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**Wars of the Future:  
Implications for the Reform of the Russian Armed Forces**

**By**

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## **Wars of the Future: Implications for the Reform of the Russian Armed Forces**

Debates in Russia on the reform of the Armed Forces have an important conceptual component: identifying the nature and types of Russia's future military operations. Views on the "wars of the future" differ considerably and depend on the ideological preferences of their proponents. By and large, they are intended to substantiate specific structural changes and/or modernization programs benefiting distinct interest groups within the military-political establishment.

Russia's senior-most military officials have been active in this debate. At the annual conference of the Academy of Military Sciences dedicated to "contemporary problems of troop command" held on January 24, 2004 in Moscow, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov criticized the General Staff and research and scientific institutions of the Defense Ministry for "looking at conflicts of the future exclusively through the prism of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya" while at the same time "attributing unacceptably low priority to the study of contemporary conflicts and wars, including Soviet and American experiences in Afghanistan, NATO's operation in Yugoslavia, and two wars in Iraq". The Defense Minister declared that "the Russian armed forces and military command bodies should be ready to participate in any type of military conflict" and not just local Chechen-type insurgencies. He called for the reform of the command and control system to make it "maximally flexible and capable of reacting to any threats to Russia's military security."<sup>1</sup>

The mouthpiece of the Defense Ministry, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, supported Sergei Ivanov's January 24 statement by publishing articles lending credibility and substance to his assertions. In a January 28, 2004 article entitled "Globalization Calls for Force", military analysts Aleksei Podberezkin and Yurii Lebedev elaborated on Ivanov's idea about the versatile nature of potential challenges to Russian security. In their view, at the root of these challenges is "the expansion of the military presence of the U.S. and other states in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq as well as Southern Caucasus and Central Asia that leads to changes in the geopolitical situation and weakening of Russian influence..." The *Krasnaya Zvezda* analysts concluded that Russia needs to "take a new look at the place and role of military policy and military instruments in defending national interests", e.g. military power should be used to promote not only security but also Russia's economic interests.

This evolving threat assessment sees the danger posed by the United States in new terms. In a widely held view expressed by Colonel-General Makhmud Gareev, President of the Academy of Military Sciences:

First and foremost we see that a global nuclear war and large-scale war in general are becoming less and less likely. This is not only owing to the catastrophic consequences of such a war or because someone repealed such wars of his own will. It is simply that other insidious and rather effective forms of international conflict have been found, whereby it is

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<sup>1</sup> Vadim Solovyev, "Sergei Ivanov Brings Anatolii Kvashnin to Reason," *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 23 January 2004.

possible, through unleashing localized wars and conflicts, through the use of economic and financial sanctions, political, diplomatic, informational and psychological pressure, and various types of subversive actions to subjugate and bring rebellious countries into a common world order without resorting to a major war.<sup>2</sup>

The official Russian elite and important segments of the expert community remain fundamentally in doubt as to the irreversibility of the confrontational model of relations with the United States. Admittedly, statements and modest steps in favor of reducing the adversarial component in these relations and even promoting bilateral partnership continue to come out of Moscow on a regular basis. However, in a parallel development, calls for vigilance and expressions of concerns over the direction of bilateral relations are becoming increasingly frequent and urgent.

A typical example may be found in a recent article by the First Deputy Commander of the General Staff Colonel-General Yurii Baluevskii featured in the March 2004 issue of the PIR Center's *Voprosy Bezopasnosti* bulletin. On the one hand, General Baluevskii argues that "today, we should start talking about abandoning the nuclear deterrence concept in Russian-U.S. relations". However, on the other hand, he immediately questions the possibility of "realistically abandoning this [mutual nuclear deterrence] concept... since the fear of nuclear weapons... may only be eliminated together with nuclear weapons themselves." The First Deputy Commander of the General Staff ends his line of reasoning with a call for maintaining the Russian nuclear deterrence capability "since today we witness the revival of the nuclear factor in global politics... including U.S. attempts... to legitimize different ways to use tactical nuclear weapons... This also includes attempts by North Korea to blackmail the international community... with its potential ability to produce nuclear weapons."<sup>3</sup>

Continued U.S. military activities in regions adjacent to Russia, and NATO's eastward expansion add to Russian unease. In effect, On March 31, 2004, on the eve of the formal inclusion of several new members into NATO including the three Baltic countries, the Russian State Duma adopted a proposal "to reconsider the expediency of Russia's participation in international treaties on conventional weapons and expand its nuclear potential if NATO fails to take into account our concern."<sup>4</sup>

Uncertainties about relations with the U.S. and NATO are reflected in Russian discussions of the roles to be played by Russia's nuclear capabilities. An illustrative clash of opinions has recently been presented by the leading military weekly *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*. Two articles, one by former deputy head of the State Duma Defense Committee, currently head of the Center of International Security of the Academy of

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<sup>2</sup> Makhmut Gareyev, "The Command and Control System - It Must Be Improved Taking The New Defense Missions and Changes in the Character of Future Wars Into Account". Presentation to the Russian Academy of Military Sciences on the Role of Policy in Military Command and Control Decision-Making, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyyi Kurier*, 28 January 2004. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040128000443].

<sup>3</sup> Yurii Baluevskii, "Nuclear Deterrence and Reduction of Strategic Offensive Potentials," *Voprosy Bezopasnosti*, No 2 (146), March 2004.

<sup>4</sup> "State Duma proposes Increasing Nuclear Potential in Connection with NATO Expansion," *Lenta.ru*, March 31, 2004.

Sciences Institute of World Economy and International Relations Aleksei Arbatov, and the other by independent military analyst Sergei Kremlev discuss these perspectives. While Dr. Arbatov argues that nuclear deterrence and WMD proliferation are closely linked together, and that the U.S. and Russia should act jointly in response to proliferation dangers<sup>5</sup>, Mr. Kremlev refuses to “look at Russian problems through the prism of problems others have.” In his view, WMD proliferation concerns primarily the U.S.: “The acquisition by certain ‘threshold’ countries of the nuclear status would undermine U.S. global ambitions. For Russia, such a development could be even indirectly beneficial (e.g. nuclear weapons in Latin America).”<sup>6</sup>

Sergei Kremlev categorically rejects Aleksei Arbatov’s claim that Russia and the U.S. are “partners and not enemies”, and asserted that Russia needs a survivable nuclear deterrent specifically to provide assured retaliation in the event of a U.S. first strike. In effect, the preservation of this second-strike capability is the optimal Russian “deterrence answer” according to Mr. Kremlev.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, the ambiguity of potential threats to Russian security complicates elaboration of consistent strategy. As noted in the report “Military Construction and Modernization of the Armed Forces of Russia” of the prestigious Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, “The spectrum of challenges to Russian military security is growing and the uncertainty is increasing. This is primarily linked to: instability in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East; proliferation of WMD; and the growth of religious and political extremism including extremist terrorism.”<sup>8</sup> Many experts note that “the main peculiarity of future wars is that the enemy is not evident. This is particularly clear with respect to international terrorism.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to uncertainty about the quarters from which threats to Russia may arise, there is increasing Russian discussion about how such conflicts may be waged. Many experts qualify wars where the enemy is distant as “wars without contact”. According to a leading proponent of the “wars-without-contact” theory Professor Vladimir Slipchenko,

It is now clear that... the majority of [future wars] will be waged by non-contact means, the evidence for which is in the last six wars waged by the United States with the participation of other countries... This new generation of wars differs sharply in that they are waged without the ground military operations on which Russia’s Armed Forces have placed their basic stakes. Already now and in the future a ground enemy with numerous front-line and army infantry groupings will not come to us. Non-contact wars are waged in a new way by basically inflicting precision

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<sup>5</sup> Aleksei Arbatov, “Subtle Political Instrument,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 12 May 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Sergei Kremlev, “Response Strike Should Be Inexorable,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 9 April 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A.G. Arbatov, V.Z. Dvorkin and V.V. Shlykov, *Military Construction and Modernization of the Armed Forces of Russia*, Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, 30 March 2004.  
<<http://www.svop.ru/upload/contents/364/1%20zip.doc>>

<sup>9</sup> Alexei Alexandrov, “What Will Wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Look Like?,” *Rossiiskie Vesti*, No. 44, 26 December 26, 2001, p. 7.

strikes from afar through air and space, which in fact become the theater of military operations. Such a war is reduced to delivering massive strikes on the economy of the country being subjected to aggression. And it is this that is the most important potential danger for Russia.<sup>10</sup>

Lagging behind in the fielding of advanced weapon systems necessary for “non-contact” warfare is regarded as a progressively mounting danger for Russian security under any scenario:

Independent analysts predict many technological advances in the military-technical sector. The matter will go beyond the rivalry between missile and anti-missile technologies... Geophysical, electromagnetic, and radiological weapons and development of laser and high-precision weapons can change the whole strategy of security and erase the differentiation between the front and the rear, civilian population and the armed forces.<sup>11</sup>

Looking further ahead, some experts visualize application of totally new exotic means of warfare. According to biological warfare expert Yurii Bobylev:

The international community enters a new stage of sharpening economic and particularly ecological contradictions... In the next few decades, the developing superpowers will be confronted with expiration of natural resources. Ahead lie many covert and overt military actions on the redistribution of available natural resources... and a series of preventive large-scale military actions involving the use of mass destruction weapons. The new strategic peculiarity is the necessity of waging “genocidal wars” geared not to the destruction of military forces and weapons but excessive populations of the potential enemy...” New biological weapons that obliterate specific populations using genetic materials... “Clean MDW”... Possible targets of “genetic bombing” are the Arabs and the Chinese.<sup>12</sup>

Recommendations for overcoming existing deficiencies in Russia’s capabilities to wage such wars abound. Some of them, following the well-known Soviet tradition, emphasize structural changes in the Armed Forces including at the top command levels, in the belief that more effective command will assure success on any battlefield. In effect, proposals for such changes are often being driven primarily by personal rivalries and institutional competitiveness within the ruling hierarchy.

For example, it has been rumored in Moscow that Sergei Ivanov’s criticism of the General Staff for its inability “to keep up with the changing character of contemporary warfare” is in effect intended to undermine the ambitions of Commander of the General Staff Anatolii Kvashnin. Some experts believe that in the sweeping administrative reform coinciding with the beginning of the second term in office for Mr. Putin, Defense Minister

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<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Slipchenko, “The Strategic Content of The State’s Military Reform (A Prognostic View),” *Vooruzheniye. Politika. Konversiya*, 7 July 2003. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20031229000123].

<sup>11</sup> Alexandrov.

<sup>12</sup> Yurii Bobylev, “Genetic Weapons Will Turn the Kingdom of Terror Into Politically Expedient Instrument,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 5 March 2004.

Sergei Ivanov acquired uncontested authority on military matters. Such authority would allow him to finally implement his plan of separating the functions of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff. Some argue that the expected reduction of financial, administrative and supply functions of the General Staff may eventually result in the “disappearance” of that body.<sup>13</sup>

Intense debates continue on adapting the structure of the Armed Forces to new challenges and types of warfare. Russian “modernists”, particularly those keen on emulating U.S. and NATO experience, call for major overhaul of the “static” system of military districts in favor of a flexible system of special commands appropriate for highly mobile operations with the use of advanced weaponry. A characteristic recommendation is presented in the report of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy:

The archaic structure of the Armed Forces remains in place and the General Staff intends to oversee the entire planning and commanding processes while refusing to delegate its functions and responsibilities to other structures. This is why we practically do not have generals and senior officers that can command joint groupings in conflicts of the Iraq war type... In this connection there is no reason for further delays with the creation of the joint rapid deployment force command.<sup>14</sup>

The “traditionalists” essentially reject such innovations calling them “blind copycatting” of foreign experience which is inapplicable to prevailing Russian conditions:

It is not possible to have a military command and control system that is abstract and suitable for all situations in life... In recent times certain politicians and journalists, not grasping the essence of the matter, have sounded the alarm with regard to the fact that the Americans are creating integrated theater-level commands, and we are still holding on to the districts and are lagging behind with regard to this innovation. But the whole matter boils down to the substantive differences between the ways in which the American Armed Services and the Russian Armed Forces have to accomplish their strategic missions... The primary mission of the Russian Armed Forces is associated with defending the territory of our country, and we... do not intend to deploy groupings of troops to the ends of the Earth. And our operational and strategic commands are structured in such a way that they will be able to consolidate into their own hands the forces and resources of the various branches of the Armed Forces and all of the other departments intended for operations in their corresponding strategic sectors. In any event, as things stand in Russia there is no need to create commander-in-chief’s directorates in the various sectors as an intermediate echelon between the Supreme High Command Headquarters and the fronts.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Mukhin, “Sergei Ivanov Goes Against Fradkov,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 9 April 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Arbatov, Dvorkin and Shlykov.

<sup>15</sup> Gareyev.

Serious discussions have also begun on the nature of aerospace missions in warfare. U.S. and NATO experience again serves as a prime-mover in these discussions. In the rapidly growing expert opinion:

The role of the Air Force in all [future] conflicts will remain dominating... NATO's air and space operation in Yugoslavia determined the result of the conflict in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The operation in Afghanistan showed that domination in the air is a decisive factor of success on the ground. Domination in the air and space has become the main condition of success in the war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This concerns both global and local conflicts. It is the Air Force that has paved the path for the task force and peacekeepers in Iraq, the Balkans, and Nhechnya.<sup>16</sup>

The most radical champions of building up the Russia's offensive and defensive aerospace capabilities suggest eliminating the Ground Troops altogether, e.g. by merging them with the Internal and Border Troops to perform purely internal police/security functions and patrol the country's borders. Explains Vladimir Slipchenko:

The most important priority of our state's military reform must be the reliable air defense of our economic potential and economic infrastructure, which must be transformed into an all-state strategic aerospace (anti-missile, anti-space, and anti-cruise-missile simultaneously) precision defense. The confrontation of strike and defensive systems is moving from medium and high altitudes where manned aviation operates to aerospace far beyond the limits of the state borders. It is necessary to destroy the aggressor's air and naval delivery systems before the point at which they launch their precision cruise missiles. It is essential to confront the enemy in near-earth space, where space and aerospace strike systems, precision ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers with conventional explosives will operate, and at maximally low altitudes, where air-launched and sea-based precision cruise missiles which have already broken through will be working. The country's air defenses (PVO) must include simultaneously anti-aircraft, anti-space, anti-missile, and anti-cruise-missile defenses... The new military dangers of the future cause the need in the course of state military reform to create a space grouping composed of several hundred satellites for various purposes by no later than 2015; without this Russia will simply be left in the past generation of wars with all the ensuing consequences. The non-contact wars of the future will require increasing the abilities of space missile-attack (cruise-missile) warning systems, space monitoring systems, reliable communications, the uninterrupted acquisition of various types of intelligence information (radio, television, optical, infrared, photographic, etc), meteorological and geodesic information, etc.<sup>17</sup>

The push towards creating a robust Air- and Space-Defense System [*Vozdushno-Kosmicheskaya Oborona– VKO*] is mounting as may be seen in the proceedings of the

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<sup>16</sup> Alexandrov, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Slipchenko.

roundtable discussion of the Extra-Departmental Expert Council for the Problems of VKO held in Moscow on 18 February 2004.<sup>18</sup> Participants in the event called for “stepped-up work on advanced technologies, including in the areas of hypersonic and Stealth technologies, the modular principle in design, and the utilization of the latest achievements of on-board electronics” [from the report *Development Trends in the Offensive Air and Space Forces and Assets of Foreign Countries, and the Forms and Methods of Their Combat Application* by Doctor of Engineering Sciences Professor Anatoliy Sumin]. They also analyzed “ways of achieving parity in VKO systems as the foundation for ensuring the country’s defensive capability in the long run through the year 2030... and ensuring reliable protection of ballistic missile launches against high-precision weaponry... [all of which would help] preserve the potential for guaranteed retribution.”<sup>19</sup>

In line with calls for modernization of the Armed Forces overall, defense appropriations are expected to grow in 2004 by 16%; appropriations for military-technical supplies of troops by 15%; and the purchase of weapons and repairs, and military R&D by 17%.<sup>20</sup>

Continued debates on the evolving nature of contemporary warfare may be expected to lead to further changes not only in the ways additional military appropriations are being distributed among individual branches and services, but also in Russia’s military strategy and doctrine.

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<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Khodarenok: “The Future of the Air and Space Shield”, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyi Kurier*, 25 February 2004. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040225000429].

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Dmitrii Yurov, “What to Expect from the New Financial Year,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 28, 2004.