external behaviour. This framework limits space for dialogue and increases the likelihood that political disputes will be interpreted through the lens of existential rivalry.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating that strategic continuity in Russia's official discourse cannot be explained solely through material power considerations. The persistence of threat narratives across successive documents indicates a deliberate alignment between state ideology, domestic legitimacy, and foreign policy objectives. Future research could expand this approach by examining how these narratives are received and operationalized within military planning, public communication, or regional diplomacy, providing a deeper understanding of how discourse translates into strategic behaviour.

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