

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Modernization of the Armed Forces in Russia: Goals and Problems

By

Dr. Andrei Shoumikhin

June 2004

© National Institute for Public Policy, 2004

The views expressed are solely that of the author and do not reflect those of National Institute for Public Policy or any of its sponsors.

Modernization of the Armed Forces in Russia: Goals and Problems

Dr. Andrei Shoumikhin

In his May 26, 2004 Message to the Federal Assembly President Vladimir Putin emphasized the goal of modernization of the Armed Forces. In his words, “Adequate quality of weapons is the characteristic that defines the combat readiness of a contemporary army”. Mr. Putin reiterated the primacy of strategic nuclear missile forces in the modernization effort: “It is imperative to shield our country from any types of military-political pressure and potential threats. The important task is equipping our nuclear forces with the most advanced systems of strategic weapons”.¹

The President also promised to establish firm civilian control over the military while pursuing modernization: “The scope of the allocations [for the military], the interests of the country’s defense and the important social parameters of the reform make the presence of civilian control over the effectiveness of transformations in the army obligatory”.²

Editor-in-Chief of the *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* weekly Vadim Solovyev noted that Putin’s desire to increase civilian oversight over military reform reflects disappointment with the results of transformations accomplished thus far by the military establishment on its own--particularly in introducing the “contract system” as the foundation for the “professional army”:

The program for the transfer to the contract foundation has been adopted however by 2008 only 50% of the conscripts will be those under contract. It is therefore quite logical that in his current message the President – as a supreme commander – concentrated on the key issue of military reform which is civilian (political) control.³

In an important related development, the State Duma introduced changes into the Law “On Defense” providing a legal foundation for such civilian control. In particular, Article 13, paragraph 2 of the Law entitled “Guidance and Command of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” was changed to read: “The Command of the Armed Forces is carried out by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation through the Ministry of Defense of Russia.” The previous version of Article 13 included the General Staff in describing the command hierarchy: “The Command of the Armed Forces is carried out by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation through the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and the General Staff of the Russian Federation that is the main body of operational command of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation”.

¹ “At Noon, Putin Submitted the Message to the Federal Assembly,” *Lenta.ru*, 26 May 2004. <<http://lenta.ru/russia/2004/05/26/putin/guns.htm>>.

² Vadim Solovyev, “The President of the Country Has Finally Seized the Main Lever in Military Modernization,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 21 May 2004.

³ *Ibid.*

This change was interpreted by military specialists as a “significant curtailment of the powers of the General Staff.”⁴ This subordination of the General Staff to the Minister of Defense is the latest turn in a long history of personal rivalry between Commander of the General Staff Anatolii Kvashnin and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. Moreover, there appeared predictions that Mr. Ivanov would soon acquire new extended powers over the entire “power ministries block” in the Russian government. Some specialists have begun to argue that Russia is on the way to creating an American-type system that will place the entire military organization of the state under the Security Council.⁵

However, internal power struggles may yet reshape any movement toward meaningful civilian control of the Russian Army. In June 2004, there were indications that Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov might himself lose favor with the President as a consequence of a report from the Chamber of Accounts revealing massive “improprieties” in the way the Defense Ministry spends budgetary allocations for defense. Allegedly:

[In 2003, the] Defense Ministry “inefficiently” disposed of over 14 billion rubles (almost half a billion dollars), i.e. 10% of all expenditures allocated for the upkeep of the military personnel of the Army and Navy... On the whole... the Defense Ministry has wasted two times the money needed for financing of the entire military reform”.⁶

As reported in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*:

The information indicating that, so-to-say, a black cat has come between the head of the state and the head of the Defense Ministry was reflected in analytic material prepared by the Scientific and Research Institute of Social Systems of the Moscow State University after M.V. Lomonosov. In particular, the report of this organization states specifically that the Defense Minister had allegedly tried to exonerate himself in front of the President... however his explanations were not accepted. Under these circumstances, according to the comment by the Institute of Social Systems, it may not be excluded that all this “has been instigated by the army elite that tries to thereby move the financial aspect of the problem to the political level”.⁷

Sensing the Kremlin’s basic desire to accelerate modernization of the Armed Forces, the liberal Council on Foreign and Defense Policy headed by Sergei Karaganov recently published a comprehensive report devoted to many different aspects of the modernization problem.⁸ SVOP recommendations deal both with structural and substantive changes within the modernization effort. Council experts argue that:

⁴ Vladimir Georgiev and Victor Myasnikov, “Defense Ministry and General Staff Are Sent to Their Own Quarters,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 14 May 2004.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Vadim Solovyev and Oleg Elenskii, “Defense Minister Loses Kremlin’s Trust,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 4 June 2004.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The report entitled “Organizational Development of the Military and Modernizing the Armed Forces” was co-authored by leading military experts V. A. Guenon, S. A. Verve, P. S. Zolotarev, A. A. Kenosha, F. I.

- “Plans for the modernization of the army should be totally transparent and understood to all of society”, e.g. the military budget should be completely transparent and “open” to the public at large.
- A quick decision should be taken “on whether Russia should strengthen and modernize the existing armed forces in the absence of obvious military threats, or take an intelligent risk to obtain a truly modern, essentially different quality of armed forces capable of responding successfully to the most unexpected challenges and dangers.”
- “To ensure reliable nuclear deterrence, Russia needs a program for developing its Strategic Nuclear Forces sufficient to meet the existing situation.” In this connection it is noted that “the Moscow (2002) Treaty for Reducing Strategic Offensive Capabilities between the Russian Federation and the USA permits the creation of a rational program for developing the Strategic Nuclear Forces, aimed at maintaining the traditional contribution of a ground-based grouping with the one-time reorientation of the great part of the bomber aircraft for solving non-nuclear tasks. This will make it possible to maintain a stable nuclear balance, to build up the weakened conventional purpose forces, and, similar to what the USA is planning, to keep nuclear cruise missiles in reserve in the event of an unpredicted development of a military-political situation.”
- From the point of view of the quality of its armed forces, “Russia needs an army that is capable of effectively, intelligently, and clearly performing the military tasks that it is given both in the near term and in the future, and that can effectively interact with the armed forces of other nations in the battle against shared threats”, e.g. terrorism.
- “This new army must differ in its ability to respond quickly when the nature of threats change and in its high moral and psychological preparedness among the high ranking and command structure and officer corps in general toward unexpected and fundamental changes.”
- The “social status” of military service should be raised considerably.
- The RF should extricate itself from yesteryear Soviet organizational models, e.g. division into “military districts”, and move to the creation of “unified command structure of rapid response”.
- The RF should proceed to the creation of “a corps of regular junior commanders (sergeants)” that would “staff both permanent readiness units and the Armed Forces as whole with contract service members of this category.”

Ladygin, N. V. Mikhail, A. A. Piscine, A. I. Podberezkin, V. A. Rubanov, V. I. Samoylov, S. B. Sokut, D. V. Trenin, M. M. Khodarenok, and A. V. Tsalko. It was edited by A. G. Arbatov, V. Z. Dvorkin, and V. V. Shlykov (the main author and overseer of the collective of writers). The Council’s editorial board overseeing the publication included A. A. Belkin, T. V. Bordachev, S. A. Karaganov (overseer of the editorial group), and F. A. Lukyanov. The report also reflects inputs from the RF Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. See: “Organizational Development of the Military and Modernizing the Armed Forces,” *SVOP.ru*, 14 April 2004 [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040414000403].

- “Russia needs a decisive de-specialization of the military industry and its integration with the civilian sector of industry as the chief mobilization base for producing weapons.
- “Control of the condition and development of the defense-industrial complex, as well as all financial resources that are allocated for defense... must be transferred under the total control of the Ministry of Defense.
- “Temporary independent commissions” should be established to assist the government in conducting the modernization reform.⁹

However, Russian traditionalists, primarily from among the opposition, raise serious doubts about the ability and, more importantly, political and psychological readiness of the Putin government to make real changes—particularly in the cumbersome Soviet-era bureaucratic apparatus that can undermine any reform.¹⁰

On top of the cluster of “subjective” impediments comes an array of overbearing “objective” difficulties inherited by the Armed Forces and MIC from the Soviet times that defy efforts at modernization especially given the limited resources available for this major undertaking.

In accordance with available data, “today the military-industrial complex [MIC] comprises 1,700 firms and enterprises scattered from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok. More than half are bankrupt if judged by Western criteria. The sector employs 2.5m people.”¹¹ Since the times of Boris Yeltsin, the only thriving branches of the MIC were those oriented towards export of weapons. As emphasized in one of the many TV reports devoted to the current problems of MIC:

Each year Russia exports 50-60 military planes, one or two ships, more than 100 tanks and 100 anti-aircraft complexes. However, the domestic armed forces are on hunger rations. This year [2004] the military promise to buy just six ballistic missiles, one bomber, six pieces of space apparatus, 15 tanks, five fighters and one strike helicopter.¹²

The government has tried to reverse the situation by introducing further structural and administrative-personnel changes into the MIC system including its export-oriented branches. To coincide with his reelection in early 2004, Putin appointed several close associates to manage key government bodies responsible for reforming MIC and boosting production of advanced weapons both for export and “internal consumption” by the Russian Armed Forces. For example, he moved Andrei Belyaninov, previously Director-General of *Rosoboroneksport* to the important position of the Director of the Federal Service for the Defense Order. [Belyaninov’s former deputy at *Rosoboronexport* Sergey Chemezov became his successor overseeing Russian arms exports]. Both Belyaninov and

⁹ “Organizational Development of the Military and Modernizing the Armed Forces.”

¹⁰ See for example: Akhtyam Akhtyrov, Alles Kaputt, “The Resounding and Uncouth Finale,” *Pravda.ru*, 21 May 2004.

¹¹ “Russian TV Examines Prospects for Military-Industrial Complex,” Moscow *NTV Mir*, 22 May 2004, [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040523000043].

¹² *Ibid.*

Chemizov have been reported to be “the President’s comrades-in-arms who worked with him in the intelligence service [stationed] in the German Democratic Republic”¹³.

Key mechanisms of MIC reform include abandoning the hitherto practiced sale of defense enterprises in favor of their “slow and covert nationalization,” by creating large-scale government holdings to produce advanced weapon systems.¹⁴ For the first time in many years, in 2004 “the volume of exports was on a par with the defense order for the home army. The money in question is 5bn dollars.”¹⁵

At the same time, production of advanced weapons systems remains a serious problem. Recently, concerns with air- and space-security issues moved Russia to concentrate on the development of a VKO (Air-and-Space Defense) system. According to Col.-General Vladimir Litvinov, President of the “Vympel” joint stock company (head contractor for developing VKO program support means) “to fight non-strategic missiles Russia needs AD complexes of the S-400 “Triumf” type that perform tasks of medium- and shorter-range interception, i.e. the tasks of the non-strategic BMD and AD.”¹⁶ Depending on the modification, missiles of the S-400 system were reported to be able to hit targets at 1-400 km distances and altitudes of 5m to 30km. The S-400 communication system allows it to be integrated within different branches of the armed forces thereby creating the basis for a united AD-BMD system. However, in a recent interview, Deputy Defense Minister Aleksei Moskovskii recognized that despite many years in research and repeated promises by the manufacturers “up till today, the [S-400] complex has not been presented for testing since so far it does not have the new missile”¹⁷ that would fundamentally distinguish it from the predecessor, S-300 system.

Similar problems are reported for the Russian Navy. In a May 24, 2004 interview, former Commander of the Northern Fleet Admiral Gennadii Suchkov declared that “in four to five years the Russian Navy will cease to exist [since] the most powerful Russian strategic submarines of the “Taifoon” type will have to be decommissioned in view of the absence of nuclear missiles.”¹⁸

Suchkov explained that of the three “Taifoon” submarines belonging to the Navy, only one – “Severstal” – still carries 10 RSM-52 missiles however decommissioned a long time ago. Neither the “Arkhangelsk” that was used by President Putin to observe the failed launch of an RSM-54 missile in February 2004 during the large-scale exercise, nor the “Dmitrii Donskoi” submarine that has been returned to service after repairs in 2003, carry any missiles at all. The Admiral blamed the Moscow Institute of Heat Technology (MIT) [*Moskovskii Institut teplotekhniki*] for the “demise of the Russian Navy”: allegedly the Institute had failed to reach even the prototype stage in the creation of the “Bulava” naval missile long-promised to the Navy that was supposed to be installed on

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nikolai Khorunzhii, “Air-and-Space Defense Begins with AD,” *Izvestiya*, 7 June 2004.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “Admiral Suchkov Revealed the Main Secret of the Russian Navy,” *Lenta.ru*, 26 May 2004. <<http://lenta.ru/russia/2004/05/25/suchkov/>>.

the “Dmitrii Donskoi” as well as the two new subs of the “Yurii Dolgorukii” type being built at the city of Severodvinsk.¹⁹

Specialists lament the loss by Russia of the ability to compete in the most advanced hi-tech defense technologies. A special publication devoted to this subject appeared in the *Moskovskaya Promyshlennaya Gazeta*. According to this source, “Only 0.3% of the entire output of Russian enterprises may be called hi-tech.”²⁰ To confirm the concerns raised by Admiral Dmitrii Suchkov, *Moskovskaya Promyshlennaya Gazeta* identifies development and production of missiles as well as radars for the EW system as some of the “weakest spots” in the modernization plans:

Missile technologies were called a priority venue in the state order [by the previous government under Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov]. However, then the [Kasyanov] cabinet fell. Some bosses have been removed. Other chairs were filled by totally new people. In other words, we have to begin all over again. Until recently, the Defense Ministry was making the strategic Topol-M complexes the main feature of its purchasing policy. The creators of these missiles from the Moscow Institute of Heat Technology (MIT) assure that they can overcome any possible ABM systems. The military intone to the designers: Only such weapons can guarantee our national security. Missiles developed by MIT are now being installed even on the fourth-generation nuclear submarines. The construction of one such SSBN – “Yurii Dolgorukii” began 8 years ago. They say it will be launched in about another two years. Construction of the second sub – “Alexander Nevskii” was begun only very recently. As intended by our military, the fourth-generation SSBNs should become the foundation of our Navy in the first half of this century. How many of them will we get under this rate of construction? To remind, the country is surrounded by 14 seas. Before the [military] reform, there were 150 nuclear submarines on combat duty... Experts believe that the country is currently capable of producing only obsolescent types of weapons. As reported by MOD, the rate of renewing the land-based “Topol-M” missiles does not exceed ten missiles a year. Given this dynamic, complexes currently on combat duty will not be completely replaced even by the end of this century... Accompanied by fanfares, they introduced into service at end of last year the “Volga” radar station in the territory of Belarus. Allegedly, it has bridged the gap created after the destruction of the radar in Latvia [at Skrunde]. All-in-all, there are now seven major radars in the

¹⁹ The decision on developing the “Bulava” missile was adopted in 1998 after three unsuccessful tests of the “Bark” missile of the Miass Construction Bureau named after Makeev [“*Miasskii KB imeni Makeeva*”]. Lenta.ru government sources reported that “more than 15 billion rubles have already been spent on the “Bulava”, and every year ‘several more billions’ are being spent for the same purpose which makes it the most expensive program on the state defense order.” Ibid.

²⁰ “High-Tech Has Sneaked On Us Unnoticed,” *Moskovskaya Promyshlennaya Gazeta*, 20 April – May 5, 2004.

system of missile early warning. However, only the Belorussian “Volga” has so far been produced in the digital version.²¹

The Putin government is apparently well aware of the structural, technological, financial, etc., problems of MIC, and will try to correct them. It appears that one of the preferred methods of dealing with these problems will be intensifying arms exports abroad in the hope to attract more resources for equipping the Russian army. So far the best trading partners have been China, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. However, with some of them, particularly China, a fundamental problem arises for Moscow of choosing between increased revenues and supplying advanced weapon technologies to potential adversaries.²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² See: Aleksei Khazbiev. “Problems of VTS between Russia and China,” *Ekspert*, 24 May 2004.