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# Political-Legal Assessment of Post-Soviet Russia's First Military Doctrine (1993)

## Abstract

This article analyzes the first military doctrine of the Russian Federation (1993) through a rigorous political-legal framework, identifying it as the foundational normative document shaping three decades of Russian strategic behavior. Rather than viewing the document as a military guideline, the research conceptualizes it as a constitutive act of state-building that emerged from the severe constitutional crisis. The paper demonstrates that the doctrine served as a central legal instrument for consolidating power within the executive branch. This security document effectively removed the conventional distinction between external defense and internal security, thereby authorizing the use of military force against domestic political adversaries. A strategic shift is apparent in nuclear strategy; the abandonment of the “No First Use” commitment has transformed the nuclear arsenal into a formidable instrument of global and regional coercion. The article also argues that the doctrine, validated by the 1995 Constitutional Court ruling, consolidated a strategic culture rooted in the primacy of force and in claims to exclusive spheres of influence. Central to this study is an examination of the doctrine’s international legal dimensions. The 1993 doctrine framework institutionalized a systematic subversion of the UN Charter by appropriating peacekeeping terminology to mask unilateral interventions in the “Near Abroad.” Through empirical analysis of conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan, the article demonstrates how legislative innovations such as “compatriot protection” and “passportization” served as instruments of jurisdictional displacement. Finally, the research traces the normative continuity of these principles across subsequent security documents (2000-2021), concluding that the 1993 doctrine established strategic

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and legal precedents for Russia's later military campaigns, specifically the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thus ultimately fueling a self-reinforcing cycle of confrontation with the rules-based international order.

**KEYWORDS:** Russian military doctrine, constitutional crisis of 1993, Near Abroad, international law, internal security, peacekeeping, strategic continuity

## 1 | Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was characterized by profound political turbulence, institutional fragility, and a serious identity crisis. In 1993, during this transitional period, the political and military leadership sought to redefine national interests and adopted the first military doctrine.<sup>[1]</sup> However, this document should not be analyzed solely as a security strategy. It was enacted on November 2, 1993, less than one month after the violent resolution of the constitutional crisis in Moscow. The conflict between the legislative branch, represented by Ruslan Khasbulatov, and the executive branch, led by Boris Yeltsin, culminated in the shelling of the parliament building and the forcible consolidation of presidential power. Boris Yeltsin acknowledged that the decision to dissolve parliament was illegal, as the binding constitution did not permit such action, but he immediately counterposed this official legitimacy with a higher value, namely the security of Russia and its people.<sup>[2]</sup> As a result, the drafting of the doctrine became a direct normative reflection of these events. Although adopted post factum, the document sought to incorporate the violent resolution of the political crisis into a legal framework. This established a precedent for the domestic use of the armed forces for political purposes. The connection is made even stronger by the fact that internal threats listed in the doctrine, such as attempts at the violent overthrow of the constitutional order and “disruption of the functioning

<sup>1</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 5th ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Murray, *A Democracy of Despots* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 177.

of state authority,”<sup>[3]</sup> are substantially the same as the accusations Yeltsin made against his political opponents during the crisis.

The 1993 military doctrine of the Russian Federation has undergone extensive academic analysis. The work of well-known researchers such as Alexei G. Arbatov, Stephen J. Blank, Mary C. FitzGerald, Michal Pietkiewicz, and Andrei Kokoshin is particularly noteworthy, as they have primarily analyzed the doctrine in terms of security architecture and strategic stability. For instance, Alexei Arbatov identifies the doctrine as a foundational document that has defined Russia’s subsequent security policy and legitimized the principle of the “first use” of nuclear weapons for strategic purposes.<sup>[4]</sup> This perspective is echoed by Stephen J. Blank, who examines the document from the standpoint of threat perception and security architecture. He explains how Russia sought to counterbalance Western superiority through nuclear deterrence.<sup>[5]</sup> Although Academician Andrei Kokoshin does not explicitly focus on the doctrine, he investigates the political-military and military-strategic dimensions of Russia’s national security. He argues that politics and military strategy cannot function in isolation; therefore, he advocates their close integration, whereby military factors actively shape political decisions.<sup>[6]</sup> Meanwhile, Mary C. FitzGerald, writing contemporaneously, identifies a more pronounced discontinuity with the prior doctrine. She notes that the doctrine did not merely depart from the late Soviet defensive strategy; it formally abandoned it. Instead, the document mandated readiness for any type of warfare, elevating offensive operations to the same level as defense in order to secure the strategic

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<sup>3</sup> Russian Federation, “Osnovnye polozheniya, voennoi doktriny Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [Basic Provisions of the military doctrine of the Russian Federation], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 18, 1993, 4, [https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/2019/12/21/22124076\\_18.11.1993.pdf](https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/2019/12/21/22124076_18.11.1993.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Alexei G. Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya* (Garmisch-Partenkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2000), 16, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA478927.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *Threats to Russian Security: The View from Moscow* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000), 11, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1133&context=monographs>.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Politiko-voennye i voenno-strategicheskie problemy national’noi bezopasnosti Rossii i mezhdunarodnoi bezopasnosti* [Political-military and military-strategic problems of Russia’s national security and international security] (Moscow: Izd. Dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki, 2013), 11–12.

initiative.<sup>[7]</sup> Michal Pietkiewicz expands this perspective by placing the 1993 document within the broader context of Russian security evolution. Most importantly, he draws attention to the doctrine's prioritization of internal threats. By prioritizing the suppression of attempts to overthrow the constitutional order, the doctrine effectively linked military strategy to the preservation of the domestic regime.<sup>[8]</sup>

Existing scholarship has established a robust framework for understanding the military-political and strategic aspects of the 1993 doctrine; this article seeks to complement these foundational studies by applying a distinct legal analysis. Rather than revising the strategic conclusions of earlier authors, this study conceptualizes the document as a controversial legal artifact. One of the issues examined is the constitutional vacuum in which Presidential Edict No. 1833 was issued, a legal circumstance central to understanding the regime's political consolidation.

The article pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to demonstrate that the 1993 military doctrine functioned fundamentally as a constitutional instrument, rather than merely a military document. Issued less than a month after President Yeltsin's violent dissolution of parliament, the doctrine served to legitimize the October crisis resolution and consolidate presidential dominance over Russia's coercive apparatus and legislative branch, thereby transforming a constitutional violation into a legal precedent. Second, this study aims to reveal how the doctrine established the conceptual and legal architecture underpinning three decades of Russian interventionism. By formulating the "Near Abroad" as a zone of privileged interests, redefining peacekeeping as a unilateral prerogative, and elevating "compatriot protection" to a strategic priority, the 1993 document established normative frameworks that enabled operations systematically violating international law – from Moldova and Georgia in the 1990s to Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Third, the article seeks to establish that the 1993 doctrine's significance extends far beyond its immediate historical moment. The principles it codified – the abandonment of "No First Use," the conflation of internal and external threats, and the assertion of sphere-of-influence claims – were not discarded but

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<sup>7</sup> Mary C. FitzGerald, "Russia's New Military Doctrine," *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 37, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss2/4>.

<sup>8</sup> Michal Pietkiewicz, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 47, no. 3 (2018): 509, <https://doi.org/10.15804/pps2018314>.

were refined and expanded in subsequent documents (2000, 2010, 2014, 2021) and ultimately materialized in Russia's interventions in Georgia and Ukraine. Understanding the 1993 doctrine is therefore essential not only for comprehending Russia's immediate post-Soviet transformation but also for analyzing its contemporary geopolitical and strategic culture.

To achieve this, the research employs a multifaceted methodology, combining four analytical approaches:

1. dogmatic-legal analysis, which examines the juridical nature of the doctrine's normative provisions and their constitutional implications;
2. historical contextualization, which situates the document within the 1993 constitutional crisis and the broader post-Soviet transformation;
3. comparative-doctrinal examination, which traces the evolution of the 1993 principles through subsequent Russian security documents, analyzing both continuity and change in strategic concepts;
4. international legal assessment, which evaluates the doctrine's compliance with the UN Charter, peacekeeping norms, and humanitarian law, thereby identifying systematic patterns of circumvention.

Additionally, content analysis of the existing academic literature frames the political and strategic context within which the doctrine emerged and evolved.

## 2 | The Genesis of the Doctrine: Political Turmoil

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Russia's political and military leadership faced a fundamental challenge: to define the nature of the new Russian state and to conceptualize its identity in the absence of its imperial legacy. This process was characterized by an intense internal struggle between two opposing factions within the government: the liberal wing, led by Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, and the conservative military establishment, represented by the Ministry of Defense.<sup>[9]</sup> However,

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<sup>9</sup> Lasha Chantladze, "Internal Political Conflict in Russia and the War in Abkhazia (1992-1993)," *History, Archaeology, Ethnology*, no. XI (2024): 140, <http://www.sciencejournals.ge/index.php/HAE/article/view/482/426>

this ideological and bureaucratic confrontation did not unfold in a vacuum; it was exacerbated by the broader context of a severe economic crisis that accompanied the process of state formation. The government inherited an economy that was effectively bankrupt, lacked foreign currency reserves, faced a growing budget deficit, and carried \$80 billion in sovereign debt.<sup>[10]</sup> In January 1992, the government initiated major economic reforms commonly referred to as “shock therapy.” By the end of the year, hyperinflation had reached 2500 percent. Consequently, the middle class was effectively ruined, and the process of privatization became known as “prikhvatizatsiya” (literally “grabbing”), thereby facilitating the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group.<sup>[11]</sup> Economic policy became a central point of confrontation between Boris Yeltsin and the legislative branch. Within the Congress of People’s Deputies, the “Industrial Union” faction, alongside conservative forces, mounted sustained opposition to Gaidar’s reforms. They argued that the government’s austere financial policies posed a direct threat to large state enterprises and their workforce; consequently, this parliamentary pressure ultimately led to the condemnation of the economic program and the forced resignation of its architect, Yegor Gaidar, in December 1992.<sup>[12]</sup> However, the struggle extended beyond divergent economic perspectives. It was fundamentally institutional in nature. The existing constitutional framework lacked a clear hierarchy, thus creating systemic ambiguity regarding whether supreme authority resided in the executive or the legislative branch.<sup>[13]</sup> This constitutional vacuum created fertile ground for institutional confrontation. As former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev observed, the parliament had devolved into a “reactionary body,” intent on obstructing presidential efforts to augment its legislative power. As a remnant of the Soviet era, it obstructed constitutional reforms and supported Vice President Rutskoi in the ensuing power struggle. The confrontation culminated in the events of September and October 1993. On September 21, Boris Yeltsin issued a decree terminating the powers of the Supreme Soviet and assuming direct presidential rule until a new parliament could be elected. In response, the Supreme Soviet, under Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov, voted to remove President Yeltsin from office and appointed Vice President Alexander Rutskoi as acting

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, *The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 358.

<sup>11</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 136.

<sup>12</sup> Suny, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, 3: 359–60.

<sup>13</sup> Trenin, *Russia*, 139.

head of state. Ruskoi promptly sought to assert authority over the coercive apparatus, ordering the armed forces and police to report to him and issuing arrest warrants for Yeltsin. The legislators barricaded themselves inside the White House.<sup>[14]</sup> Russia thus entered a state of dual sovereignty, characterized by two competing heads of state and parallel governments, each asserting supreme authority. Ultimately, Yeltsin employed military force to suppress the resistance, ordering the shelling of the parliamentary building. Following these events, he initiated constitutional reform that significantly diminished parliamentary authority, relocating essential powers to the presidency.<sup>[15]</sup>

After the dissolution of the parliament, Yeltsin unilaterally promulgated a new constitution. This document established a super-presidential system, granting the head of state the unrestricted authority to issue decrees with the force of law. Moreover, the constitution introduced a significant structural change whereby the “force ministries” (the military, police, and the renamed KGB) reported directly to the president rather than to the prime minister.<sup>[16]</sup>

## 3 | Legal-Dogmatic Analysis of Key Provisions:

### 3.1. The Internal Use of Armed Forces

During the 1993 political crisis, the decisive factor for Yeltsin’s retention of authority was not institutional frameworks but the support of the armed forces. The events of October exposed the structural feature of post-Soviet Russia: political will and coercive power superseded the formal constitution. This development was subsequently enshrined in law in the following sequence: the use of force in October preceded the establishment of the justificatory norm on November 2, when the president issued Edict No. 1833 On the Fundamental Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian

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<sup>14</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *The Firebird: The Elusive Fate of Russian Democracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 231.

<sup>15</sup> Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest For Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation* (New York; Basic Books, 2017), 314.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150-151.

Federation. This new doctrine, which bypassed the legislative body and was formalized by presidential edict, became the normative foundation of a political system grounded in executive hegemony and the institutionalization of coercive measures. Approved by the Security Council on November 2, the document was formalized on the same day by presidential decree.<sup>[17]</sup>

The doctrine established a formal legal basis for the deployment of the Russian Federation's regular armed forces within its own territory. The document specified internal circumstances that justified the use of force, referring to unlawful activities by nationalist, separatist, and other organizations intended to destabilize the situation of the Russian Federation and violate its territorial integrity. It also authorized military intervention in response to "an attempt to violently overthrow the constitutional order or disrupt the functioning of state power and administration."<sup>[18]</sup> Political-legal analysis of these formulations reveals that they constitute a paradigm of legal uncertainty. Terms like "destabilization" and "attempt to violently overthrow" do not constitute precisely defined legal categories; rather, they function as objects of political assessment. More significantly, this provision removed the normative boundary between foreign defense and internal security. The doctrine explicitly mandates the Russian Armed Forces to support internal affairs authorities and troops in the containment and suppression of domestic instability. This provision assigns broad domestic policing functions to the military, a role considerably more expansive than previously acknowledged. Initially, Western experts regarded this provision as a justification for the military suppression of parliament in October. Concurrently, it served as a "subtly concealed warning" to other political factions contemplating challenges to Yeltsin's authority.<sup>[19]</sup>

### 3.2. The Nuclear Shift: Abandoning "No First Use."

The evolution of the military's internal functions exposed a structural vulnerability: an army occupied with domestic policing and constrained by economic limitations could no longer rely exclusively on conventional

<sup>17</sup> Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Russian Federation, "Osnovnye polozheniya voennoi doktriny", 4.

<sup>19</sup> Halcomb, James F., and Michael M. Boll. *Russia's New Doctrine: Two Views*. (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1994) , 11, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1260&context=monographs>

capabilities to deter external aggression. In response to this conventional deficiency, the Russian leadership pursued a strategic counterweight to preserve its global stature. As a result, the doctrine reallocated the primary deterrent function from conventional forces to the state's strategic nuclear arsenal, thereby marking a significant pivot in Russia's nuclear strategy.<sup>[20]</sup>

The ideology behind the 1993 doctrine placed significant emphasis on the consolidation of a strong Russian state, aiming to promote the notion of "multipolarity" as a long-term strategic vision to counter the existing dominance of the United States as a global hegemon. Within this geopolitical context, one of the most consequential legal revisions of the document involved the status of nuclear capabilities.<sup>[21]</sup> In this geopolitical context, the doctrine redefined the unconditional commitment of the Soviet era. While the doctrine formally codified a pledge of non-use against non-nuclear states, it simultaneously introduced explicit conditions to that commitment. The doctrine explicitly states that the Russian Federation will not employ nuclear weapons against any state a party to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of July 1, 1968 that does not possess nuclear capabilities. An exception applies in cases of an armed assault by such a state that is allied with a nuclear-armed state against Russia, its territory, its armed forces, or its allies.<sup>[22]</sup>

This approach established nuclear deterrence as a deliberate strategic equalizer vis-à-vis the conventional superiority of potential adversaries. Russia thereby sought to redefine any state cooperating with a nuclear-armed adversary as a potential target of nuclear response. This legal precedent permits a conventional threat to serve as a legal justification for a nuclear response. The 1993 military strategy thus positioned nuclear weapons as an instrument of regional and global coercion. This shift was subsequently preserved and further formalized in later Russian doctrines.<sup>[23]</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Robin Higham and Frederick W. Kagan, eds., *The Military History of the Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 308-9.

<sup>22</sup> Russian Federation, "Osnovnye polozheniya voennoi doktriny," 1.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *Threats to Russian Security: The View from Moscow* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000), 11, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1133&context=monographs>

### 3.3. The “Near Abroad” and Legalization of Intervention

While the emphasis on nuclear capabilities addressed questions of global strategic stability, it offered limited utility for asserting influence over the immediate regional periphery. In practice, the 1993 military doctrine functioned as a foundational legal framework authorizing the use of force across the post-Soviet region referred to as the “Near Abroad.” The term “peacekeeping operations” was coined with deliberate ambiguity, thereby facilitating circumvention of established norms of international law. The document defined one of the primary peacetime responsibilities of the armed forces as the conduct of peacekeeping operations authorized by the UN Security Council or undertaken in accordance with the international obligations of the Russian Federation.<sup>[24]</sup>

Initially, the Russian political elite sought to secure international legitimacy for its predominant role in the post-Soviet region.<sup>[25]</sup> In a series of speeches to the leaders of the Civic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in February and March 1993, President Boris Yeltsin strongly emphasized Russia’s “unique duty” to manage disputes within the former USSR’s borders. Yeltsin clearly stated his demands, declaring that the time had come for international organizations, including the United Nations, to recognize Russia as the exclusive guarantor of peace and security in the region. Following the backlash provoked by this declaration, the Russian Federation adjusted its strategy.<sup>[26]</sup> Rather than awaiting authorization from the international community, Moscow unilaterally constructed a framework of “international obligations” within the CIS. The administration argued that its operations aligned with the UN Charter, asserting that they were undertaken *de jure* inside the CIS framework. Thus, Russia maintained that it was not seeking external legitimacy but rather material support.<sup>[27]</sup> This approach reflected the position of presidential advisor Sergei Stankevich, who contended that Russia ought to formulate its own “Monroe Doctrine” and designate the post-Soviet space as an

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<sup>24</sup> Russian Federation, “Osnovnye polozheniya voennoi doktriny,” 4.

<sup>25</sup> See also: Anastasiia Vorobiova, “Weaponizing Memory: The Legal Implications... of Russia’s Monument Policy on Occupied Territories of Ukraine,” *Prawo i Więż*, no. 5 (58) (2025): 440 et seq.

<sup>26</sup> Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 51-52

<sup>27</sup> Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 92.

exclusive sphere of influence.<sup>[28]</sup> Within this policy framework, peacekeeping assumed the role of a pragmatic legal intermediary – a compromise between unilateral coercion and legitimate non-intervention.<sup>[29]</sup>

The 1993 military doctrine legitimized intervention not only through formal agreements but also under the guise of “protecting civilians,” explicitly referring to individuals residing outside Russia’s boundaries. “The perception of citizen safety” was designated as a vital interest of the state.<sup>[30]</sup> Specifically, the document stipulated that the violation of the rights of Russian citizens, as well as of individuals in former Soviet republics who ethnically and culturally identified with Russia, constituted a serious source of conflict.<sup>[31]</sup> This provision effectively established a *de facto casus belli*, insofar as Russia deemed itself obligated to protect the 25 million ethnic Russians residing across the post-Soviet space.<sup>[32]</sup> This ambiguous concept established a system of “jurisdictional imperialism,” enabling Russia to project its sovereignty beyond its territorial boundaries. The practical expression of this legal stance was articulated by Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, who stated that, in the event of any violation of the rights of Russian citizens, he would take “the most decisive” action, potentially involving troop deployment.<sup>[33]</sup> An illustrative example of this dynamic is the case of Moldova, where General Lebed, appointed commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, formally designated a “neutral peacekeeping force,” openly declared his intention to use force to protect the ethnic Russian community in Moldova. This position was not isolated. The concept of protecting ethnic Russian citizens as a justification for intervention was further supported by the Parliament’s Committee on International Affairs, led by Yevgeny Ambartsumov, and by Vice President Alexander Rutskoi.<sup>[34]</sup>

This political position became increasingly evident during the armed conflict in Abkhazia. For Russia, it was strategically important that Georgia accede to the CIS and ensure the security of Russian military bases on its

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Legvold, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 418.

<sup>29</sup> Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Russian Federation, “Osnovnye polozheniya voennoi doktriny” 4.

<sup>31</sup> James H. Slagle, “New Russian Military Doctrin: Sign of the Times,” *Parameters*, 24, no. 1 (1994): 97, [https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1697&context=parameters&acrobatPromotionSource=embeddedpdfs\\_chrome-native\\_view](https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1697&context=parameters&acrobatPromotionSource=embeddedpdfs_chrome-native_view)

<sup>32</sup> Slagle, “New Russian Military Doctrin,” 91.

<sup>33</sup> Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 78.

territory. Pavel Grachev asserted that the preservation of bases in Georgia was vital for maintaining predominance over the eastern sector of the Black Sea.<sup>[35]</sup> In pursuit of this geopolitical objective, Russia employed direct military action, therefore affirming its “effective control” over separatist troops. During the March 1993 offensive on Sokhumi, the Russian special forces unit “Tapir” directly participated in combat operations against Georgian forces. Moreover, evidence of Russian aerial interference was documented. Confirmation was provided by the downing of a Russian SU-27 fighter jet, piloted by Major Vaclav Shipko, by Georgian forces. In addition to direct combat operations, Russian forces implemented a naval blockade along the coastline and employed radio-electronic suppression against the adversary.<sup>[36]</sup> From a legal perspective, these military operations, which constituted acts of aggression under international law, were domestically justified under an expansive interpretation of the peacekeeping mandate, thus conferring a formal legal basis upon offensive operations presented as humanitarian action.

In conclusion, the 1993 doctrine established a legal framework for peacekeeping operations that, in practice, functioned as a basis for unilateral intervention. Russian actions within the CIS, especially in Georgia and Moldova, were not authorized by the UN or the OSCE. Ultimately, they served as geopolitical instruments designed to consolidate Russia’s exclusive sphere of influence and to secure a sustained military presence in the region.

### 3.4. Legal Vacuum and the Legitimization of Power: The Constitutional Precedent of 1995

In December 1994, more than three years after the Chechen proclamation of independence, a direct application of the 1993 military doctrine occurred when President Yeltsin authorized military engagement in Chechnya.<sup>[37]</sup> This decision was based on a central provision of the doctrine permitting the deployment of the armed forces to restore constitutional order.

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<sup>35</sup> Lasha Chantladze, “State Responsibility in International Law: Analyzing Russia’s Actions in the War in Abkhazia (1992-1993),” *Annales Pomorienses. Ius*, no. 3 (2024): 101, <https://api.upsl.edu.pl/index.php/ius/article/view/71/93>.

<sup>36</sup> Chantladze, “State Responsibility in International Law,” 102-3.

<sup>37</sup> Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 81.

The lawfulness of these actions was examined by the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, which issued its judgment on July 31, 1995 (Case No. 10-P). Members of the Federation Council and the State Duma argued that the president's orders, particularly Edict No. 1833, formed a normative framework that enabled the unlawful deployment of the armed forces. Their central argument was that the domestic use of the military was legally permissible only within the strict framework of a formally declared state of emergency or martial law, circumstances that were notably absent in the examined case.<sup>[38]</sup>

The court held that the constitution did not require the defense of state integrity to be conducted solely under a state of emergency regime.<sup>[39]</sup> This decision was grounded in the argument that a “legal vacuum” existed. The court acknowledged that the legislative framework regarding the use of the armed forces was “imperfect” and contained gaps that the lawmakers had failed to rectify in a timely manner.<sup>[40]</sup> The court also argued that limiting the president's authority in the absence of explicit legislation would represent a “denial of the principle of the constitution's direct application” (Article 15), as the president is constitutionally obligated to implement necessary measures to safeguard sovereignty and state integrity.<sup>[41]</sup>

With respect to the 1993 military doctrine (Edict No. 1833), the court concluded the document's provisions contained no normative precepts and thus lacked normative content. Consequently, the court determined that the document was not classified as a legal act subject to judicial review, thereby placing it outside the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court.<sup>[42]</sup> This judgment established a form of legal protection for the doctrine: by designating it as “non-normative,” the court insulated it from constitutional review while permitting it to operate as the *de facto* standard for military operations.

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<sup>38</sup> Venice Commission (European Commission for Democracy through Law), *Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation of 31 July 1995: On the constitutionality of the Presidential Decrees and the Resolutions of the Federal Government concerning the situation in Chechnya*, CDL-INF(1996)001 (Strasbourg, 1996), [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-INF\(1996\)001-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-INF(1996)001-e).

<sup>39</sup> Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, *Constitutional Case No. 10P concerning the situation in Chechnya*, Judgment of July 31, 1995, 4, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/national-practice/constitutional-case-no-10p-concerning-situation-chechnya-constitutional-court>

<sup>40</sup> Venice Commission, *Judgment of the Constitutional Court*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Venice Commission, *Judgment of the Constitutional Court*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Venice Commission, *Judgment of the Constitutional Court*, 8.

## 4 | Contemporary Relevance and Legal Legacy: From 1993 to the Present

### 4.1. Continuity in Russian Strategic Thought

The 1993 military doctrine was not merely a reaction to post-Soviet disorder but a foundational framework that established the core principles of modern Russian strategic culture. An analysis of the trajectory of security documents, from the 2000 National Security concept to the 2021 National Security Strategy, reveals a distinct pattern of normative continuity. The foundational paradigms established during the Yeltsin administration, specifically sphere-of-influence claims in the “Near Abroad,” the abandonment of “No First Use” as a strategic equalizer, and “compatriot protection” as a justification for intervention, did not diminish. These conceptual frameworks were methodically modified and expanded under subsequent administrations. Ultimately, the concepts established in 1993 endured and evolved rather than being abandoned, demonstrating that the initial doctrine has remained the foundational paradigm for three decades of Russian strategic behavior.

The extension of the “Near Abroad” concept constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of the 1993 doctrine, which effectively removed the distinction between external defense and domestic security. The 1993 doctrine designated Russia as the exclusive guarantor of peace among the former Soviet republics, while the 2010 and 2014 military doctrines developed this assertion into a progressively assertive defense stance vis-à-vis perceived Western expansion. Over subsequent decades, official discourse concerning NATO shifted from cautious cooperation to overt hostility. Specifically, the 2010 doctrine identified NATO expansion and its military infrastructure as a primary external military threat.<sup>[43]</sup> This trajectory culminated in the 2014 Military Doctrine, which broadened the catalog of threats to include “color revolutions” in neighboring states.<sup>[44]</sup> Ultimately, the 2021 National Security Strategy consolidated these positions, transitioning

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<sup>43</sup> Russian Federation, “O Voennoi doktrine Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [On the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], Edict No. 146, February 5, 2010, <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/97383/>.

<sup>44</sup> Russian Federation, “Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], approved by the President of the Russian Federation on December 25, 2014, No. Pr-2976, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>.

from a regional sphere-of-influence claim toward more overt imperial ambitions, characterizing the CIS region as a domain where the preservation of Russian influence is deemed a vital national interest.<sup>[45]</sup>

Russia's strategic continuity is illustrated by the transformation of the doctrine of compatriot protection, which evolved from a preliminary legal justification in 1993 into a central basis for military intervention. While the 1993 doctrine recognized violation of the rights of ethnic Russians in the "Near Abroad" as a potential source of conflict, subsequent decades saw this concept developing from a defensive issue into a proactive instrument of extraterritoriality. This evolution reached a pivotal moment with the 2008 intervention in Georgia, when the strategy of "passportization" served as the operational link between the 1993 formulation and the formal legal mandates articulated in the 2010 and 2014 doctrines. Within this framework, "passportization" may be perceived as a mechanism of hybrid legal warfare, operating through what has been referred to as "legal grey zone exploitation" to facilitate gradual displacement through legal absorption. This policy enabled the widespread naturalization of Georgian residents in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, thus altering their legal status and political loyalty without requiring formal territorial annexation.<sup>[46]</sup> The doctrines of 2010 and 2014 explicitly permitted the deployment of the armed forces beyond Russian territory to "обеспечения защиты своих граждан, находящихся за пределами Российской Федерации" (ensure the protection of citizens located beyond the Russian Federation),<sup>[47]</sup> thereby transforming cultural identity into a jurisdictional basis for intervention. By 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine represented a culmination of the doctrine's application, invoking the protection of the Russian residents of Donbas from alleged "genocide," the prevention of NATO expansion, and framing the conflict as a civilizational "denazification" struggle.<sup>[48]</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Russian Federation, "O Strategii natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii" [On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation], Edict No. 400, July 2, 2021, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046>.

<sup>46</sup> Kakhaber Kalichava, "Legal Grey Zone Exploitation And The Silent Displacement Of A Population: Reframing Russia's Passportization Policy In Georgia's Breakaway Regions," *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* 11, no. 13s (2025): 388, <https://theaspd.com/index.php/ijes/article/view/1856>.

<sup>47</sup> Russian Federation, "Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii." 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Russian Federation, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

The consistency of Russia's nuclear doctrine indicates a sustained reliance on coercive strategies first introduced in 1993. The strategic shift of that year, relinquishing the "No First Use" commitment, established a precedent redefining the nuclear arsenal as a strategic equalizer compensating for conventional limitations. The 2000 National Security Concept reinforced this position by lowering the nuclear threshold and authorizing use in response to large-scale conventional aggression.<sup>[49]</sup> The 2010 and 2014 doctrines extended this formulation to threats "угрожающих самому существованию государства" (threatening the very existence of the state),<sup>[50]</sup> thereby preserving strategic ambiguity regarding the definition of an existential threat while maintaining Russia's interpretive discretion. This trajectory culminated in the modern "escalate to deescalate" posture, where nuclear signaling serves as a protective shield for regional interventions.<sup>[51]</sup> The 2022 invasion of Ukraine demonstrates the operational application of this doctrine. Russian officials consistently issued threats of nuclear action should Western support for Ukraine cross undefined "red lines," stating that they would use "all available means" to defend territories they claimed to have annexed.<sup>[52]</sup> By September 2022, Russian officials further warned that any attack on these incorporated regions, including Crimea, would trigger the provisions of Russia's nuclear doctrine, thereby extending nuclear deterrence to Ukrainian territory under Russian control.<sup>[53]</sup> Ultimately, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, invoking all three principles stated in the 1993 doctrine ("Near Abroad" sphere-of-influence claims, compatriot protection, and nuclear coercion), illustrates that the doctrine continues to function as the original foundation defining the current Russia-West confrontation and the long-term strategic interaction between Moscow's imperial ambitions and the international rules-based order.

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<sup>49</sup> "Russia's Military Doctrine," trans. U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Arms Control Today* (May 2000), <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-05/russias-military-doctrine>.

<sup>50</sup> Russian Federation, "O Voennoi doktrine Rossiiskoi Federatsii".

<sup>51</sup> Nikolai Sokov, "Why Russia Calls a Limited Nuclear Strike 'De-escalation,'" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 13, 2014, <https://thebulletin.org/2014/03/why-russia-calls-a-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation/>.

<sup>52</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," September 21, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>.

<sup>53</sup> Al Jazeera, "Russia Can Defend New Regions with Nuclear Weapons: Medvedev," September 22, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/22/russia-can-defend-new-regions-with-nuclear-weapons-medvedev-says>.

The 1993 military doctrine was not merely a security document but was also intended to address structural weaknesses in the immediate post-Soviet period. The decision to relinquish the “No First Use” commitment was a direct asymmetric response to the conventional military superiority of Western powers. Confronted with a severely diminished conventional military following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian military elite utilized the nuclear threshold as a principal equalizer to deter external actors from exploiting Russia’s domestic vulnerabilities. This shift effectively redefined the nuclear arsenal not as a tool of last resort but as a counterweight to the technological and organizational advantages of Western military structures.<sup>[54]</sup> This doctrinal shift was also informed by entrenched perceptions of a changing geopolitical reality. The prospect of NATO expansion was perceived not as a defensive measure but as a deliberate attempt to diminish Russian influence in Europe and worldwide. The 1993 doctrine functioned as a strategic deterrent designed to prevent the expansion of Western military infrastructure toward Russian borders. Moscow’s assertive stance regarding the “Near Abroad” was a preventive effort to establish a buffer zone in response to perceived institutional and military expansion into its traditional sphere of interest.<sup>[55]</sup>

The Western reaction to the 1993 Russian military doctrine was characterized by a dual approach, combining immediate political support for Boris Yeltsin’s administration with sustained geopolitical concerns. From a nuclear perspective, the West viewed the abandonment of the “No First Use” policy not as an indication of imminent aggression but as a manifestation of systemic weakness. The 1993 shift was perceived as a rational, albeit desperate, effort to address Russia’s diminished conventional capabilities, a policy that mirrored NATO’s own Cold War logic of using a nuclear umbrella to counter Soviet conventional superiority. For the Western strategic community, Russia’s reliance on nuclear signaling was an admission of its limited capacity to prevail in a conventional conflict and an attempt to preserve its diminishing status as a great power.<sup>[56]</sup> However, this initial assessment proved temporary, as Russia’s interference in the “Near Abroad” marked a longer-term shift in strategic orientation. Russia’s assertion of exclusive spheres of influence and its willingness to employ unilateral force in post-Soviet regions were regarded as fundamentally incompatible with

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<sup>54</sup> Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Blank, *Threats to Russian Security*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine*, 16.

Western principles of sovereign equality. The doctrine's pursuit of a buffer zone of non-aligned states produced unintended consequences. Rather than deterring NATO expansion, it signaled to Eastern European nations that their security could only be guaranteed through formal integration into the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>[57]</sup>

Consequently, the 1993 doctrine functioned as a central factor in a self-reinforcing cycle of interaction. Russia's attempt to assert regional predominance directly accelerated the process it sought to prevent, namely the eastward expansion of NATO. The doctrine evolved and became increasingly institutionalized through successive security documents (2000; 2010; 2014; 2021), which systematically refined and expanded its core principles: sphere-of-influence claims in the "Near Abroad," compatriot protection as a justification for intervention, and nuclear first use as a strategic equalizer.

## 4.2. International Law Dimensions

The relationship between the 1993 military doctrine and international law reveals a systematic tension between Russia's asserted rights and established legal standards. While the United Nations Charter explicitly prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state,<sup>[58]</sup> the doctrine permitted military operations in former Soviet republics under the guise of peacekeeping without a UN Security Council mandate. This appropriation of international legal terminology, specifically the notion of peacekeeping, to legitimize unilateral intervention established a pattern that subsequently characterized Russia's post-Soviet military operations. The doctrine thereby established a legal framework that enabled Russia to violate fundamental norms of international law while formally asserting adherence to them, transforming peacekeeping from a collective security mechanism into an instrument for maintaining spheres of influence. International peacekeeping practice, as developed through UN operations since 1956, requires three fundamental elements: cooperation of the parties to the conflict, the impartiality

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<sup>57</sup> Blank, *Threats to Russian Security*, 92-93.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations, *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*, Supplement No. 7, vol. 1, "Article 2(4)," 22.

of the peacekeeping force, and the non-use of force except in self-defense.<sup>[59]</sup> Russia's 1993 doctrine departed from all three requirements: operations proceeded without legitimate consent, which was either obtained under duress or derived from unrecognized separatist entities. Russian forces consistently favored one party to the conflict (typically separatist groups resisting post-Soviet administrations), and the deployment of force served offensive political objectives rather than merely defensive peacekeeping functions. Between 1992 and 1995, Russian peacekeeping operations were strategic instruments of geopolitical leverage. Rather than resolving disputes, Moscow instrumentalized regional conflicts by providing sustained support to secessionist entities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. This policy facilitated the extraction of significant political and military concessions from neighboring sovereign states. This departure from international norms is apparent in Russia's activities throughout the CIS. In Moldova and Georgia, Russia applied a "coercive strategy of suasion," where peacekeeping forces were deployed only after Russian troops had intervened to support separatist entities, effectively freezing conflicts to secure Russia's strategic interests rather than resolve them. In Tajikistan, the mission reflected a "supporting strategy," whereby Russian forces relinquished neutrality to bolster the government against opposition forces, participating in combat actions that significantly surpassed conventional peacekeeping objectives.<sup>[60]</sup> In the case of Abkhazia, the Russian-led peacekeeping mission operated as a *de facto* geostrategic enclave aimed at preserving Moscow's regional influence rather than promoting a lasting resolution. The contingent impeded the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and the repatriation of refugees. This mission oversaw a humanitarian crisis in its immediate area of responsibility, particularly in the Gali district. The deployment ultimately functioned as a political guarantee facilitating separatist secession.<sup>[61]</sup>

Russian peacekeeping activities within the CIS did not constitute a genuine multilateral effort but rather represented a departure from international standards. This operational paradigm followed a discernible sequence. Russian forces initially engaged as active combatants to

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<sup>59</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, "What is Peacekeeping," <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping>.

<sup>60</sup> Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Dazmir Jojua, *Apxazeti 1938–2006 tslebshi: regionaluri istoriuli protsesis aspektebi* [Abkhazia in 1938–2006: Aspects of the Regional Historical Process] (Tbilisi: Sokhumi State University, 2009), 245–246.

establish favorable conditions on the ground and subsequently assumed the role of “peacekeepers” to institutionalize and preserve that outcome. This systematic undermining of international law can be classified into two principal legal violations: 1) abandonment of neutrality: contrary to the UN requirement for impartiality, Russian forces utilized their peacekeeping mandate not to resolve disputes but to act as a military guarantor for secessionist authorities; 2) erosion of state sovereignty and illegal use of force: through initiatives like “passportization” and the establishment of unlawful military bases, Russia facilitated a form of jurisdictional legitimization. These activities supplanted the legal authority of sovereign states, such as in parts of Georgia, with Russian political-legal control.<sup>[62]</sup>

The 1993 military doctrine employed deliberate ambiguity as a strategic instrument to circumvent the constraints of established international law. By defining the primary responsibility of the armed forces as conducting operations authorized either by the UN Security Council or executed in accordance with the international obligations of the Russian Federation, Moscow institutionalized a legal framework conducive to unilateral action. This dualism enabled Russia to present regional revisionism under the guise of collective security while methodically undermining the fundamental principles of the UN Charter, specifically resulting in the violation of Article 2(4) through the unlawful threat or use of force, as well as Articles 2(1) and 2(7) regarding the principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention in the domestic jurisdiction of neighboring states.

## 5 | Conclusion

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the first military doctrine of the Russian Federation (1993) functioned more as a foundational act of state-building than as a traditional defense strategy. Emerging from the constitutional crisis of 1993, the document provided an *ex post facto* legal justification for the executive’s predominance over the legislative branch. By removing the traditional boundary between external and internal security, the doctrine institutionalized the use of military force as a legitimate

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<sup>62</sup> Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 179–180.

instrument of domestic politics, thereby solidifying the foundations of a super-presidential system. The Constitutional Court's affirmation of these provisions in 1995 established a precedent of post-Soviet statehood: that in a "legal vacuum," political authority may prevail over formal constitutional limits. In this context, Edict No. 1833 solidifies a strategic culture characterized by executive predominance and the primacy of force.

Beyond domestic consolidation, the 1993 doctrine established the foundational basis for three decades of Russian strategic behavior and revisionism. As the study has demonstrated, the doctrine institutionalized a systematic departure from the international legal order. By appropriating peacekeeping to legitimize unilateral interventions and elevating "compatriot protection" to a strategic priority, Russia established a normative architecture for jurisdictional legitimization across the "Near Abroad." These actions blatantly violated the fundamental principles of the UN Charter, transforming the regional security landscape into a domain of limited sovereignty.

The significance of the 1993 doctrine extends far beyond its historical context. The strategic principles it codified: the abandonment of "No First Use," the assertion of exclusive spheres of influence, and deliberate legal ambiguity, were not abandoned but rather refined in subsequent security documents. These foundational documents shaped the trajectory of Russia's subsequent foreign policy and defined the strategic rationale for later military campaigns. An analysis of the 1993 doctrine is essential for understanding the current challenges facing the rules-based international order, as it remains a blueprint for Russia's ongoing confrontation with Western security architecture.

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