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MAPPING RUSSIA'S GLOBAL INFLUENCE

A CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIC GOALS AND INSTRUMENTS OF INFLUENCE IN THE POST-CRIMEA ERA (2014-2021)

ABSTRACT   The article presents a comprehensive analysis of Russia's strategic goals and instruments of influence in foreign policy between 2014 and 2021 for implementing global ambitions. Using cluster and index analysis methods, the study identifies eleven regions of influence (ROIs) and four main clusters: Border Security (BS), Economic-Historical Ties (EHT), Eastern Markets (EM), and Dialogue with North America (DNA). The analysis showed that Russia's activity in certain regions was differentiated and adapted to their strategic importance. The highest activity indicators were recorded in Central and Southern Africa, the Western Balkans, and the Baltic States, where Russia used various instruments of influence—from political to economic to informational. The study confirms that Russian foreign policy after 2014 was aimed at undermining Western dominance and building a multipolar world. The findings reveal Russia's systematic and differentiated approach to achieving strategic goals in different regions of the world and contribute to a better understanding of its role in shaping the contemporary international order.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy, strategic goals, regions of influence, cluster analysis

INTRODUCTION

During his speech in Munich in 2007, Vladimir Putin announced activities in the area of foreign policy to expand and strengthen Russia's influence in various regions of the world. These were intensified after 2014. They were aimed at rebuilding Moscow's superpower position and creating a counterweight to Western influence. It was also a signal that Russia does not accept the existing international order and is starting an overt struggle for its new shape.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars and analysts have extensively studied Russia's foreign policy, highlighting changes in strategic goals, diplomatic approaches, and regional engagement.[1] These studies have identified key phases in Russia's international operations, including periods of cooperation and confrontation with the West, as well as the activities of various types of influence and directions of global expansion.

According to this research, the period of rebuilding Russia's superpower position in the international arena began with Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000 and thus was directed at weakening the West.[2] Researchers point out that de facto Russia has not come to terms with the formal loss of control over many countries that were part of the Soviet Union, and has therefore sought to keep them in its sphere of influence, especially where pro-Western attitudes were growing.[3] On the other hand, in the case of the idea of multipolarity, pushed by Russia since the 1990s as a desirable international order, there are different positions among scholars, especially in the context of Russia's aggressive policy towards countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. Some of them argue that the idea of multipolarity is a tool for restoring greatness.[4] However, some researchers argue that after Russia's open aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the international order will be based on the idea of 'multi-order' rather than 'multipolarity,' where the dynamics of global governance will take place within and between different

[1] C. Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest*, vol. 70 (2003), pp. 5-18.

[2] D.W. Larson, A. Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2010), pp. 63-95; I.B. Neumann, "Russia as a Great Power, 1815-2007," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2008), pp. 128-151.

[3] S. Hast, *Spheres of Influence in International Relations: History, Theory and Politics*, Burlington 2014; T. Kuzio, "The Origins of Peace, Non-Violence, and Conflict in Ukraine," in A. Pikulicka--Wilczewska, R. Sakwa (eds), *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda, and Perspectives*, Bristol 2016, pp. 103-116, at http://www.e-ir.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Ukraine-and-Russia-E-IR-2016.pdf, 12 November 2024; F. Kliem, "CO22009 | Russia, NATO, and Ukraine: The Return of Spheres of Influence," *RSIS*, 7 February 2022, at https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/cms/russia-nato-and-ukraine-the-return-of-spheres-of-influence/, 10 October 2024; A.A. Michta, "What Russia Wants from a Ukraine Crisis: A Sphere of Influence in Eastern Europe," *1945*, 13 December 2021, at https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/12/what-russia-wants-from-a-ukraine-crisis-a-sphere-of-influence-in-eastern-europe/, 15 October 2024.

[4] S. Turner, "Russia, China, and a Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2009), pp. 159-184; B. Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, London–Washington, D.C. 2015; D. Lewis, "The Role of Ideology in Russian Foreign Policy," in J.L. Maynard, M.L. Haas (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Ideology and International Relations*, London 2022, pp. 374-390.

international orders (e.g., liberal and Eurasian) rather than between multiple sovereign states. [5] Studies aimed at analyzing Russia's strategic goals and operations in international politics have mainly focused on individual regions or countries and have mostly been synthetic studies that refer to the current political situation. The exceptions are the few empirical comparative works, including longitudinal ones, which analyze in detail secondary data, such as, for example, reports of the secret services.[6]

Despite the many studies devoted to Russian foreign policy, there is a lack of empirical analyses that focus on a systematic assessment of Russia's influence from a global perspective. This is important because, as scholars point out, over the past decade Russia has regained influence in countries where it had previously lost it.[7] According to Reid,[8] only theoretical analysis based on empirical methods can lead to true conclusions in this regard.

In this article, we formulate the argument that Russia's foreign policy is inherent in the concept of regional influence, which serves as a strategic framework for achieving its global goals in different regions of the world. The purpose of this study is to comprehensively analyze the strategic foreign policy goals of the Russian Federation, its instruments of influence, and their impact in 2014-2021. The dependent variable in this study is the degree of activity of the Russian Federation in the strategic regions in 2014-2021. Such independent variables as the strategic goals of the Russian Federation (political, military, economic, informational, diplomatic) and the geographical diversity of the influence were used to explain the dependent variable.

The use of statistical computational methods and clustering techniques in our work goes beyond traditional qualitative analysis and allows us to compare different elements of foreign policy (goals, activities, and regions of influence). This provides a systematic approach to understanding Russia's foreign policy activities and its impact on regional and global dynamics. Thus, our study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Russia acts in different regions of the world, interacts with other actors, and shapes the international order, which enriches the scholarly discourse on geopolitics and strategic studies. The study also satisfies the need to use innovative research methodologies in the field of international relations developed within the framework of computational international relations.[9] By examining how clusters of influence align with Russia's

5   T. Flockhart, E.A. Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine: Putin and the Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2022), pp. 466-481.

6   G.H. Karlsen, "Divide and Rule: Ten Lessons about Russian Political Influence Activities in Europe," *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1-14.

7   R.E. Berls, "Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and Its Neighbors: A Sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship?," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 13 July 2021, at https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-ii-russia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship/, 28 January 2025.

8   E.A. Reid, "Third Rome or Potemkin Village: Analyzing the Extent of Russia's Power in Serbia, 2012-2019," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 49, no. 4 (2021), pp. 728-737.

9   H.A. Unver, "Computational International Relations: What Can Programming, Coding, and Internet Research Do for the Discipline?," *arXiv*.

strategic vision, the study uncovers patterns of behavior aimed at altering global governance structures in favor of multipolarity.

The results of our research can help to develop a framework for assessing the effectiveness of foreign policy responses to Russia's actions in different regions. By identifying patterns in Russia's activities and strategic goals, policymakers could assess the impact of policy decisions and adjust strategies accordingly. In addition, insights into Russia's spheres of influence and instruments of influence could help create tools to assess the geopolitical risks associated with Russia's foreign policy actions. These tools could help policymakers, businesses, and analysts assess potential risks and vulnerabilities in different regions.

EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS
FROM 1992 TO 2021

Many researchers point out that the strategic goals of Russia's foreign policy were strongly intertwined with those of its domestic policy,[10] so after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the policy changed over the decades. Consequently, it went through different stages, characterized by conflicting goals.[11] In the first stage (1992-1995), the overriding goal was close cooperation with the West both economically and militarily. The rapprochement had a pragmatic dimension. Russia needed economic assistance from the West to finance internal economic and political reforms. At the time, agreements were signed with Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, recognizing them as sovereign states, a training brigade was withdrawn from Cuba, and arms sales to Afghanistan were halted (Sakwa 2017). The US and Russia also signed the Treaty on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the START II Treaty). Recognition of the attributes of great power has also become an important issue for Russia in the face of new identity challenges, which has triggered nationalist yearnings.[12]

In 1996-2000, despite its domestic weakness, Russia sought to emphasize its importance in the international arena, accentuating its desire to restore its great power status and promote a multipolar world[13] with *competitive peaceful coexistence.*[14] This was because while Russia was opposed to the US primacy in the world, it wanted to create a new international order based on cooperation and balance of power. At that time, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security was signed with NATO,

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[10]   B. Lo, *Russia and the New...*; R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*, Cambridge 2017; H. Smith, "Domestic Influences on Russian Foreign Policy: Status, Interests and *Ressentiment*," in M.R. Freire, R.E. Kanet (eds), *Russia and Its Near Neighbours*, London 2012, pp. 39-62.

[11]   F. Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy over the Past Three Decades: Change and Continuity," *Chinese Journal of Slavic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2022), pp. 86-99; R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest...*

[12]   R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest...*

[13]   F. Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy...".

[14]   R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest...*

which was a response to Russia's concerns about the alliance's expansion to the East. Russia also promoted the establishment of the CIS Free Trade Area, expressed interest in strengthening the regional security system and establishing a customs union (later reorganized as the Eurasian Economic Community) and the Russia-Belarus Community (later transformed into the Union State of Russia-Belarus). Strategic partnerships were also signed with China (1996) and India (2000) to create a counterweight to the United States.

The grand-state ambitions of the Russian political elite could not be satisfied, as Russia was too weak to establish a new international order, so foreign policy took another turn and revised its previous goals, replacing idealism with pragmatism once again. Between 2000 and 2013, foreign policy under Putin and Medvedev (2008-2012) entered a phase of 'new realism' (Sakwa, 2017), although according to Liu (2022) this was not a homogeneous period, as three sub-periods with different goals can be distinguished, such as Great Power Pragmatism (2001-2004), Neo-Slavism (2005-2008), and Stability and Cooperation Diplomacy (2009-2013). New Realism was characterized primarily by the acceptance that *Russia would have to fend for itself in a competitive international system, and therefore it would have to bolster the economic and other foundations of its great power status*.[15] One of the operations aimed at rebuilding the Russian Federation's superpower position and restoring its rightful place in the global balance of power was changes in Putin's foreign and security policy. This was enthusiastically welcomed by the Russian public, which identifies identically with its imperial status and supports the government's actions. As a result of the boom in energy resources and rising oil and natural gas exports, the Russian government secured an influx of financial resources and had the opportunity to fulfill social promises, which, in connection with the stable payment of pensions and salaries of the budgetary sphere, influenced high support for the authorities of the Russian Federation.[16]

Considering the Russian Federation's growing ambitions in the international arena and its desire to play an increasingly important role on the global stage, one aspect of strengthening the Russian state was also the reform of the armed forces and a significant increase in financial outlays for the Russian army.[17] Consistent actions in this regard and the priority direction of the reconstruction of the Russian army resulted from the fact of equating strong armed forces and combat potential with a strong state, which was directly related to Russia's aspiration for a superpower position and the restoration of influence in various regions of the world, the guarantor of which was to be the Russian army.[18]

The aspirations to rebuild a superpower position were increasingly accentuated by the Russian government in subsequent years. This was reflected both in plans to

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[15]   R. Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, London 2021, p. 523.

[16]   A.P. Tsygankov, *Russian Realism: Defending 'Derzhava' in International Relations*, London 2022.

[17]   M. De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, London 2010.

[18]   A. Snetkov, *Russia's Security Policy under Putin: A Critical Perspective*, London 2015.

reintegrate the post-Soviet space politically, economically, and militarily, as well as in subsequent active efforts in the international arena. Taking advantage of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States, Russia joined the anti-terrorist coalition, thus hoping to revive relations with the West and recognize its great-power status. However, in the following years, the cooperation weakened, and disillusionment on both sides grew, mainly due to the involvement of the European Union and the US in the process of democratic change and 'color revolutions' in the region,[19] which was met with harsh criticism from the Russian Federation and intensified nationalist tendencies.[20] These actions were seen as a threat to its interests, a violation of its sphere of influence, and an attempt to weaken its position on the international stage.[21]

After a period of 'new realism' and Putin's re-election as president in 2012, it was time once again to revise domestic and foreign policy goals. Putin recognized that partnership with the West had become possible to a limited extent, so he took steps to *change the practices rather than the principles of international affairs*[22]. There has come a period referred to as 'neo-revisionism,'[23] 'great power diplomacy' or 'turn to the East'.[24] In the narrative presented, Russia emphasized the need to resist Western tendencies to expand its influence in the region and support the opposition, pointing to these premises, among others, as the reasons for the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the confrontation between Moscow and the West. As a result of its foreign policy, Russia has, on the one hand, exposed itself to political and economic sanctions that have slowed down the country's development and modernization, while on the other hand, it has strengthened its relations with Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern countries. During this period, propaganda efforts also intensified with a simultaneous anti-Western message. Foreign policy returned to the Cold War rhetoric of a two-power struggle.[25]

Analyzing Russia's international policy and visions of the country's international order, it should be noted that 2014 marks an important caesura in this regard. This is the result of Russia's increasingly confrontational policy in the international arena, which was associated with the failure of the policy of making Ukraine dependent and incorporating the country into Russian integration structures, which resulted from the Revolution of Dignity and the seizure of power in Kyiv by opposition forces. The annexation of Crimea and the ensuing conflict in the eastern regions of the Ukrainian

[19]   F. Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy...".

[20]   D. Lewis, "The Role of Ideology...".

[21]   R. Menon, W. Ruger, "NATO, U.S. Grand Strategy and the Russian Response," in R.E. Kanet, D. Moulioukova (eds), *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, London 2021, pp. 179-213.

[22]   R. Sakwa, *Russian Politics...*, p. 525.

[23]   R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest...*

[24]   A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Lanham 2019.

[25]   R.H. Donaldson, V. Nadkarni, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, New York 2019; R. Legvold, *Return to Cold War*, Cambridge–Malden 2016.

state began a new period of shaping the foreign and security policy of the Russian state, as well as Russia's international activity.[26]

The indicated processes were the direct causes of the development of a new strategy and doctrinal assumptions in this regard. On this basis, new strategic documents were accepted as the War Doctrine took effect in 2014 (President of the Russian Federation, 2014), the National Security Strategy of 2015 (President of the Russian Federation, 2015), and the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by President Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016.[27] Based on these, Russia conducted its international policy and activity on the global stage. The documents reflected a significant deterioration in relations with the United States and Western countries. Officially, the documents expressed conceptual assumptions and were an unequivocal confirmation that Russia had begun a new form of active policy in the international arena and increased its influence in the world. At the same time, Russia accused the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance of pursuing actions that were detrimental to its interests and weakening its position in the international arena, which Russia announced it would firmly counteract.[28] Information policy activities were also an integral part of the goals and objectives of the Russian Federation's policy in the international arena. The Information Security Doctrine of December 5, 2016 (President of the Russian Federation, 2016) adopted at the time, pointed out the determinants and importance in the modern world of the information factor, defined strategic interests and the implementation of activities in this area, both in the domestic sphere and in the international arena.

The stages of foreign policy development discussed above show that Russia, searching for an identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, accepted various types of compromises to protect its rights and interests. 'Universal liberalism' characteristic of the early period was replaced by the pursuit of Russia's superpower status in the international arena.[29] During Putin's time in power, efforts were made to reconcile a traditional worldview with an interest-based approach to external relations.[30] Eventually losing its great power status,[31] Russia decided to fight more openly for a new international order, also aimed at ensuring the internal cohesion of the nation.[32]

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[26]   K. Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, vol. 72, no. 1 (2017), pp. 28-55.

[27]   A.M. Dyner, "The Russian Federation's New Foreign Policy Concept," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 1 (2017), at https://pism.pl/publications/The_Russian_Federation_s_New_Foreign_Policy_Concept, 12 September 2024.

[28]   M. de Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy...*; D. Moulioukova, R.E. Kanet, "The Battle of Ontological Narratives: Russia and the Annexation of Crimea," in R.E. Kanet, D. Moulioukova (eds), *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, London 2021, pp. 115-139.

[29]   R. Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest...*

[30]   B. Lo, *Russia and the New...*

[31]   R.H. Donaldson, V. Nadkarni, *The Foreign Policy of Russia...*

[32]   J. Newton, "Shortcut to Great Power: Russia in Pursuit of Multipolarity," in J. Newton, W. Tompson (eds), *Institutions, Ideas and Leadership in Russian Politics*, London 2010, pp. 88-115.

INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE AS A TOOL FOR ACHIEVING STRATEGIC GOALS

The term 'influence' is defined in international relations as *a relationship among human actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intentions of one or more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, of one or more other actors in a direction consistent with - and not contrary to-the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence-wielders.*[33] Influence is thus characterized by relationality (it refers to the relationship between actors), causality, (the influencing actor causes a change in the target actor's behavior), and intentionality (the influencing actor must be able to change the target actor's behavior in a direction at least desired by the target). As Fridman notes, the true intentions of influence are most often formulated according to national interests and remain unknown to the influenced actor. Moreover, influence can be transparent, ambiguous, or covert, and the choice of form depends on the strategic objectives behind the activities. For example, foreign investment in national infrastructure can be either transparent influence (with clearly stated goals), implicit influence (with goals other than those declared), or ambiguous influence.[34]

States, to gain or maintain influence in the international arena, resort to a variety of means called instruments or activities of influence.[35] They are seen as tools to achieve strategic goals formulated in strategic foreign policy documents. They involve the use of various sources of state power (diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, religious, etc.) by one international actor to influence another actor to achieve policy goals.[36]

Instruments of influence can be viewed as a continuum from soft instruments of influence, which shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion, to hard instruments of influence, which employ a variety of coercive measures such as economic sanctions or military intervention.[37] Soft instruments of influence are characteristic of soft power[38] and include cultural, educational, informational, and diplomatic activities, among others, while hard instruments of influence are a feature of hard power.[39] As Walker and Ludwig note, in recent years authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China have turned to instruments of influence that can only ostensibly be categorized as soft power, proposing the term 'sharp power' for these mechanisms.

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[33]   R.A. Dahl, B. Stinebrickner, *Modern Political Analysis*, Englewood Cliffs 2003, p. 17.

[34]   O. Fridman, "Defining Foreign Influence and Interference," *INNS*, 2024, at https://www.inss.org.il/publication/influence-and-interference/, 12 November 2024.

[35]   E. Meierding, R. Sigman, "Understanding the Mechanisms of International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2021), pp. 1-18.

[36]   O. Fridman, "Defining Foreign Influence…".

[37]   J.-P. NE Wagner, "The Effectiveness of Soft & Hard Power in Contemporary International Relations," *E-International Relations*, 14 May 2014, at https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/14/the-effectiveness-of-soft-hard-power-in-contemporary-international-relations/, 10 September 2024.

[38]   J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2002.

[39]   E.J. Wilson, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 616 (2008), pp. 110-124.

Unlike soft power, sharp power does not seek to 'win hearts and minds,' but rather to manipulate and control target groups by 'puncturing' and 'poisoning' the information environment of democratic states—a malicious and aggressive activity that covertly exploits the openness of democratic systems to deepen existing social divisions and project outward authoritarian values such as monopoly power, top-down control, and censorship.[40] According to Nye, however, the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes is a form of hard power.[41]

A country that is an object of influence can also be in what is called a sphere of influence (SOI). According to some researchers, the concept of a sphere of influence reflects the structural asymmetry of political interests[42] and serves to organize the political map of the world and hierarchize relations between states.[43] It is also emphasized that the establishment of a sphere of influence and their mutual acceptance by various powers contributes to the construction of international order[44] and reduces the danger of conflict between superpowers, especially when these zones are well-defined.[45] Spheres of influence also contribute to avoiding wars because they are tacit agreements under which certain nations are placed under the tutelage and patronage of a given superpower.[46] The exception is when a sphere of influence undermines the key interests of another power, such as the security, political stability, or economic well-being of a nation or its allies.[47] Likewise, when the boundaries of spheres of influence are not well defined, a conflict can arise between powers, as was the case in the Korean or Afghan wars. Although the idea of SOI has a long tradition,[48] it is however in modern times most associated with the Cold War period and the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, when the two powers clearly defined their spheres of influence.[49] Some researchers believe that after the end of the Cold War, America pursued a policy of preventing the emergence of rival spheres of influence to break with the politics of the past,[50] while Russia, as the heir to the Soviet Union, did not break with the policy

40   Ch. Walker, J. Ludwig, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, Washington, D.C. 2017.

41   J. Nye, "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2019), pp. 7-20.

42   G. Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, 10 February 2020, at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence, 9 October 2024.

43   S. Hast, *Spheres of Influence...*

44   H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York 2012.

45   A. Etzioni, "Spheres of Influence: A Reconceptualization," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2015), pp. 117-132; P. Keal, "Contemporary Understanding about Spheres of Influence," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1983), pp. 155-172.

46   A. Etzioni, "Spheres of Influence...".

47   Ibid.

48   V. Jackson, "Understanding Spheres of Influence in International Politics," *European Journal of International Security*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2020), pp. 255-273.

49   P. Keal, "Contemporary Understanding...".

50   E.R. Sankey, "Reconsidering Spheres of Influence," *Survival*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2020), pp. 37-47.

of spheres of influence.[51] For this reason, the concept of spheres of influence often appears as an explanation of Russia's foreign policy motives, although mainly in its relations with the post-Soviet area.[52]

In the context of analyzing Russia's actions in the international arena, it is crucial to distinguish between the traditional concept of spheres of influence (SOI) and the concept of regions of influence (ROI) adopted in this study. While spheres of influence refer to historically shaped areas of political, military, and economic domination by superpowers, where the dominant state can effectively limit the sovereignty of other states, regions of influence represent a broader analytical category. ROIs encompass geographically defined areas where a state pursues its strategic goals through a variety of instruments of influence, without necessarily achieving a dominant position. In the case of post-2014 Russia, while traditional spheres of influence were mainly concentrated in the post-Soviet area, regions of influence extend much wider, encompassing areas where Russia seeks to increase its political, economic, or informational influence.

This distinction is important for several reasons. First, it allows one to grasp the broader scope of Russian international activity beyond the traditionally understood spheres of influence. Second, it allows analysis of the diverse instruments of influence tailored to the specifics of each region. Third, it better corresponds to contemporary international realities, where direct domination is more difficult to achieve and states employ more subtle forms of influence.

In our variant of foreign policy analysis of the Russian Federation, we distinguish three key elements: Region → Goals → Instruments. This approach allows us to: systematize the interactions between regions, goals, and instruments; trace how Russia uses specific instruments to achieve its goals in particular regions; and integrate local strategies into the global context.

It also allows us to test the cause-and-effect relationships between the region, objectives, and instruments of influence. Accordingly, we have formulated three hypotheses that define the relationships between the components of the model we have highlighted:

H1:　In Russia's foreign policy after the Annexation of Crimea, the priority of goals and the intensity of actions vary depending on the geographical location of the region of influence.

H2:　The higher the level of strategic importance of the region for Russia, the wider the range of instruments of influence adapted to the specifics of the region.

H3:　The intensity of Russia's influence in a given region is directly correlated with its geopolitical importance, especially its role in achieving global or local goals.

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[51]　S. Hast, *Spheres of Influence...*; M. Suslov, "'Russian World' Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of 'Spheres of Influence,'" *Geopolitics*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2018), pp. 330-353.

[52]　A.A. Michta, "What Russia Wants...".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Data

The study used secondary data. Internet resources were searched using the Google search engine with the keywords such as: 'Russian foreign policy', 'spheres of influence', 'strategic goals', 'Russian strategy', 'Russian influence', and 'Russia's global interests and actions'. The search results were then reviewed for content that met the following criteria: reports, expert reports, and academic articles on the foreign policy strategy of the Russian Federation, including the actions taken in various regions of the world between 2014-2021. As a result, a total of 15 materials were selected and analyzed (Supplemental material, Table 1).

2. Research methods and procedure

The study used a mixed-methods approach, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis of grouping countries according to similarities for Russia's specific strategic goals and was conducted in a three-stage model.

In Stage One:
- strategic goals and instruments of influence of the Russian Federation in foreign policy were identified,
- identification of regions of influence (ROI) and the countries that are part of those regions,
- linked the identified strategic goals and instruments of influence of the Russian Federation to the highlighted ROI.

In the second stage:
- Groups of regions with common characteristics, i.e. in which Russia pursues similar goals, were identified using the clustering method, the optimal number of clusters was calculated, and their hierarchy was made.

In the third stage:
- Russia's activity in each highlighted cluster of groups was examined in terms of identified goals and instruments of influence, as well as the validity for the Russian Federation of specific groups of goals in different clusters. A set of objects/clusters of regions of influence was ranked according to the values of relevant indicators, and objects with structural similarity in terms of goals were identified (similar values of indicators—proximity relates to the degree of activity rather than the content of Russian policy).

2.1. Conceptual content analysis

The secondary data was analyzed using a conceptual content analysis method aimed at identifying strategic goals, instruments of influence of the Russian Federation in foreign policy, and countries of influence. Content analysis was used to categorize the

studied dataset by coding text passages to identify and summarize concepts important to the study. The categories of analysis were target indicators—regions of influence and strategic goals of the Russian Federation in those regions. The data were coded independently by two coders. Analysis of the sources made it possible to identify not only ROI but also the main countries that Russia considers to be in its region of influence. This resulted in a matrix of targets and regions of influence, which formed the basis for further analysis.

2.2. Cluster analysis

Statistical computer data analysis methods were used to analyze the matrix of targets and regions of influence. Cluster analysis was used to group similar objects such as ROI into homogeneous groups (clusters). This method is a probabilistic method used in the social sciences mainly in sociology, less often in political science or economics,[53] making researchers more aware of recognizing and discovering specific patterns from data. Due to the nature of the data, a hierarchical clustering using a binary distance measure with the clustering algorithm 'ward.D2' (Ward's method) was used. The application of this method to analyze the goals and instruments of influence of the Russian Federation in the identified ROI allowed us to discover and identify groups of regions with common features, i.e. in which Russia pursues similar goals. The resulting hierarchy of clusters (dendrogram of nested clusters) was checked for correctness (integrity, quality of grouping). For this purpose, the cophenetic distance was calculated. To determine the optimal number of clusters of ROI, two formalized algorithms—Elbow Method and Silhouette Method—were applied, and based on the results, after qualitative cluster analysis, the number of clusters was finally selected for further study. This selection enabled us to obtain a clearer characterization of the homogeneity of clusters.

2.3. Index method

The index method is applied to the social sciences, mainly economics.[54] It was used to examine Russia's activity in each highlighted cluster of ROI in terms of identified goals and instruments of influence, as well as the importance of the RF of specific groups of goals in different clusters.

The algorithm for creating indexes to analyze Russian activity in ROI and relevant clusters was as follows:

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[53]   A. Batinti, J. Kopstein, "Is Russia Really a Normal Country? A Numerical Taxonomy of Russia in Comparative Perspective," *Constitutional Political Economy*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2022), pp. 217-232.

[54]   В. Андрієнко, Статистичні індекси в економічних дослідженнях, Київ [V. Andriеnko, *Statistični indeksi v ekonomičnih doslidžennâh*, Kiїv] 2004; B. Yuskiv, N. Karpchuk, "Linguistic Landscape and the Monolithic Nature of the EU," *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2021), pp. 641-676.

1) Initial data marked.

The study included m clusters ($j=\overline{1, m}$). Each cluster is in turn formed by l_j objects (SOI), i.e. $l_1, l_2, ..., l_m$ regions of influence in 1, 2, ... m clusters, respectively.

The target structure is made up of n groups of targets ($i=\overline{1, n}$). Each object is characterized by the same type of target structure. In turn, each group of targets is formed by k_i specific objectives, i.e. $k_1, k_2, ..., k_n$ objectives respectively 1, 2, ... n group of objectives.

To analyze the activity of clusters with similar structures, it is necessary to take into account information about the structure of the phenomenon under consideration at each site. These figures form a matrix:

$$
[v_{jl}^{ik}] =
\begin{bmatrix}
v_{11m}^{11n} & v_{12m}^{11n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{1l_m}^{11n} & v_{21m}^{11n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{ml_m}^{11n} \\
v_{11m}^{12n} & v_{12m}^{12n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{1l_m}^{12n} & v_{21m}^{12n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{ml_m}^{12n} \\
\cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} \\
v_{11m}^{1k_1} & v_{12m}^{1k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{1l_m}^{1k_1} & v_{21m}^{1k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{ml_m}^{1k_1} \\
v_{11m}^{21n} & v_{12m}^{21n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{1l_m}^{21n} & v_{21m}^{21n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{ml_m}^{21n} \\
\cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} \\
v_{11m}^{nk_n} & v_{12m}^{nk_n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{1l_m}^{nk_n} & v_{21m}^{nk_n} & \cdots_{1m}^{k_1} & v_{ml_m}^{nk_n}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

whereby v_{jl}^{ik} denotes presence (equals 1)/absence (equals 0) in the l-regions of influence j-cluster k-target i-group. Each column of the matrix represents the target structure under study in one of the sites.

2) A rating was calculated for the degree of RF activity in l-regions of influence (object) j-cluster using three indices with the following formulas:

– RF activity index in l-regions of influence in the j-cluster and concerning i-group of targets

$$
I_{i,jl}^{s} = \sum_{k} v_{jl}^{ik} , (i = \overline{1, n}, \; j = \overline{1, m}, \; l = \overline{1, l_j})
$$

– index of average RF activity in l-regions of influence in j-cluster for all target groups

$$
I_{jl}^{s} = \frac{\sum_{i} I_{i,jl}^{s}}{n}, \quad (j = \overline{1, m}, \; l = \overline{1, l_j})
$$

– Averaged RF activity index across all clusters for all target groups

$$
I^{s} = \frac{\sum_{jl} I_{jl}^{s}}{\sum_{j} l_j}
$$

3) We calculated the evaluation of RF activity in the clusters according to three similar indices. To calculate these indexes, go to the simplified matrix:

$$
[w_j^{ik}] =
\begin{bmatrix}
w_{1m}^{11n} & w_{2m}^{11n} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & w_{mm}^{11n} \\
w_{1m}^{12n} & w_{2m}^{12n} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & w_{mm}^{12n} \\
\cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} \\
w_{1m}^{1k_1} & w_{2m}^{1k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & w_{mm}^{1k_1} \\
w_{1m}^{21_1} & w_{2m}^{21_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & w_{mm}^{21_1} \\
\cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} \\
w_{1m}^{nk_n} & w_{2m}^{nk_n} & \cdots _{1m}^{k_1} & w_{mm}^{nk_n}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

in which v_j^{ik}-share (%) of the regions of influence in the j-cluster in which the Russian Federation intends to achieve the k-target i-cluster. We calculate it as

$$
w_j^{ik} = \frac{\sum_l v_{jl}^{ik}}{l_j}
$$

The elements of the matrix satisfy the following condition

$$
0 \leq w_j^{ik} \leq 1
$$

Equality v_j^{ik} zero means that the regions of influence of this j-cluster are not related to k-goal -i goal cluster, while equality of 1 means that in all regions of influence belonging to the -cluster the j-cluster the Russian Federation is pursuing this goal.

Then, based on a simplified matrix, we calculate indicators:
– RF activity index in the i-cluster with i-group of targets

$$
I_{ij}^c = \sum_k w_j^{ik}, \quad (i = \overline{1,n}, j = \overline{1,m})
$$

– index of average RF activity in the j-cluster for all target groups

$$
I_j^c = \frac{\sum_i I_{ij}^c}{n}, \quad (j = \overline{1,m})
$$

– Averaged RF activity index across all clusters for all target groups

$$
I^c = \frac{\sum_i I_j^c}{m}
$$

The indices can be interpreted as follows: (1) a zero index value means zero activity, (2) a higher index value corresponds to more activity, (3) the greater the difference between the index values of two regions/clusters, the more the RF activities in them differ.

All the steps described were implemented in the R—programming language for statistical computing and data visualization—using for:
- clustering process—hclust() function,
- display dendrogram—plot() function from cluster package,
- calculation of the cophenetic distance—cophenetic() function from the stats package,
- graphical evaluation of the optimal number of clusters—fviz_nbclust() function from the factoextra package,
- comparative evaluation of groups—compareGroups()function from compareGroups package,
- getting data for drawing maps with the help of ggplot()—a function from the maptools package.

RESULTS

1. Regions of influence of the Russian Federation in foreign policy in 2014-2021

Qualitative secondary data analysis identified:
- Eleven ROI of the Russian Federation (Baltic States [BS], Visegrad countries [VC], Western and Southern Europe without the Balkans [WES], Northern Europe without the Baltics [NE], Post-Soviet Area—the Commonwealth of Independent States [PSR], Indo-Pacific countries [IPS], the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States [LAC], Middle East and North African countries [MENA], Central and Southern African countries [CSA], Western Balkans [WB], North America [NA]);
- Five main objectives (political, diplomatic, commercial/business, military, information);
- Ten strategic goals linked to the main objectives (1. Strengthen the political potential of the Russian Federation in the world. 2. Weakening the potential of the West, including the U.S., EU and NATO. 3. Building and strengthening the military potential of the Russian Federation. 4. Securing a deep strategic military presence in the regions. 5. Trade and economic cooperation within the framework of bilateral agreements, alliances, and multipolar groups. 6. Strengthening the Russian Federation's sovereignty over natural resources. 7. The Russian Federation as a strategic partner for political stability and world peace. 9. Increasing Russian influence to counter the West. 9. Creation of the Russian Federation's information base in the regions. 10. Promotion of Russian culture and language);
- 47 activities (instruments of influence) linked to the main and strategic goals for the regions of influence.

The assignment of specific strategic goals and instruments of influence to specific ROI enabled to creation of a matrix of RF goals and activities in the ROI (Supplemental material, Table 2), providing the basis for detailed computer statistical analyses in the next stage.

As the analysis shows, Russia actively pursued its foreign policy around the world in 2014-2021. Its field of influence included countries that can be grouped into ROI (Table 1). A geographical map of the ROI is illustrated in Figure 1.
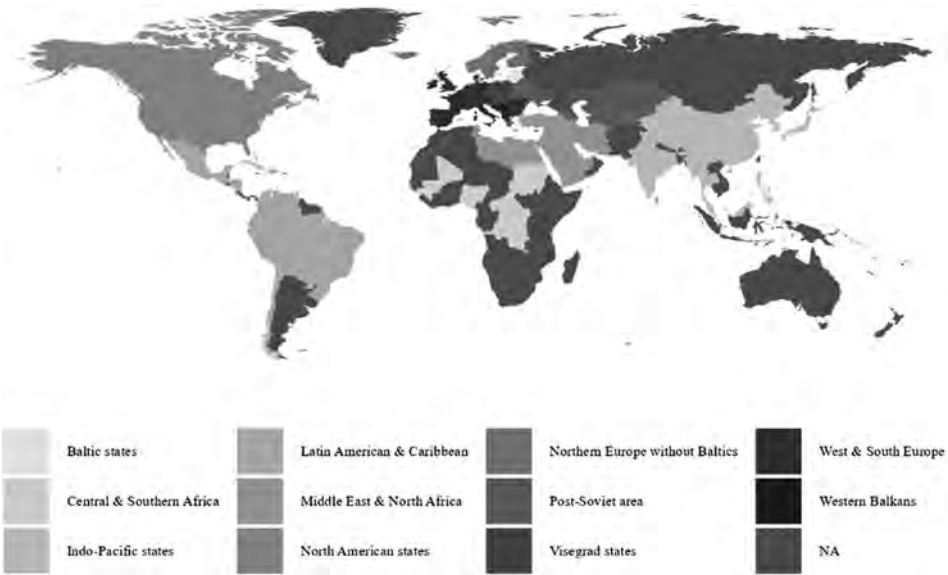
Table 1. The regions of influence groups and countries

Regions of Influence	Countries
Baltic states (BS)	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
Central and Southern African States (CSA)	Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan
Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (LAC)	Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela
Indo-Pacific states (IPS)	China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, North Korea, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand
Middle East and North African states (MENA)	Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
North American States (NA)	US, Canada
Northern Europe states without the Baltics (NE)	Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
Post-Soviet area—Commonwealth of Independent States (PSA)	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan
Western Balkans states (WB)	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
Western and Southern European states without the Western Balkans (WSE)	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, UK
Visegrad states (VS)	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia

Analyzing the goals and instruments of influence of the Russian Federation in 2014-2021, it can be seen that the strategy of affecting individual countries is multifaceted. Russia's main strategic goals covered virtually all major areas of state functioning, such as politics, military, economy, diplomacy, and information. This shows that Russia sought to influence the international scene through a multilateral approach. There were strategic goals (*Strengthening the political potential of the Russian Federation in the world*), which were pursued only in certain zones using instruments of influence, which consisted of stoking tensions, and ethnic, cultural, and political conflicts

in other countries (VC, PSR, LAC, CSA, WB, and NA). This was intended to weaken the unity of states and international organizations.

Figure 1. The regions of influence of the Russian Federations on the world map

Baltic states	Latin American & Caribbean	Northern Europe without Baltics	West & South Europe
Central & Southern Africa	Middle East & North Africa	Post-Soviet area	Western Balkans
Indo-Pacific states	North American states	Visegrad states	NA

Several strategic objectives (*Weakening the potential of the West, including the US, the EU, and NATO, Increasing Russian influence to counter the West, and Building and strengthening the military capabilities of the Russian Federation*) were aimed to strengthen Russia's position as a global power by weakening its main competitors and at the same time building up its own strength. This indicates that Russia has striven to reduce the influence of these actors in the international arena and has pursued these goals only in certain regions and/or countries belonging to them. The goals and instruments of influence are interrelated. For example, in the information field, Russia can use propaganda to support political and military influence objectives.

2.   Groups of ROI with common features, where Russia pursued similar goals

The results of the clustering analysis of the ROI clearly show the overall hierarchical structure of the clusters divided into four groups (Figure 2).

Cluster 1 [BORDER SECURITY—BS] includes the Baltic States, Visegrad countries, and Northern Europe. It includes countries neighboring and historically linked to Russia. Thus, Russia sought to maintain its traditional ties and secure its western borders. This had geopolitical significance in the context of Russia's relations with NATO and the European Union. **Cluster 2 [ECONOMIC-HISTORIC TIES—EHT]** includes the countries of Western and Southern Europe and the former post-Soviet area.

Key political, economic, and cultural centers for Russia's interests are located there. The post-Soviet area, the so-called Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, is an important sphere of Russian interests due to historical and economic ties. In **Cluster 3 [EASTERN MARKETS—EM],** Russia has engaged in relations with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, Latin America and the Middle East, and Central and Southern Africa. Russia has striven to expand its influence in areas of growing global importance and has sought to increase its global reach and activity. **Cluster** 4 **[DIALOGUE WITH NORTH AMERICA—DNA]** includes the countries of North America (mainly the United States). This is an area of great global importance, in which Russia has competed with the West in various spheres due to the importance of these countries in the international arena, including economic and military-political. This relationship is crucial to geopolitical balance and global issues.

Figure 2. Cluster dendrogram of the Russian regions of influence
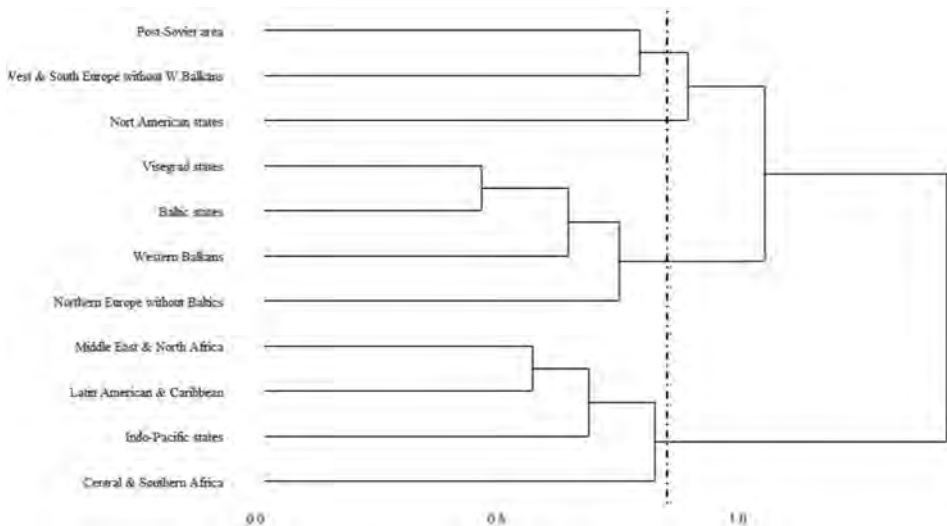
Note: The cophenetic distance of the obtained dendrogram is 0.8364612 (> 0.75), which is a satisfactory value according to generally accepted standards.

In turn, an analysis of the goals and instruments of influence of **the BS cluster (1)** reveals that there was a varied strategy of seeking influence in different areas to secure its borders. Important activities undertaken by the Russian Federation in the zones belonging to this cluster included interfering in the political processes of states, supporting Kremlin-friendly authorities, and stoking ethnic tensions. These actions not only strengthen Russia's control over its immediate neighborhood but also undermine the liberal international order by challenging NATO's cohesion and the EU's political unity, aligning with Moscow's broader strategy of reshaping global governance.

In the information sphere, Russia sought to disseminate anti-liberal and anti-Western messages and the presence of news agencies in these zones, and supported pro-Russian media. In

contrast, activities related to trade cooperation, minimizing U.S. influence, and promoting Russian culture seem less important in this cluster. Russia has directed its activities toward increasing its influence through high activity in the political and information areas.

An analysis of **EHT Cluster (2)** reveals that the main goals and instruments of influence in the cluster's zones have mainly focused on undermining the West's potential by shattering unity within the EU, undermining confidence in EU institutions, and blocking efforts to expand NATO. This is important because this cluster includes countries economically (Western Europe) and historically (post-Soviet area) linked to Russia. The development of military capabilities and rapid response capabilities in the regions of this cluster are also priorities for Russia. Diplomatic goals are relevant in this cluster. Russia has sought to be seen as a stabilization partner by promoting peace, being a security leader, and helping refugees. Information goals also played an important role, where Russia strove to establish a strong database through the presence of news agencies and Internet portals, and promoted its culture and perception as a leader among Slavic nations. In the regions of influence belonging to Cluster 2, Russia pursued to consolidate its influence through activities that highlighted its role and importance in the global geopolitical landscape.

EM Cluster (3) also shows a clear desire to weaken the influence of the West by restricting Western states, stoking anti-Western sentiment, and creating counterbalances in the form of new power centers. The military area is closely linked to military capacity building and arms exports, including the use of private military companies. In the commercial and business regions, energy commodity sales and Russian economic initiatives have been important, but certain targets, such as railroad infrastructure and access to airspace, appear to be less significant. Diplomacy focused on promoting Russia as a partner for stability, conflict resolution, and advocacy at the UN, although refugee assistance was less important. In the information area, anti-liberal and anti-Western messages were less important than promoting Russian culture and language. Overall, Russia's strategy in this cluster was aimed at bolstering its influence through various areas of action, with an emphasis on certain goals that appear to be priorities in implementing the country's global strategy.

An analysis of **DNA Cluster (4)** shows that Russia has placed a robust emphasis in the ROI belonging to this cluster on strengthening political influence through interference in political processes and elections, and securing military capabilities by countering the increase of Western troops. In the area of diplomacy, Russia has sought to be seen as a state that promotes peace and stability and supports conflict resolution. Some goals, such as supporting Russian culture and language, and Russian media, seem to have less importance in the cluster. Russia has therefore striven to reinforce its positions through political, military-strategic, and diplomatic actions, emphasizing its role as a stabilizer and a leader in a peaceful conflict resolution.

3. Russia's activity in ROI due to strategic goals

After identifying the ROI, evaluating them in terms of their goals, and clustering them into clusters, the activity of both the ROI and the clusters was evaluated in terms of the importance of the goals. To calculate the activity indices, the data in Table 2

(Supplemental material) was used as input. First, an analysis of Russia's activity in the identified ROI was calculated, and then the regions were ranked in terms of the importance of their designated goals. Table 3 (Supplemental material) shows the values of the indices for the different ROI and for each group of goals.

Figure 3. Visual representation of clusters of Russian ROI on the world map
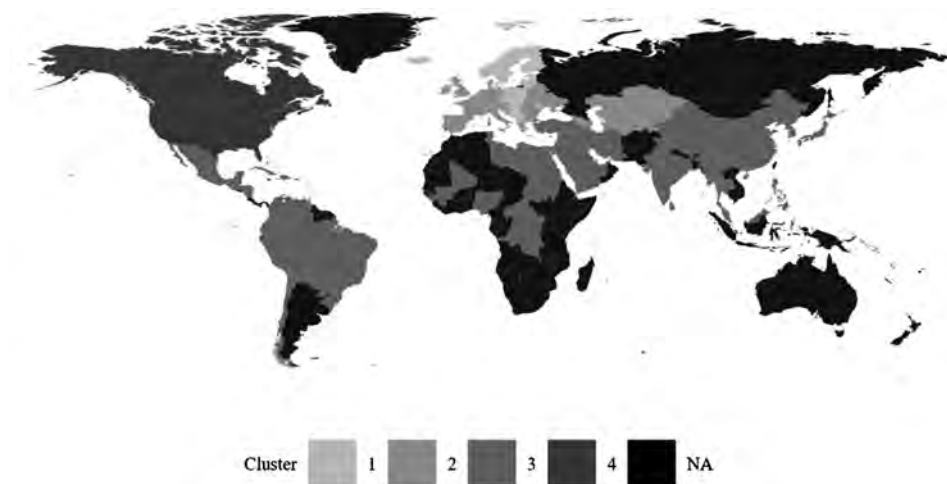
The analysis showed that the activity of the Russian Federation due to the realization of specific strategic goals in the different ROI also varies. For the group of **political goals**, the highest activity indexes are held by the WB, VC, and BS regions. Thus, these are countries that, on the one hand, share strong historical and political ties with the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, most of the countries in these zones were the youngest to become members of the EU and NATO. Conversely, the lowest activity indexes for the political goals group have the IPS, MENA, and NA regions.

In contrast, for diplomatic purposes, the activity of the Russian Federation in the MENA zone (Middle East and North African states) and the PSR (Post-Soviet area — Commonwealth of Independent States) stands out strongly. In the case of the WSE (Western and Southern Europe states without the Western Balkans) and LAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) zones, the activity indexes are slightly above average, indicating that these zones also play an important role from the point of view of achieving diplomatic goals.

On the other hand, the MENA regions, CSA, and IPS have the highest indexes for the **military target** group, while the other regions have low activity indexes, suggesting that they are not as important regions of influence in the area.

For **trade/business purposes,** RF activity in the CSA region stands out, being the highest (index 7.0). However, activity in the IPS, LAC, and MENA regions is above average, which indicates that these regions are also important to the Russian Federation in terms of trade and economic cooperation.

For the group of **information targets**, the BS region, the CSA, and WB have the highest activity index, indicating the importance of this ROI in the Russian Federation's information activities.

The calculation of activity indices also made it possible to rank both regions of influence (Fig. 4) and clusters (Fig. 5) in terms of the importance of the targets set.

Figure 4. RF activity indexes and regions of influence ranking
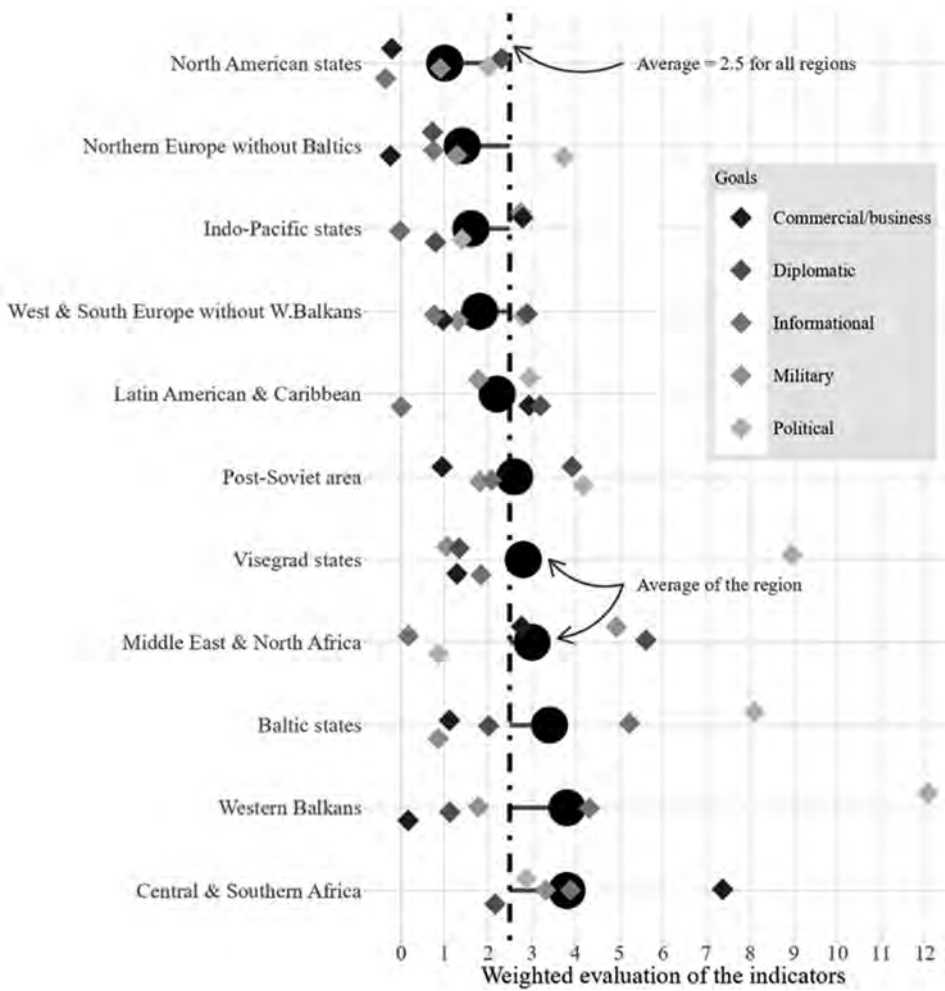
The difference in activity for each region about the target groups is very clear so the ranking of the region of influence according to the average index activity index is as follows:

[CSA—WB—BS—MENA—VS—PSA—LAC—WSE—IPS—NE].

The analysis confirmed that there is differentiated activity for specific groups of goals (Figure 5) with the possibility of identifying priority goals. Thus, for the CSA zone of influence, these are commercial/business and informational goals, for the WB region—political and informational goals, and for the BS region—political and informational goals. On the other hand, in the MENA zone, the highest activity is in the group of military and diplomatic goals, while in the VS region, it is in the group of political goals, and the PSA region for political and diplomatic goals. In contrast, the LAC region is heavily involved in commercial/business, diplomatic, and political aspects, while the IPS region is involved in military and commercial/business aspects. All of this underscores the complexity and diversity of activities in the region of influence, where different regions make unique contributions to different groups of strategic objectives.

We also assessed RF activity in each cluster using indices (Table 2).

Table 2. Matrix of RF activity indices in clusters

Code	Goals	Index I_{ij}^c				Average
		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
	Index $I_j^c(I^c)$	2,9	2,2	2,7	1,0	2,2
100	Political	8,3	3,5	2,0	2,0	4,0
200	Military	1,3	1,5	3,3	1,0	1,8
300	Commercial/Business	0,5	1,0	4,0	0,0	1,4
400	Diplomatic	1,3	3,5	3,0	2,0	2,5
500	Informative	3,0	1,5	1,0	0,0	1,4

If we consider specific strategic goals, it can be observed that Cluster 1 has the highest activity index for political goals (8.3), which means that in the ROI of this cluster, Russia is particularly focused on political goals. In contrast, Cluster 3 has the highest activity index of the Russian Federation for military purposes (3.3), with low activity in the other clusters for this purpose. Cluster 3 also has the highest index of Russian activity for trade/business purposes (4.0). The other clusters have index values much lower than the average index for this group of objectives, and Cluster 4's activity is zero. For the diplomatic purposes group, only Cluster 2 (3.5) and Cluster 3 (3.0) have indexes higher than the average index (2.5). Reversely, the highest index of RF activity for information purposes is observed for Cluster 1 (3.0), indicating that this cluster is the best fit for information purposes. Cluster 2 (1.5) has a slightly lower index but is higher than the average index, and Cluster 3 (1.0) and Cluster 4 (0.0) have the lowest activities.

Arranging clusters based on average activity indicators (Figure 5) allows us to identify those clusters that stand out for their high activity due to specific strategic goals.

Figure 5. Activity indexes and cluster ranking
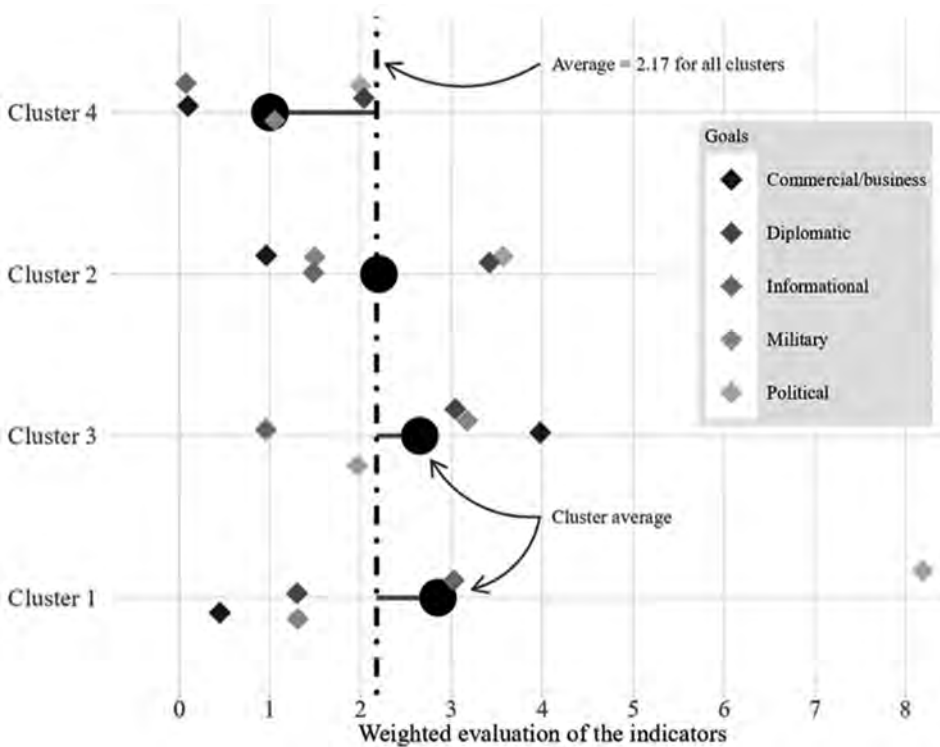
Cluster 1 is distinguished by high activity indexes for political and information purposes, while Cluster 3 performs best for trade/business and military purposes. Cluster 2 dominates in diplomatic and political activities, and Cluster 4 is characterized by low index values in all groups of objectives. Overall, the different clusters are more or less aligned with different categories of objectives, suggesting their specific roles in the context of representing Russian Federation activity.

DISCUSSION

The article aimed to comprehensively analyze the strategic goals of Russian foreign policy and instruments of influence from a global perspective in 2014-2021. The analysis shows that there are clear patterns in the way Russia pursues its strategic goals in different regions of the world. The results of the study make it possible to verify the research hypotheses and formulate the following conclusions:

- Concerning H1 the cluster analysis revealed the existence of four distinct groups of regions in which Russia pursues different priorities:

- Border Security (BS) cluster: focus on political and informational goals;
- Economic-Historic Ties (EHT) cluster: emphasis on diplomatic and political objectives;
- Eastern Markets (EM) cluster: dominance of commercial and military objectives;
- Dialogue with North America (DNA) cluster: limited activity focused on political objectives.

In the context of H2 the analysis found that in regions of strategic importance (e.g., CSA, WB, BS), Russia uses a broader and more diverse set of instruments. The intensity and diversity of activities are particularly evident in regions in competition with the West. The selection of instruments is finely tuned to the specifics of each region.

Referring to H3 the study confirmed that the highest activity rates were recorded in regions of key geopolitical importance. Activity intensity is particularly high in regions where Russia competes with the West. Regions of less strategic importance are characterized by lower activity rates.

The results of our research confirm earlier analyses indicating Russia's systematic pursuit of superpower status but additionally show how these goals are being pursued through diverse regional strategies.[55]

Clustering results confirm that Russian foreign policy reflected the geopolitical importance of continuation due to the similarity of regions of influence belonging to the same clusters. Russian foreign policy had a broad geopolitical scope, as reflected in its priority relations with certain regions, for example. Moreover, it also testifies to the building of alliances in different regions of the world (e.g., Eurasian, Latin American, African) to build and develop networks of cooperation directed at challenging the existing international order and the leadership role of the United States in the western hemisphere.

Russian foreign policy has different priorities in different regions of the world. The research confirmed that regions such as the Baltic Sea (BS), the Western Balkans (WB), and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) receive special attention from the Kremlin. This is due to their strategic importance. The BS and WB are regions associated with EU integration and NATO, which play a key role in the political counterbalance to the West. MENA, on the other hand, is the region's energy and military markets, which are crucial for the Russian economy. Thus, the geographic distribution of priorities is the result of Russia's desire to strengthen its position in regions where it competes with the West. By prioritizing regions such as the Baltic States or the Middle East, Russia seeks not only to maintain regional dominance but also to disrupt the existing international order. The identified clusters reveal how tactical activities within ROI align with strategic goals to challenge Western hegemony and advance a multipolar global structure.

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[55] R.E. Kanet, "Russian Strategic Culture and Renewed Conflict with the West," in R.E. Kanet, D. Moulioukova (eds), *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, London 2021, pp. 34-60; D. Moulioukova, R.E. Kanet, "The Battle of Ontological Narratives…".

On the other hand, an analysis of the strategic goals and instruments of influence in the various regions of influence revealed the hidden links between them and the differences in the activity of the Russian Federation with groups of goals and clusters. These issues are directly related to the evolution of the international order and Russia's efforts to undermine it so far. For example, in the case of the political target group, regions of influence such as the Western Balkans, the Baltic States, and the Visegrad countries have played a key role. These countries are linked primarily by the issue of integration into the EU and NATO, as the youngest members of both structures and associated countries (e.g., Kosovo—EU) are located here. Thus, our research confirms previous analyses of regional influence in terms of the Russian Federation's activity in these directions and its attempts to achieve its own goals in the Western Balkans,[56] the Baltic region,[57] and the Visegrad Group countries.[58]

In turn, ranking the regions of influence according to the average index activity index indicates which areas were most important to Russia. The high activity in regions such as CSA, WB, BS, and MENA may indicate that Russia placed great emphasis on those regions where it competed with the West (except WB), allowing it to appear as an important actor in the global balance of power.[59] Moreover, the CSA and MENA are important markets for energy resources and weapons,[60] two of the most important sectors of the Russian economy.

The reasons for the presented research results can be pursued by the evolution of the Russian Federation's foreign policy strategy and its adaptation to changing global conditions. Since Putin took power, the 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation' has changed five times (in 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016 and most recently in 2023). Importantly, the 2023 document clearly emphasizes the focus of foreign policy on specific directions, including rapprochement with countries in the Indo-Pacific region (mainly China and India) and MENA (mainly Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey), representing an important element of Russia's global foreign and security policy and an expression of its aspiration for a superpower position in the contemporary system of international relations. As our research shows, Russia has deliberately pursued its strategy, adapting the instruments of influence within specific targets to its own needs. The situation after the outbreak of open war with Ukraine showed

[56]   S. Secrieru, N. Popescu (eds), *Russia's Return to the Middle East: Building Sandcastles?*, Paris 2018.

[57]   R. Nilsson, *Revanchism – Russians – Justice: Foreign Policy Perceptions in Russia*, Copenhagen 2014, at https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/english/publications/revanchismrussians/, 15 September 2024.

[58]   J. Marušiak, "Russia and the Visegrad Group – More Than a Foreign Policy Issue," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 1-2 (2015), pp. 28-46.

[59]   R. Cerulli, *Russian Influence in the Middle East: Economics, Energy, and Soft Power*, 2019, at https://www.americansecurityproject.org/perspective-russian-influence-in-the-middle-east/, 12 September 2024; S. Ramani, "The Ukraine War and Russia's Africa Strategy," in S. Ramani, *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?*, Oxford 2023, pp. 293-320.

[60]   *Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia*, London 2017, at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-03-20-russia-arms-exporter-connolly-sendstad.pdf, 14 September 2024.

that such a strategy paid off for Russia, as some of the countries remaining in the region of influence not only did not condemn Russia's actions but also maintained or intensified economic cooperation with Russia.[61]

CONCLUSION

Russia's foreign policy for 2014-2021 demonstrates a systematic and differentiated approach to achieving global strategic goals, including the adaptation of influence tools to the specifics of each region of influence (ROI). The identification of four clusters of influence—Border Security (BS), Economic and Historical Ties (EHT), Eastern Markets (EM), and Dialogue with North America (DNA)—showed that Russia's greatest activity was observed in regions of high strategic importance, such as Central and Southern Africa, the Western Balkans, and the Baltic region. The use of a wide range of tools—from political to economic and informational—confirms Russia's desire to challenge Western dominance and build a multipolar world order. In doing so, the study contributes to a better understanding of Russia's role in shaping the current international order through its diverse activities in key regions of the world.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the division of countries around the world into two camps: anti-Russian and pro-Russian,[62] and it would be appropriate to analyze Russia's actions in the same regions in a similar way after 2022. In addition, there is a need for a more detailed analysis of the domestic factors that influence Russia's foreign policy, which is somewhat difficult for Western researchers due to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. There is a limited analysis of the interrelationships between Russia's various regions of influence, and there is a lack of research on the interrelationships between Russia's various instruments of influence in different regions. There is also a lack of in-depth analysis of the regional specifics and national interests of individual countries, as well as the views of Russia and other countries on the geopolitical situation.

There is also considerable potential for a deeper analysis of the internal factors influencing Russian foreign policy. The main claim of this article is that Russia's foreign policy actively integrates the concepts of international order and regions of influence as core frameworks to achieve its strategic objectives. While the analysis demonstrated the differentiation of Russian activity across various regions and clusters, it also highlighted the interconnectedness between the two categories. The regions of influence serve as operational zones where Russia executes its broader vision of reshaping the international order to align with its interests. Future research could expand on these findings by conducting comparative analyses of how the Russian strategy varies across

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[61]   J. Holder, L. Leatherby, A. Troianovski, W. Cai, "The West Tried to Isolate Russia: It Didn't Work," *The New York Times*, 23 February 2023, at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/23/world/russia-ukraine-geopolitics.html, 10 October 2024.

[62]   Ibid.

clusters of influence and examining the interplay between these two key categories in different geopolitical contexts. Additionally, exploring the reactions of other states to Russian policies could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of competition within the evolving international order. Finally, assessing the implications of Russian strategies for global security and stability would enrich our understanding of how regions of influence contribute to broader shifts in global governance. By integrating these perspectives, future studies can further elucidate the role of Russian foreign policy in shaping contemporary international relations.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Secondary data used in content analysis

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Table 2. Matrix of RF objectives and activities in the regions of influence

Code	Goals and instruments of influence	Region of influence										
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA
100	POLITICAL											
101	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Strengthen the political potential of the Russian Federation in the world											
101a	Interfering in the political processes of states, including the maintenance or elevation of Kremlin-friendly authorities	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
101b	Supporting ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking population	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
101c	Stirring up ethnic and social tensions	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
101d	Stoking cultural-religious divisions	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
101e	Engaging in local conflicts	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
101f	Interference in elections and referendums	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
101g	Creation or support of new pro-Russian structures, foundations, NGOs, and networks	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
102	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Weakening the potential of the West, including the U.S., EU and NATO											
102a	Shattering the unity in the EU	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
102b	Undermining confidence in the EU and EU institutions	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Code	Goals and instruments of influence	Region of influence										
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA
102c	Reducing the influence of Western countries, including the US	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
102d	Weakening NATO	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
102e	Blocking efforts to expand NATO and supporting NATO opponents	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
102f	Stoking anti-Western sentiment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
102g	Creation of new centers of power as a counterweight to the West	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
200	MILITARY											
201	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Building and strengthening the military potential of the Russian Federation											
201a	Development of military, intelligence, or police cooperation	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
201b	Russian arms exports	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
201c	Countering the increase of Western troops, including NATO, in the regions	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
202	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Secure a deep strategic military presence in the regions											
202a	Access to military bases as a rapid response capability and stabilization force	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
202b	Access to naval bases and maritime infrastructure	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0

Code	Goals and instruments of influence	Region of influence										
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA
202c	Access (real or planned) to air bases	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
202d	Russian Private Military Company operations in countries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
300	COMMERCIAL/BUSINESS											
301	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Trade and economic cooperation within the framework of bilateral agreements, alliances, and multipolar groups											
301a	Sales of energy raw materials	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
301b	Railroad infrastructure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
301c	Eurasian economic union	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
301d	Airspace access agreements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
301e	Russian bilateral intergovernmental commissions on mainly economic and trade relations	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
301f	Russian commercial entities involved in energy projects	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
301g	Business contracts for President Putin's close circle of associates	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
302	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Strengthening the Russian Federation's sovereignty over natural resources											
302a	Access to energy resources (gas, oil)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
302b	Mining of hydrocarbons, bauxite, diamonds	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Code	Goals and instruments of influence	Region of influence										
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA
302c	Acquiring new sources of financing for the energy and armaments sector, including in the field of nuclear technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
400	DIPLOMATIC											
401	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: The Russian Federation as a strategic partner for political stability and world peace											
401a	Working towards the perception of Russia as a peace-keeping state, a leader in security and stability	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
401b	Promote conflict resolution and contribute to joint efforts to combat terrorism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
401c	Helping refugees	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
402	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Increasing Russian influence to counter the West											
402a	Use existing relationships to maintain stable governments in countries and counter regime change	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
402b	Minimize U.S. influence and intervention in the regions	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
402c	Gaining the support of countries at the UN for its initiatives	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
402d	Weakening "Russophobic sentiment" in the world	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Code	Goals and instruments of influence	Region of influence										
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA
402e	Perception of Russia as a Slavic brother and community member in Orthodoxy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
500	INFORMATIONAL											
501	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Creation of the Russian Federation's information base in the regions											
501a	Spreading or supporting anti-liberal and anti-Western (anti-EU, anti-NATO) messages	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
501b	Own radio station, newspaper with wide coverage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
501c	Presence of Russian news agencies, Internet portals	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
501d	Supporting pro-Russian media in the countries of the zone	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
501e	Media and communications technology agreement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
501f	Print media registration, radio in Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
502	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Promotion of Russian culture and language											
502a	Promotion of Russian culture	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
502b	Promotion of the Russian language, including under contracts	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total		17	14	9	7	13	8	11	15	18	19	5

Table 3. Matrix of RF activity indices in ROI

Code	Goals	Index in the ROI											Average
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA	
100	POLITICAL	8	9	3	4	4	1	3	1	3	12	2	4,5
101	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Strengthen the political potential of the Russian Federation in the world	4	5	1	2	2	0	1	0	1	7	2	2,3
102	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Weakening the potential of the West, including the U.S., EU and NATO	4	4	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	5	0	2,3
200	MILITARY	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	5	3	2	1	2,0
201	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Building and strengthening the military potential of the Russian Federation	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1,2
202	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Secure a deep strategic military presence in the regions	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	3	1	1	0	0,8
300	COMMERCIAL/BUSINESS	1	1	1	0	1	3	3	3	7	0	0	1,8
301	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Trade and economic cooperation within the framework of bilateral agreements, alliances, and multipolar groups	1	1	1	0	1	3	2	2	5	0	0	1,5
302	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Strengthening the Russian Federation's sovereignty over natural resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0,4

Code	Goals	Index in the ROI											Average
		BS	VC	WSE	NE	PSR	IPS	LAC	MENA	CSA	WB	NA	
400	DIPLOMATIC	2	1	3	1	4	1	3	6	2	1	2	2,4
401	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: The Russian Federation as a strategic partner for political stability and world peace	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	1	0	2	0,8
402	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Increasing Russian influence to counter the West	2	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	0	1,5
500	INFORMATIONAL	5	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	4	4	0	1,7
501	STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Creation of the Russian Federation's information base in the regions	3	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	3	4	0	1,5
502	STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Promotion of Russian culture and language	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0,3
	Index $I_{fi}(F)$	3,4	2,8	1,8	1,4	2,6	1,6	2,2	3,0	3,8	3,8	1,0	2,5

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