Russia’s Military Capabilities and Dilemma over Great Power Status

Anoop Kumar
PhD Scholar in Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies (CRCAS), School of International School, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

Introduction
Historically, Russia is a country with colossal territory and strategic location (known as Eurasia which includes parts of Asia and Europe). In the context of its military capability Russia is known for its massive military capability historically as its neighbors’ policy of expansion and attack by European powers and Mongols. After worth of the Second World War, USSR became one of the world’s superpower in opposition of United States of America. Consequently Cold War began between two superpowers. During Cold War Period from 1945 to 199, Russia’s military capabilities were the major factor to sustain its status as a superpower for long time. After the disintegration of USSR in December 1991, Modern Russia came into picture. After disintegration of USSR Russia had been gripped by its unstable domestic problem, therefore could not take care of its military capabilities. After 1999, Vladimir Putin came into power, which helped Russia to regain its military strength of past. In the world politics theater, Russia’s position is against the unipolarity which directly threatens USA’s hegemony in world politics. Contrary, Russia’s military capability has been weakening to counter USA’s hegemony.

The era of unipolarity began after the disintegration of USSR in 1991. Disintegration of USSR left Russia from socialist, one party and planned economy to multiparty system and open market economy. After disintegration of USSR, Russia became dominant player in former republics of the USSR which had been done only through its military capabilities. Therefore, even though Russia’s military capability has been diminished after the disintegration of USSR, it was the only country which could counter USA’s hegemony in world politics. For instance, Russia’s position in world politics reflects its thinking against unipolarity, as it could be seen in the context of Syria where both the powers have contrary positions. Russia always censures NATO’s action in the Caucasus and Central Asian region because of its sphere of influence consideration of the region. Further, to counter the US led military alliance ‘NATO’, Russia established Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with collaboration of China and other Central Asian states for providing security to the region where outside power could not interfere. In Central Asian region, Russia established its hegemony by forming Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia's military strength as a component of great power status could be seen in 2008 Russia-Georgia war where Russia's defeated Georgia. In the context of military strength, According to SIPRI, Russia spent nearly $72bn on arms in 2011. Russia is planning further increases its military spending, with draft budgets showing a 53% rise in real terms up to 2014. 2008 military reform played vital role to modernize Russia’s military by reducing its military arms and braches and category of military men.

Theoretical Understanding of Great Power
In 1991 the disintegration of USSR was not only a disintegration of republics or treaty but a disintegration of great power. As Francis Fukuyama argued in his ‘the End of History and the
Last Man’ regarding the disintegration that ‘it was not west that won but these were the ideas which won’. The idea of Fukuyama has been criticized in all arena of academic and in world politics as there are not definite definition to define Great Power. Paul Kennedy in this context in his ‘Rise and fall of Great Powers’ argued that economic and military capability are the essential components of great power system. He took up on European System as first Great Power System which has been divided into three stages:

**First stage**: Spain, Portugal and Britain as Great Power System.

**Second Stage**: Britain, France, Austria, Russia, Persia which replaced by France, Britain, Germany, USA, USSR and Japan, After the Second world War USSR and USA.

**Third Stage**: USA’s Hegemonic system in world politics.

In the context of definition of great powers, Prof. Varun Sahini argued that great power status defined by those states which have system shaping capability with intention to shape the system. Therefore, capability to do change in the system is defined a great power, hence it could not be a great power unless it has intention to shape it. Those states which have capability to shape the system but have not intention for it could not be defined as great power, for example, Japan had the economic capability to shape the international system after World War Second but it had lack of intention, equal was with the USA during First and Second World War and with USSR after Bolshevik Revolution. Capability and intention scenario to get great power status have been defined by four elements of regime given by Krasner:

1. **Principle**: it about believe.
2. **Norm**: standard of behavior.
3. **Rules**: rules must be specific so these are specific prescription and proscription and
4. **Decision-making procedure**: the decision-making procedure is depends over all the three mentioned above which means rules depend on norms and norms depend on principles therefore there is a bonded link among them. If principles change then behavior will change and then decision-making procedure will change.

For shaping the system, capabilities and intentions are imperative however problem lies in the categorization of capabilities and intentions of the states. Here, capability means power (both hard and soft) capability without which system could not be shaped. In this context military capability is one of the most important elements of power. Another important aspect of power is power capability is for what. Power capability for what depends on the nature of nation-building process a state went through on the one hand and how to play in world politics to secure national interest on the other. For example, the USA uses its power to contain USSR to set up world capitalist liberal market economy and Britain used its power to set-up worldwide maritime trade relations for raw materials.

Intention to shape the international system minimally means a wish to use the power for specific purpose. Therefore, power and purpose are related with each-other in the context of capability and intention to shape the system. It could have seen after world Second World War when institutions were set up under the leadership of USA to deal with the world affairs. Intentions are also become important because international politics is about ‘relative gains rather than absolute gains’. There are six attributes which define the ‘great power’ in the milieu of capability and intention to shape the system:
Military capability considers as one of the indispensable attribute for the great power status. Jack S. Lebby in his well known ‘War in Modern Great Power System: 1495-1975’ focuses on military power as main attribute to great power status. He defined military capability as ‘capability of great power, strength of great power, test for war and necessary to defend itself from other great powers.’ Therefore, in this context defense is most important for any great power for which military capability required. Lebby defined great power in five distinguish criteria in which he emphasizes on security issues.

1. Military power: for any great power, it must to have a high level of military capability over the others. He divides military capabilities into: (A). relative self sufficiency with military security it means not defeated by the others. (B). invulnerable to non-great powers threat. (C). great powers do not need to fear from the other states. Here (A) and (B) elements can be characterized as the defensive element but also use for offensive purposes. (D). alliances are also important for great powers but in the term of military capabilities, collective security mechanism is suggestive. In this context commitment of great powers for security alliances are important and if great power does not fulfill this commitment, there would be than dilemma arises over the great power status. (E). using the force and threat of force to shape the external environment is also important to get the great power status.

2. Regarding of the interest of behavior: there is fundamental difference between use of force by great power and other ordinary states. In this context, great powers shape power in continental and global terms whereas other ordinary states concern only in local and regional term. So territorial defense is important however for great powers territorial defense extends to continents. In the milieu of national interest and symbolic interest, great powers always aware to define their national and symbolic interest.

3. Behavior of great powers always stands in their own interest and behaves more aggressive than others. They use ‘use of force of threat of force’.

4. The perception of other states about great power must be perceived as great power and treated as great power at every place whether it’s economic, military and cultural.

5. In the context of formal criteria, great powers must follow-up top level of security criteria. In the other words, it must has good leadership, alliances and in context UNO Veto power

Military Capabilities are of three types whom accessibility is fundamental for any state to get the great power status:

**First: military industry**- it means where the weapon come from? So if a country does not have its own military industry, it could not be acquiring the status of great power.
Second: nuclear deterrence- it define relation with other great powers. A country mainly has four levels for nuclear deterrence to define great power status: non-weaponised, minimal capability, triad (Air, Land and Sea) and all horizon nuclear capability.

Third: sea power- or naval capability. Thus it is clear that without military capability, there would not be any great power.

Russia’s Past and Present
Russia’s past made it clear that it had valorous military capabilities. Great power status therefore for Russia could not be seen only in the present context. In historical perspective, Russia is a country with mammoth military capabilities. During and before Tsarist Russia, it had a large land army. One among the various factors for large land army was the ‘attack from the external power, from Europe it was Spain and Portugal and from Asia it was Mongols’. Unique location of Russia also plays an important role for its giant military capabilities historically. During the tsar regime, Russia desired to control over its neighboring countries such as in Central Asian and in Caucasus. Influence over the Central Asian and Caucasus countries because of its military capabilities made Russia ‘great power’ at the world stage. It could be seen during the First World War, when Russia contributed with its massive land army in the War. This shows that having a massive military strength is not new for Russia.

After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Russia turned into a socialist country under the charismatic leadership of Lenin. However till 1921, conditions were not stable in the country and therefore the period from 1917 to 1921 was known as ‘war communism or civil war’. After the end of civil war or war communism, Lenin focused on economy and introduced ‘New Economic Policy’. The reason for introducing new economic policy lay in Lenin’s understanding that war is never recipient as it destroys economy and creates chaos among the population, therefore building military strength was never be part of Lenin’s Russia whereas economic reforms were at the forefront for the welfare of the people.

After Lenin’s death, Stalin came in power. Stalin’s approach for military capabilities was ninety degree tangible than it was for Lenin. Stalin removed the ‘New Economic Policy’ and introduced five years plan and collectivization in the economy. Apart from Stalin’s focused thinking for better military capabilities, the Second World War proved to add fuel to a fire to reconstruct Russia military capabilities. Consequently, after the War Russia became a superpower along with USA in the military capabilities terms. It became a sole to counter USA’s military hegemony during the Cold war period. The pulsating examples of military confrontation between the two superpowers are ‘Cuba Missile Crisis’ in 1962, Vietnam War from 1955 to 1975 and 1979 Russia’s invasion of Afghanistan.

After the disintegration of USSR in December 1991, Russia considered successor of USSR and became permanent member of United Nations Security Council. 1990s was not a stable decade for Russia as it was surrounded by many economic problems such as inflation and lack of advanced technology vis-à-vis its western counterpart which had been proved in its Chernobyl disaster. Therefore period from 1992 to 2000 was known as ‘Russia’s engagement with domestic problems’. Because of these problems, newly elected president Boris Yeltsin significantly reduced budget of the military capabilities and introduced new economic policy which came to known as ‘Shock Therapy’.
2000 presidential election was path-breaking as military power centric Vladimir Putin occupied the political power. Immediately after coming in power, he firstly passed ‘Decree’ for military and economic reform. Putin believed in massive military capabilities to control its neighbors especially Central Asia and Caucasus region. Therefore expect Turkmenistan, Russia created its military base in all the Central Asian countries. In his 2007 Munich speech, Putin criticized USA’s unilateral decision for its military operations on the one hand. On the other, one year later it defeated Georgia in 2008 Russia-Georgian war, which showed Russia resurgence as a great power in military capabilities terms. In 2008 Russia took up military reform to modernize Russia military which was a also a another step to get great power status as the reforms stated ‘by these reforms, Russia wants to modernize its military capability by increasing expansion on military capability and reducing the size of military’.

In 2012 presidential election, Vladimir Putin again won the election, although there was no provision in the constitution to fight election for third time presidency. In 2008, as president Putin passed a decree for constitutional reform and reformed the article which was binding time and tenure of the president. Reformed constitution increased the tenure of president to six years from four and a candidate can legally contest for the third time instead of two for the presidency. Along with this authoritarian nature of rule, president Putin has also won the trust among the Russian people. Under the leadership of Putin, Russia again gained its great power status which gave a legitimate right to Putin as a charismatic leader, however consequently TINA factor which shaken Russia people which means after Putin Who?.

**Determinants of Russia’s Military Capabilities**

Economy, geography, military industry and political leadership are among the chief determinants to shape any country’s military capabilities. In case Russia also, above mentioned four determinants are significantly important to shape its military capabilities for strengthening-up its great power status. For this, Russia is moving from conventional to nuclear military capabilities, however lack of advance technology is a biggest hurdle in this process.

**Economic Factor**

From 1990 to 1999, Russia military budget had been reducing every year. However from 2000 it grown dramatically. During the period of 2000 to 2008 Russia’s military budget grown fivefold. After the war in Georgia the defense ministry announced the expansion in defense budget by 23%. An armament program also exists, which is being financed not only by defense budget but also by other sources such as receipts from arm exports of state military-industrial defense enterprises. For the period of 2007-2015, approximately $189 billion have been earmarked for that program. However, the leading problems for development of Russia’s military capabilities are Inflation and corruption.

**Demographic Factor**

People make the nation. Without its population a country is like a cemetery. In the context of Russia, its population is declining. It is drafted that more than 1.1 million young men decreased by 2007. As Russia’s population is declining, it has a negative effect on the military capabilities as standing army is reducing. Recently president Putin rightly stated ‘the demographic declining is the biggest national security threat to Russia’. Therefore, balance in demography is important to strengthen military capabilities.
Military Industry  
Industry is a backbone of modern economy. Military industry contributes a great share in Russia GDP and is a major source for its foreign exchange from countries such as India. However, collapse of USSR throws Russian military industry into a deep crisis. Nevertheless, Russian military industry still comprises about 1,700 enterprises and 1.5 million employs and therefore one of the largest in the world. Problems which have been facing by the Russian military industry are lack of modern technology and appalling material and financial situation of many enterprises.

Political and Military Leadership:  
Leadership whether political or military is the most important factor to determine a country’s great power status. Russia became super power during after the Second World War because of earlier leadership of Stalin. After the collapse of USSR, it regained its status under the leadership of president Putin. Therefore, political and military leadership is necessary for coherent and sensible demand profile for the armed forces. In addition it needs financial and technological innovation.

Russia’s Military Capabilities and Ambition for Great Power Status  
Russia’s military capabilities make Russia a great power in international system. Russia’s military capabilities have been categorized into three which nonetheless gives immense power to Russia for being a great power in international system. The forces have been divided into conventional, nuclear and military capabilities.

Conventional forces  
1990s was a decade of immense hard pressure on Russian economy as it was getting down because of failure of ‘shock therapy’ as an economic policy. Consequently, its impact on conventional armed forces was negative and it got weakened. 2000 is a considerable decade in the history of Russian Conventional forces as Russian parliament Duma introduced 2008 military reform. The reason behind the reform as given by defense minister of that time Anatov Serdvukov that ‘in all military capability modern weapons to be only about 10%’ despite it was 15% in 2003’. After the reform he argued that the share of modern weapon in total military weapon will reach to 15% till 2015 and 30% by 2020. Such reforms could only be reaching to their goals by massive increase in defense spending and trough technological innovations in armed forces. This can be demonstrated by focusing on three armed services:

1. The ground forces.
2. The air forces.
3. The navy forces.

The ground forces:  
Historically, Russia is posing one of the biggest arsenals in the world. For instance, today Russia owns 23,860 arsenals which are more than NATO countries put together. However, vast majority of Russia’s ground forces are those of 1960s and 1970s which is technologically backward. For example 80% of tanks in Russian military like T-55, T-64, and T-72 are from 1960s and 1970s models. Therefore, the problem which Russia is facing today is to modernize its ground forces. Even though, Russia took-up 2008 military reform to modernize the military, however the
process of modernization is very slow for example, until 2009, only two regiments had been furnished with the S-400 weapons. Therefore, lack of modern technology in Russian military is one of the prevalent obstacles for Russia to regain its great power status.

The air forces:
Majority of combat aircraft are outdated or badly serviced. MIG-29 and two of this kind aircraft got crashed in 2008. In 2009 only 6% out of 1743 combat aircraft in the air force had been subsequently re-equipped and were new. Although the 2008 military reforms deal with the air force as well, however the process is very slow. For example, the armament program of 2007-2015 provides only 116 new combat aircraft to the Russian air force. Among the 550 SU-24 air force combat planes only 7 have been modernized. Apart from SU-24 others air combat planes such as SU-25, SU27, MIG-29, MIG-35 are lacking modern technology.

The navy force:
Navy forces faced most volatile impact of 1990s economic slowdown. Historically also Russia never concentrated on navy forces, therefore it was weakest force among all three. Problem of modernization was not untouched from the navy forces. In modern military capabilities, navy forces play an important role to build-up strong military capabilities. Having a frail navy force signifies weak and poor military capabilities. Nevertheless, in the context of stock and modernization projects of navy’s conventional forces of May 2009, Russia took initiative to modernize its navy force although it also faces challenges such as modernization projects for tactical submarines are under construction.

Nuclear capabilities
Nuclear capabilities consider attribute for great power status and is a recognized instrument for deterrence. In the context of nuclear capabilities, Russia is the second country in the world which successfully conducted its nuclear test in 1950s as USA was the former most. Russia’s nuclear capabilities were one of the foremost factors that Russia became a permanent member of United Nations Security Council. Today with its 14,000 nuclear weapons Russia poses largest atomic arsenals in the world. It is estimated that by 2009, Russia poses 2050 tactical and 2787 strategic nuclear warheads and all were operational.

Today, Russia’s nuclear capabilities are one of the foremost pillars of its national security. Russia’s national security is more dependent nuclear capabilities instead of conventional forces. Therefore, in 2003 president Putin announced the nuclear forces of Russia ‘forms the most important basis for Russia’s national security’. In the context of first nuclear strike after the disintegration of USSR, the military doctrine of 1993, contained the renunciation of first strike but did not contained large scale war such as war with NATO. In the similar terms, national security concept of 2000 stated that Russia nuclear strike does not only posses and response to the nuclear attack but also against conventional attack to protect its territorial integrity and to counter any threat to national security.

Russia’s nuclear capabilities’ sole objective is deterrent and defense of the country (especially Moscow) against any threat from outside world. Considering nuclear capabilities significance in Russia’s national security and for its defense, Moscow took some modernization measures to modernize nuclear capabilities with advance technology by improving the quality of its offensive strategic nuclear weapons. In this way, first, Moscow wants to improve its nuclear capabilities to
overcome USA’s strategic missile defense service and second, Moscow is also improving its early-warning defense system. In this context Russia has 2787 warheads whereas USA has only 2202. However, major portion of its delivery vehicle was built in Soviet Era. In the context of triad, compare to sea and ground forces, air force is traditionally weakest point in Russian military capability. Nevertheless, Russia’s strategic nuclear arsenal and modernization program reduced new production of warheads by 2009. By 2009 it had, 385 delivery vehicles and 1357 warheads as a part of ICBMs, 160 delivery vehicles and 576 warheads as a part of SLBMs and 77 delivery vehicle and 856 warheads as a part of bombers.

Conclusion
Russia’s military capabilities are one of the most important components for Russia’s great power status. Russia’s military capabilities which make Russia a great power are analyzed at three levels namely, domestic, regional and global. At the domestic level, Russian military might surmount Chechnya separatist movement in 2005. At the regional level, it has created its sphere of influence among its former ally in Caucasus and Central Asian countries. In 2008 Russia defeated Georgia in 2008 Russo-Georgia war. In 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, an island under the Ukrainian territory. At the global level, Russia always supports its traditional allies. In Syria, Russia is supporting Asad regime by taking side against USA. Many obstacle have been facing by the Russian military, lack of modern technology is one of them. Nevertheless, Russia’s military might is not less than a great power and spend 5.4% of its GDP on military. Russia also took some initiative to reform its military and therefore it took 2008 military reform which emphasize on combat ready forces than mass mobilization, along with Russia also changed the organizational structure and came up with forces employment concepts, improvements in the trainings, efforts to create professional armed forces, reforms in leadership.
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