

DOI 10.33099/2618-1614-2024-27-4-3-12

UDK 355.5

**V. S. Komarov,***Doctor of Military Sciences, Professor,  
Defence Intelligence Research Institute,***V. V. Oleksiuk,***Candidate of Military Sciences, Senior Researcher,  
Defence Intelligence Research Institute,***K. A. Shcherban,***Defence Intelligence Research Institute*

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## Key elements of Russian Federation's strategic adaptation for sustaining a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine

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*This article analyses the key elements of the Russian Federation's strategic adaptations for sustaining a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine. The objective is to identify critical vulnerabilities susceptible to asymmetric impact, which could establish conditions that compel the Russian Federation to abandon its military and political objectives in its armed aggression against Ukraine.*

*Keywords: asymmetric impact, critical vulnerabilities, DIME means, scenarios, strategic adaptation, war of attrition.*

**F**ormulation of the Problem. In both Western and Ukrainian information spaces, discussions are increasingly focusing on possible scenarios for the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, regardless of the predictions [1–2], the Russian Federation's (RF) continued pursuit of its military and political objectives into the third year of full-scale aggression against Ukraine indicates one clear reality: the war is far from over and has evolved into a prolonged war of attrition. This phase is characterized by significant personnel losses, extensive destruction of weapons and specialized military equipment, massive resource expenditures, and minimal shifts in the front line [3–8].

Nevertheless, the RF's willingness to commit substantial resources has prompted a re-evaluation of the initial invasion strategies, leading to strategic adaptations in four key areas: military, political, economic, and informational. A thorough study and comprehensive analysis of actions and measures in these areas will enable us to assess the RF's capacity to sustain a prolonged war of attrition and to identify critical vulnerabilities across various sectors and institutions.

These vulnerabilities must be systematically and comprehensively targeted through DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) means [9], which, in turn, could compel the RF to cease its armed aggression and bring an end to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

**An analysis of recent studies and publications** [3–8] reveals that think tanks and researchers have begun examining how the RF has implemented adaptation measures to build the necessary capabilities for a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine. Specifically, these studies highlight Russia's ability to transition its national economy to a wartime footing, expand and enhance its defence industry's production and technological capabilities, incorporate lessons learned and combat experience, and adapt swiftly to dynamic situations. However, these studies primarily provide an overview of Russia's capacity for sustained warfare and, unfortunately, do not propose any mechanisms for counteracting it.

Therefore, **the purpose and main focus of this article** are to identify the key components of the RF's strategic adaptations that restore and strengthen its capacity for a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine.

### Summary of Main Research Material

An analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the lessons learned reveals that the RF is continuously seeking to enhance the effectiveness of its armed forces by increasing troop numbers and equipment, altering military leadership, and adjusting tactics and methods of

deployment. According to the authors, RF's strategic adaptation to a prolonged war of attrition involves four key elements: military, political, economic, and informational (Fig. 1). Military reforms are being implemented; the defence industry is undergoing modernization; significant financial resources are invested in raising the technological capabilities of the RF's armed forces; the configuration of RF's international partnerships (including alliances with China, Iran, North Korea, and the Global South) is evolving; and there is an escalating militarization of Russian society, among other developments.



Fig. 1. Four key elements of the RF's strategic adaptation

A detailed analysis of each of the elements above will enable us to identify critical vulnerabilities and leverage asymmetric impacts that could compel the RF to halt its armed aggression by diminishing its relevant capabilities.

#### *Military Element*

*Changes in Command and Control Systems and Organizational Structure of Troops.* Following the unsuccessful blitzkrieg attempt under the slogan «Kyiv in Three Days,» Russia adapted its command and control structure to the new realities of warfare. In April 2022, a single commander was appointed to coordinate the full-scale invasion, leading the Russian armed forces to abandon the decentralized and fragmented command system initially employed. This resulted in a consolidation and unification of efforts, shifting the Russian invasion from multiple disjointed campaigns across northern, eastern, and southern Ukraine to more concentrated operations in defined areas in eastern and southern Ukraine.

At the outset of the full-scale invasion, the RF deployed battalion and company tactical groups, which

ultimately proved insufficient in strength and limited in their ability to achieve strategic objectives. After a year of war, the Russian armed forces moved away from these tactical groups, reverting to a regimental and divisional structure within the ground forces. Essentially, above the battalion level, Russian forces have returned to the traditional Soviet-style combat organization of regiments, divisions, and combined arms armies. Meanwhile, the structure below the regiment has been significantly modified, with battalions now restructured to perform specifically in classical and assault operations.

As the organizational structure of the RF's armed forces has changed, the forms and methods of their deployment have also evolved, refining existing tactics and fostering the development of new warfare strategies.

The tactics for conducting assault operations have shifted to the so-called «meat assaults». This tactical adjustment arose from military necessity, particularly due to insufficient time to train mobilized personnel to a high level of combat readiness. The leadership of PMC Wagner championed this «meat tactics» approach, using convicts to breach our troop positions, which ultimately led to the capture and occupation of Lysychansk, Soledar, and Bakhmut.

The RF's manpower can likely be maintained at current levels for the next five to seven years, though the same cannot be said for weapons, military, and specialized equipment. The enemy is attempting to offset shortages in armoured vehicles by deploying light, mobile vehicles such as buggies, ATVs, and motorcycles. This adaptation aims to «conserve» armoured vehicles during assaults and relies on ground personnel as a substitute. Despite significant losses, the Russian armed forces continue to meet personnel demands without initiating a second wave of mobilization. In September 2024, a presidential decree increased the Russian army's personnel by 180,000, bringing the number of active-duty military personnel to 1.5 million [10].

The Russian authorities aim to recruit approximately 225,000 contract soldiers annually by 2027, with relevant funding allocated in the draft federal budget of the RF. Additionally, Russian legislation has been amended to dismiss criminal charges against individuals who sign military contracts that involve participation in the war against Ukraine. The Russian army's personnel in the occupied territories of Ukraine is estimated at around 600,000. This figure represents nearly half of Russia's total active military force and is almost equivalent to the official count of contract soldiers reported by RF [11].

If enemy losses continue at the current rate of approximately 30,000 personnel per month, RF's operational reserves are expected to be depleted by 2025. However, its full mobilization reserves could potentially

last until 2032 [12]. Additionally, the RF is raising the conscription age to increase the number of conscripts who will join the operational reserve after completing their military service. In total, annual conscription in RF could reach up to 400,000. The primary constraints on the size of the Russian army are the financial strain on the budget, the impact on the Russian economy, and the willingness of Russian citizens to participate directly in the war.

#### *Offensive Capabilities*

The Russian armed forces are bolstering their offensive capabilities by expanding the volume, forms, and methods of employing ground- and air-based strike systems. The extensive use of reconnaissance UAVs has significantly shortened the time between target detection and strike initiation, enabling the creation of reconnaissance-strike channels with varied firepower and minimal intelligence cycle times.

The Russian aerospace forces have adapted their tactics and methods of operation. The enemy now conducts airstrikes in grouped, massive, or combined assaults on Ukrainian territory, deploying attack drones, land-, sea-, and air-launched cruise missiles, ballistic and aerial ballistic missiles, guided and FAB-series aerial bombs equipped with UPMK kits. These strikes are executed in multiple waves, utilizing a broad range of precision weaponry. Post-strike reconnaissance assesses the impact, informs future attacks, and identifies vulnerabilities in Ukraine's air defence system.

During these strikes, the use of cruise and ballistic missiles in concentrated attacks has decreased, with a shift toward a coordinated approach involving diverse aerial systems. «Star raids» are employed, in which a localized group of closely positioned targets is attacked from multiple directions nearly simultaneously by air defence systems. The enemy also conducts simulated launches and deploys decoys (booby traps) to mislead defences, aiming to achieve surprise in SAM usage and reduce flight time. Launches are carried out under limited visibility and at low or extremely low altitudes, with some targets receiving multiple SAM hits, among other tactics.

The shortage of precise missile weaponry for striking critical infrastructure, industrial, and military facilities in Ukraine has compelled the RF to begin mass production of aerial bombs of various calibres. The introduction of the UPMK kit has enhanced both the accuracy and range of these bombs. Additionally, the enemy has adapted to transition from targeting a single direction to executing sequential strikes from multiple directions within the same flight. Airstrikes are accompanied by intensive jamming and the use of anti-radar missiles targeting Ukraine's anti-aircraft and radio engineering troops, all while avoiding the line of contact

and staying outside the range of Ukraine's air defence systems.

#### *Defence Capabilities*

Relevant adaptive changes have also impacted the defensive organization of Russian troops in the temporarily occupied territories of southern Ukraine. In the second half of 2023, the Ukrainian Defence Forces encountered an enemy markedly different from that of 2022. Following initial efforts to fortify vulnerable positions at the start of the war, by late 2022 and early 2023, the Russian armed forces had established deeply entrenched defensive lines, reinforced with multi-layered minefields, across the temporarily occupied territories.

The effective use of attack UAVs (FPV drones) by the Ukrainian Defence Forces has compelled the Russian armed forces to seek protective measures against them. Significant attention has been given to shielding armoured combat vehicles from FPV drones and anti-tank missile systems, aiming to enhance the physical security of these vehicles and boost crew confidence in high-risk areas. Protective structures, so-called «mangals», are now being produced on an industrial scale, not only for armoured vehicles but also for trucks, self-propelled artillery systems, pickup trucks, and high-mobility bikes.

The enemy has also significantly enhanced its strike drone capabilities, shifting previous dynamics. Early in the war, Ukraine pioneered innovative UAV applications for reconnaissance, artillery adjustment, precision strikes, and direct engagement, giving the Ukrainian Defence Forces a significant advantage. Although the Russian armed forces were slower to adopt UAV tactics, they now surpass Ukraine in UAV production and loitering munitions, with this gap likely to widen further.

The Russian armed forces have adapted to the Ukrainian Defence Forces' use of precision weapons equipped with advanced global navigation satellite systems for accurate targeting (including HIMARS and precision artillery ammunition). They have managed to reduce the effectiveness of these weapons through the use of electronic warfare (EW) systems and counter-measures.

Electronic warfare (EW), traditionally a strong suit of the Russian armed forces, appeared to play a minor role in the early phase of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, after RF regrouped following its initial setbacks, EW was once again actively employed. The enemy has since intensified efforts to develop, produce, and deploy new mobile EW systems, enhancing existing ones – including the so-called «trench» EW to counterattack UAVs and FPV drones – and introducing new roles within the organizational structure of the forces.

Thus, an analysis of the RF's military adaptations for a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine reveals that enhancements to its command and control structure, organizational framework, mobilization resources, and defence capabilities – along with the restoration of offensive potential through the development, modernization, and production of advanced combat systems and the use of reconnaissance-strike circuits – position the RF to pursue its offensive and aggressive plans in the long perspective.

#### *Economic Component*

RF continues to take steady measures to adapt its economy and defence industry to sustain a prolonged war of attrition. Trends in the GDP of the RF indicate that economic sanctions imposed by the collective West have not achieved the intended impact, with the RF managing to increase its GDP following a decline in 2023 (Fig. 2).

The dynamics of total military spending shows that RF does not intend to end the war against Ukraine in the near future, but rather is adapting to a long war by increasing the amount of this spending (Fig. 3).

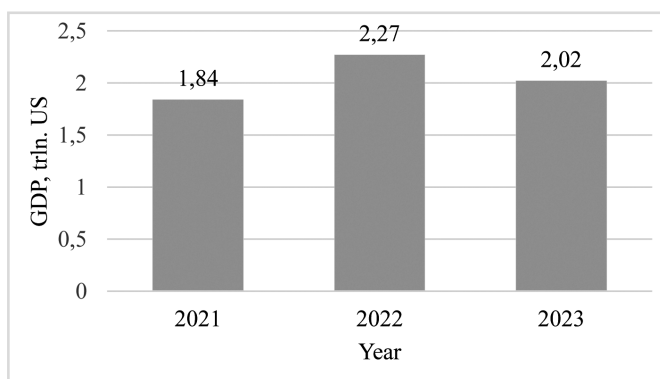


Fig. 2. The dynamics of changes GDP of the RF in 2021–2023 [13]

The analysis indicates a tendency for the Russian government to conceal and inflate the amount of classified military expenditures related to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

A significant factor influencing the economic aspect of the RF's strategic adaptation to the war of attrition is the volume of hydrocarbon production. Despite Western sanctions imposed due to the war in Ukraine, the RF's revenues from fossil fuel production increased by 41% in the first half of 2024 alone [18]. To ensure sustainable financing of military expenditures related to its war against Ukraine, the RF was compelled to increase production volumes, violating certain agreements with OPEC+.

A drop in oil prices by 20 US dollars at the current exchange rate in September 2024 would result in RF losing 1.8 trillion roubles (20 billion US dollars), which is about 1% of its GDP. This would force RF to either reduce funding for the war, which is unlikely, or accept rising inflation and higher interest rates [18] amid already galloping inflation in RF. The inflation target of 4% set by the Central Bank of the RF will not be achieved by the end of the year. At the end of 2024, inflation is expected to remain high (7% on average), with a tendency to slow down in November and December amid the tight monetary policy of the Russian state regulator.

In the summer of 2022, a number of laws and government decrees were adopted, which effectively put Russian defence industries under martial law, increasing the number of shifts and working days per week. This significantly mobilized the defence industry, in particular, by expanding production lines at existing enterprises, as well as returning to work at previously mothballed ones.

In addition to increasing its own military production, RF is purchasing weapons, ammunition, and special equipment from authoritarian states such as North Korea, Iran, and China. RF has also strengthened its position by

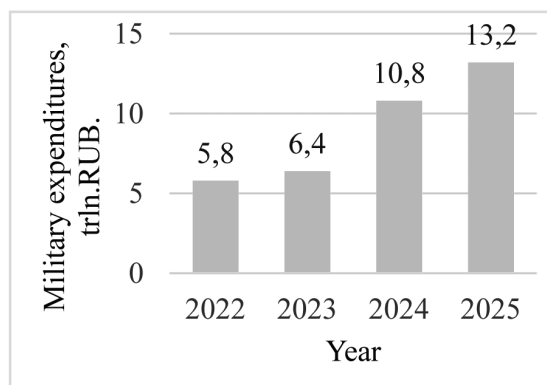
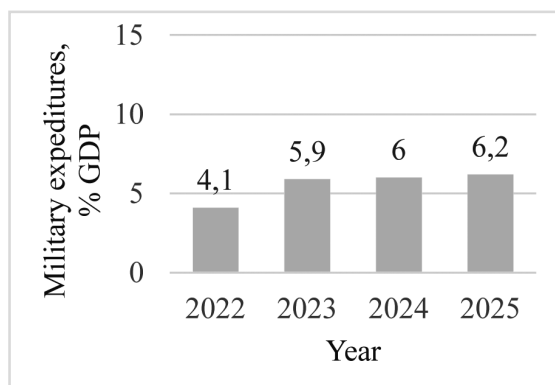


Fig. 3. Dynamics of total expenditures on military needs of the RF and their percentage of GDP in 2022–2025 [14–17]

purchasing equipment and critical electronic components through third countries that it cannot buy in the West due to sanctions. About 70% of machine tools and 90% of microelectronics imported by RF come from China and Hong Kong, which helps it produce missiles, armoured vehicles and ammunition for its war of attrition against Ukraine [19]. Chinese companies supply RF with specially designed military UAVs for testing and use by the Russian armed forces on the battlefield in Ukraine, a relevant agreement on which was signed last year [20].

Russia compensates North Korea and Iran for the arms and ammunition supplied through contracts for the sale of modern aircraft, the transfer of critical missile and nuclear weapons components, and space production technologies, as well as through the provision of food and other resources.

Russia's military-technical cooperation with China, India, Iran, and other countries in Asia, Africa, and South America is being developed and strengthened. This cooperation aims to participate in joint projects for the development of weapons, military, and special equipment in exchange for the material resources needed by Russia to sustain its war of attrition against Ukraine.

The Russian defence industry continues to produce missile weapons despite tough international sanctions. The monthly production rates are as follows: cruise missiles Kh-101 and ballistic missiles «Iskander-M» – 40 to 50; sea-based missiles «Kalibr» – 30 to 40; cruise missiles «Iskander-K» – 10 to 15; anti-ship missiles «Onyx» – up to 10; and aeroballistic missiles Kh-47M2 «Kinzhal» – 2 to 6. The production rate of «Shahed-136» attack drones exceeds 500 per month, with an upward trend.

According to estimates [21], the production of missiles on this scale costs the RF approximately 1.1 billion US dollars per month, while the production of attack drones costs about 100 million US dollars. As of the end of August and the beginning of September 2024, the RF had approximately 1,220 cruise missiles and 245 ballistic missiles in its stockpile [21]. The development of strike UAVs, aerial bombs with UMPK, and samples of robotic ground strike and reconnaissance systems is ongoing, and new facilities are being established for the development, production, and repair of armaments. The weapons, military and special equipment, strike UAVs, interceptor UAVs, FPV drones, and surface combat unmanned aerial vehicles used by the Ukrainian Defence Forces – produced by the national defence industry or provided as military and technical assistance by partner countries – are being replicated.

The production of armoured combat vehicles in the RF relies on existing military stocks from storage facilities and repair centres. Approximately 80% of tanks and other armoured vehicles are not new but have been repaired and modernized. The volume of these stocks

allows the RF to maintain a stable level of production until the end of 2024. However, by 2025, it will begin to face the need for more extensive modernization of its equipment, and by 2026, most of its existing stocks are expected to be exhausted.

As the availability of repaired equipment decreases, industrial capabilities may shift toward the creation of new combat platforms. This transition will likely result in a significant reduction in the number of vehicles supplied to the Russian armed forces in the near term. In 2022, the RF restored approximately 60 tanks per month from its reserves, with plans to increase that number to 90 per month in 2023 [22]. Additionally, RF produces about 20 new tanks per month, primarily the T-90 and T-80 models [22].

If the current trend of restoration and production continues, and the rate of losses for Russian battle tanks remains consistent with that of 2024, the Russian armed forces will be adequately supplied with tanks at least until the end of 2026. Should the losses of battle tanks remain below 150 per month, the recovery resource could last until 2028.

Thus, it can be asserted that the Russian defence industry has developed an extended and continually improving cycle of adaptation that integrates lessons learned from combat operations with Russian industrial capabilities and strategies for utilizing existing and future military resources. Given this dynamic, the Russian armed forces could achieve a significant military advantage, which, if not countered in a timely manner by targeting specific «critical vulnerabilities», may evolve into a strategic advantage in a prolonged war of attrition.

#### *Political Element*

RF's strategic adaptation to the war of attrition is also evident in the political sphere, where it is reconfiguring its international network of partners. This shift involves strengthening cooperation with autocracies such as China, Iran, and North Korea. Within this coalition, RF is actively working to establish a unified anti-Western stance, aiming to position itself as a potential global centre of power.

Despite being significantly supported by China – the world's second-largest economy and a key global power – in light of the sanctions imposed by the «collective West», Iran has been reluctant to formalize a comprehensive friendship agreement with RF since 2022, even under immense pressure. On the other hand, the RF seeks to position itself as a key player in a strong and united Global South, particularly by expanding the BRICS interstate coalition. RF's efforts are directed at transforming BRICS into a geopolitical and economic rival to the G7 bloc. At the beginning of this year, at the initiative of the Russian Federation, Egypt, Ethiopia,

Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Argentina were invited to join BRICS; however, Argentina declined the invitation. Between August and October of this year, several additional countries submitted applications to join BRICS, including Cuba as a «partner country», Azerbaijan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka, which formally applied for membership during the summit in Kazan. The BRICS summit in Kazan demonstrated that none of Putin's «global ideas» garnered support among the participants, as none of the attendees expressed any intention of «fighting the West» or transforming the bloc into an anti-Western platform. The summit concluded with a conditional signing of the declaration.

RF actively supports China's «peace initiative», promoting it as a project that positions China as a peacemaker. However, there are significant doubts about China's neutrality, particularly given the backing of the Chinese plan by the RF, which serves as an alternative to the Ukraine's Peace Formula. This formula is grounded in the norms and principles of the UN Charter. Additionally, China continues to provide a wide range of products, including dual-use and military goods, to the RF.

The new six-point Chinese-Brazilian «peace initiative» calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, de-escalation of tensions, and the commencement of peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow, without requiring the Russian Federation to withdraw its troops from the occupied Ukrainian territories. Previously, China had proposed a 12-point plan, but notably, the provision regarding respect for the territorial integrity of «all countries» was omitted from the latest initiative. In this context, the RF has indicated that it will conduct negotiations solely based on the current situation at the front, meaning that it considers the line of combat contact at this moment and asserts that the territories captured during the conflict should remain with RF.

Brazil and China are aware of this but have refrained from condemning the aggressive stance of the Russian Federation, which violates the UN Charter. China, Brazil, and several other countries in the Global South – such as Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates – have agreed to establish the «Friends of Peace» platform. Within this framework, they plan to promote a peaceful resolution to what China refers to as the «Ukrainian crisis» (as China calls the Russian war against Ukraine). Thus, through the Sino-Brazilian plan, the RF is attempting to de jure «legalize» its occupation of part of Ukrainian territory, potentially setting a precedent for future illegal territorial annexations around the world through military force.

Particular attention should be given to the outcome of the successful pressure exerted by the RF on Germany. This pressure has led Germany, one of Ukraine's key military allies and the primary supplier of assistance from the EU, to change its rhetoric. Germany now intends to postpone the delivery of the planned volume of heavy equipment to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, citing a lack of belief in a successful offensive to liberate the occupied territories. Meanwhile, the RF is demonstrating a steady pace of advancement into Ukrainian territory in 2024, despite significant losses. Additionally, the number of combat engagements in September has increased by nearly 20% compared to August (see Fig. 4).

In October this year, Russia captured 490 square kilometres, marking the largest territorial gain for 2024 and for the RF forces' counteroffensive, ongoing since October 2023 [23].

Of particular concern is the successful deepening of ties and «comprehensive» cooperation with North Korea, which not only produces and supplies weapons and ammunition to the RF, but has also begun to implement

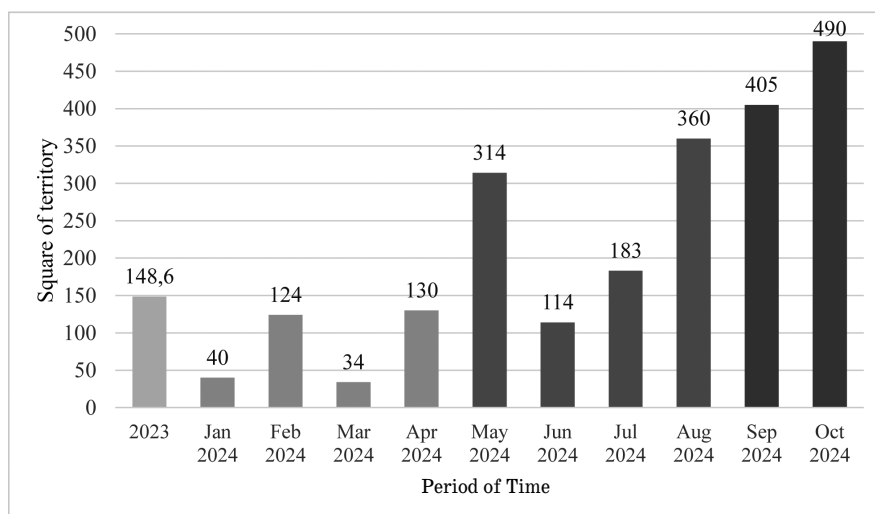


Fig. 4. Ukraine occupied territory by the RF in 2023 and monthly during 2024

concrete steps to transfer a contingent of its troops to the territory of the RF, as well as to the Kursk region. North Korea can organize, at the request of the Russian Federation, the production of weapons and military equipment, ammunition of the required nomenclature on its own territory, as well as provide significant human resources that are vital for the Russian Federation in continuing the war against Ukraine.

In exchange, RF supplies North Korea with modern military technologies to upgrade its weaponry, has agreed to test specific models in real combat conditions in Ukraine, and may even be transferring technology for nuclear weapon production.

The RF's implementation of strategic adaptation measures in the political sphere points to its efforts to restore former geopolitical influence and forge coalitions with countries that share an anti-Western stance. Additionally, Russia aims to align with coalitions within the Global South.

These actions are intended to create favourable conditions for Russia to exert pressure, potentially suspending active hostilities in the Russia-Ukraine war, re-establishing relations with the collective West, and positioning itself as a key player in shaping a new global order.

#### *Informational element*

The informational aspect of the RF's strategic adaptation to a war of attrition has evolved into a targeted information war against Ukraine. Through an effective propaganda apparatus that leverages media and internet platforms, the RF imposes Kremlin narratives on a global audience in multiple languages. Following the Goebbels principle – «the bigger the lie, the more it will be believed» – this mechanism uses bias, manipulation, and fact distortion to shape perceptions worldwide.

The full-scale invasion of the RF in Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022, gave new momentum to Russian media operations, reinforcing their ongoing practice of creating fake news and disinformation – a tactic they have employed since 2014. This disinformation includes fabricated stories purportedly from residents of «liberated» territories, staged reports from occupied areas of Ukraine, as well as short propaganda films and videos.

Representatives of the Russian leadership and its diplomatic corps disseminate false information about Ukraine in their speeches, including those at the UN, and unfortunately, their efforts often achieve their intended goals. A key element of Russian disinformation is the accusation of the Ukrainian authorities of Nazism, portraying Ukraine as a Nazi state, despite the fact that the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has enacted a law condemning the National Socialist regime. Additionally, Russian propaganda propagates the fiction of an

exclusive right to Ukrainian territory based on its history as a former part of the Russian empire.

Below are the significant areas of the informational component of the RF's strategic adaptation to a war of attrition, which, in the opinion of the authors of the article, have seen certain successes.

#### *Activities of the Russian Orthodox Church*

The Russian Orthodox Church, a Kremlin-controlled organization and a tool in RF's hybrid warfare strategy, convened the so-called World Russian People's Council in Moscow on March 27–28, 2024. During this event, it approved an ideological and political document that synthesized several Kremlin narratives, seemingly aimed at further establishing a nationalist and ideological foundation for the war in Ukraine and RF's expansionist ambitions in the foreseeable future. The invasion of Ukraine was described as a jihadist-style «existential and civilizational holy war,» with the assertion that the entire territory of modern Ukraine should be included in the zone of exclusive influence of the RF [24].

Furthermore, the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church actively lobbies at the state level for the endorsement and promotion of the ideology of the «trinity doctrine.» This concept, rooted in the Russian tsarist era, denies the existence of Ukrainians and Belarusians as separate, self-sufficient nations [24].

In its religious activities, the Russian Orthodox Church employs a «double» rhetoric, simultaneously promoting peacekeeping messages alongside military ones. This approach manipulates the perceptions of its parishioners, allowing the Church to maintain its image as a «peaceful» institution. An analysis of the frequency of peacekeeping versus military rhetoric from January 01, 2022, to August 18, 2024, reveals that military language is nearly five times more prevalent than peacekeeping language.

Since the early days of RF's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, priests of the Russian Orthodox Church have actively recruited from among their congregants and Russian society at large, targeting individuals willing to go to war in Ukraine with promises of financial benefits. Their goal of establishing the first private military company under the Church's protection is being realized with some success. Currently, clergy are mobilizing both fellow clergymen and believers on a contractual basis to recruit new volunteers prepared to die in Ukraine for the ideals of nationalism and the «Russian world.» The first private «church army» – essentially a military company – was organized by priests of the Kronstadt St. Nicholas Cathedral in St. Petersburg, with the initial volunteer battalions named the St. Andrew's Cross.

Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church continues to serve as a key tool for militarizing Russian society, legitimizing

and justifying military actions, particularly acts of aggression and violence against Ukraine. Its role in the context of this aggressive war extends beyond spiritual support, becoming an integral part of state policy that ideologically justifies military actions to the unwitting Russian public as a «righteous» endeavour to defend the fatherland. Emphasizing the «sacred» nature of these actions, the Church frames them as necessary to eliminate the «oppression of Orthodox believers» in Ukraine.

*Changes in the nuclear doctrine of the RF in view of its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*

On September 25 of this year, the president of the RF announced new principles for the use of nuclear weapons and the commencement of work on amending the document «Fundamentals of State Policy in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence.» Since the outset of RF's invasion of Ukraine, the president has repeatedly referenced nuclear weapons in his public rhetoric as a means of threatening the «collective West» and as a «red line» in response to the provision of high-tech weapons to Ukraine as part of military and technical assistance. In February 2023, RF suspended its participation in the Strategic Offensive Arms Treaty, and in March 2023, a decision was made to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. At the end of May 2024, the RF conducted an exercise involving the relocation and deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Each time, Putin's statements regarding the use of nuclear weapons have resonated with the international community and influenced the level of support for Ukraine from its partners.

The RF views the amendments to its nuclear doctrine as «a certain signal to unfriendly countries» that they should heed [25]. Simultaneously, the six-point Sino-Brazilian «peace initiative,» announced on the «Friends of Peace» platform, clearly outlines key principles against the irresponsible use of nuclear weapons. These principles include: countering the use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons; avoiding nuclear crises; and countering armed attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities. This was emphasized at a joint press conference in New York on September 28, 2024, by the head of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Special Representative of Brazil. Following this, on September 30, 2024, the RF issued an official statement clarifying that the adjustment of its nuclear doctrine was not a response to recent events in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Additionally, a former deputy foreign minister of India warned that if the RF were to be the first to use nuclear weapons, it would lose the support of the Global South.

Thus, the RF's attempts to modify its nuclear doctrine stem from its current weaknesses and inability to

adequately respond to the potential authorization for Ukraine to use long-range Western weapons against targets deep within Russian territory. The clause in the nuclear doctrine stating that RF may use nuclear weapons in response to the alleged «aggression» of non-nuclear countries supported by nuclear countries effectively serves as a formal legitimization of a nuclear strike on Ukraine in the eyes of the international community.

*Propaganda of Russian Narratives in the Media Space*

Within RF's information space, public opinion has been shaped to support the need for military action in neighbouring countries. New narratives have emerged, portraying RF as a victorious nation in World War II, as a protector of the «Russian world» and Russian-speaking populations. This has fostered a distorted worldview and mindset, with intense suppression of dissent and rampant censorship. These narratives have laid the ideological groundwork for Russians to accept and justify plans to restore elements of the former Soviet Union, particularly by bringing Belarus and Ukraine back into RF's sphere of geopolitical influence. They have also fuelled the perception of a new enemy in the «collective West,» portrayed as a threat to RF. Unfortunately, this ideological framework has been effectively implemented.

Currently, the Kremlin's narratives and deliberately distorted facts about global events, elite relationships, and assessments of certain international and regional issues – particularly the Russian-Ukrainian war and related relations – are systematically presented to Western audiences through a network of online publications, television channels, and other media outlets.

Today, the RF makes extensive and largely uncontrolled use of digital propaganda, leveraging AI technology and its powerful capabilities to generate images, memes, videos, and news. Rather than engaging rationally with audiences, Russia employs these tools to overwhelm people with a flood of false information. For individuals easily influenced by propaganda, this barrage embeds itself at a subconscious level, shaping a distorted perspective on the events in Ukraine. Russian propaganda aims not only to persuade its target audience but also to undermine trust in other countries. In other words, the effectiveness of Russian propaganda is not solely based on fostering belief in specific false narratives, but rather in eroding the target audience's trust in their own democratic systems and leaders. Furthermore, Russian propaganda intertwines numerous parallel narratives in a systematic, coordinated manner to enhance its impact.

The economic sanctions, international political pressure, and substantial losses of personnel, weaponry, and military equipment sustained by the Russian armed forces in the third year of the war against Ukraine have led to notable shifts in the information and media landscape

surrounding the aggression against Ukraine. As a result, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) in RF strictly monitors the presence of any «inaccurate information regarding the special military operation of the Russian armed forces to protect Donbas.» Media control in Russia, including online platforms, is nearly absolute, with coverage of the war and other foreign news on major Russian sites closely mirroring state narratives. This extensive censorship aims to prevent the dissemination of factual information about the current state of the Russia-Ukraine war to ordinary Russian citizens, thereby creating an artificial information vacuum around this issue. The lack of truthful information about the nature and consequences of the conflict has contributed to the indifference of the Russian public toward the war, as well as an increase in the number of individuals willing to join the occupation forces.

The RF persistently makes successful attempts to destabilize the situation in EU member states through coordinated disinformation campaigns, foreign information manipulation, and malicious actions in cyberspace. The result of these activities is the rise of pro-Russian politicians and parties that shift the vector of political support for Ukraine in Europe. Notable examples include the ascent to power of pro-Russian parties with openly anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

Thus, the analysis of the aforementioned elements and the measures taken by the RF provides insight into its ongoing strategic adaptation to a prolonged war of attrition against Ukraine. Consequently, it is essential to identify «critical vulnerabilities» within this strategy, as exploiting these vulnerabilities could undermine the RF's capacity to sustain a long-term war of attrition – not only in Ukraine but also in future armed conflicts.

### Conclusion

Thus, RF's strategic adaptation to the war of attrition is taking place across military, political, economic, and informational elements, as analysed in detail above. It can be concluded that RF has significantly enhanced its capacity to adapt and learn, which suggests that the longer the Russia-Ukraine war endures, the more effectively RF will improve its strategic adaptability.

This will enable it to develop more effective armed forces, progressively assimilate new insights from analysing its own military operations, and adjust its tactics, forms, and methods of troop deployment. Over time, this will have adverse consequences for Ukraine's Defence Forces. Such improvements have been facilitated by synthesizing the experiences of countering Ukraine's Defence Forces in combat and developing specific

methodological recommendations for conducting assault operations in urban areas, forested zones, open terrain, countering modern armoured vehicles, and responding to drones, among other scenarios.

RF has made substantial progress in the economic aspect of its strategic adaptation, gradually transitioning its economy to a wartime footing, mobilizing its defence industry, and securing a range of critical Western components despite U.S. and EU sanctions. However, these sanctions have proven ineffective not only in curbing RF's economy but also in diminishing its capability and willingness to persist in the war.

Recognizing the extent of RF's media influence network in Europe and globally, democratic nations should focus not only on military, technical, and financial assistance to Ukraine and imposing economic sanctions on RF but also on «cleansing» their internal political, economic, scientific, informational, and other systems of RF influence, which has created – and will continue to create – obstacles to peace in Ukraine.

The Russian-Ukrainian war is unique in the sense that the use of modern technologies mitigates some of the traditional advantage that larger armed forces have over smaller ones. However, the importance of conventional military strength and traditional forms of its application cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, identifying «critical vulnerabilities» in all sectors of life in the Russian Federation and its armed forces will help restrict its strategic adaptation to the new wartime conditions. Targeting these «critical points» will considerably limit its capacity to conduct military operations.

Implementing asymmetric measures against these «critical vulnerabilities» will not only disrupt RF's military plans but also provide Ukraine's Defence Forces with valuable time to stabilize their preparations to gain qualitative superiority over the Russian armed forces. This will weaken RF's capacity for prolonged attritional war and lay the groundwork for Ukraine to conduct not only defensive but also offensive operations.

The prospects for further research involve identifying mechanisms to influence the «critical vulnerabilities» within RF's strategic adaptation components using DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic means). The goal is to create conditions compelling Russia to abandon continued armed aggression against Ukraine.

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