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2010-02-27

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February 27, 2010

# What's New In Russia's New Military Doctrine?

by Mikhail Tsypkin

Earlier this month, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev signed the new "Military Doctrine Of The Russian Federation Until 2020" to replace the doctrine signed by Vladimir Putin in 2000. It's supposed to be a guiding document for the development of the armed forces.

Western observers have focused on two aspects of the new doctrine emphasized by its drafters: the designation of NATO as a source of military danger, and the language on nuclear deterrence. Upon closer inspection, however, there is nothing new in the document on either subject.

The really interesting aspects of the new doctrine are the contradictions between its text and Russia's ongoing military reform, as well as those between the envisioned requirements for future weapons acquisition and the realities of Russia's defense industry.

The references to NATO as a source of military danger to Russia are neither new nor as direct as often presented in Western commentaries. The military doctrine adopted in 2000 did not mention NATO by name, but described enlargement of military alliances in areas adjoining Russia as a military threat. It was not necessary to use the word NATO to make it clear which alliance the document had in mind.

The new doctrine draws a distinction between "military danger" and "military threat." The former is an international situation that may, under certain conditions, lead to the latter. A military threat is an international situation that makes war possible. NATO's enlargement is listed at the top of the list of military dangers, which means that it could develop into a military threat. Thus NATO enlargement has actually been demoted from a threat to a danger in the latest doctrine.

The concerns about the role to be assigned to nuclear weapons in the new doctrine were triggered by a statement in October by Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev (the Security Council was charged with preparing the draft doctrine) suggesting that the new doctrine "would not exclude preventive" nuclear strikes in situations "critical" to Russian national security, even in small-scale, local wars. (The August 2008 war with Georgia was a small-scale war.) The 2000 military doctrine assigned first use of nuclear weapons only to large-scale (in fact, global) wars, in situations critical to Russian national security. Once the 2010 doctrine was released, however, the formula of first use dropped any reference to the scale of war and somewhat tightened the main condition for such use to a "threat to the existence of the state itself." Such provisions, as nonproliferation expert Nikolai Sokov observes, are "standard" for any nuclear-weapons state.

Aleksandr Golts, one of the most perceptive Russian experts on military affairs, has noted a discrepancy between the doctrine and the development of the armed forces. The goal of the military reform conducted by the Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov since October 2008 is to make all military units fully combat ready without the mobilization of reservists.

The new military, 1 million strong, is intended to react quickly to conflicts along Russia's periphery rather than fight NATO. The doctrine, however, refers to a mixture of fully combat-ready units and those that can be deployed only after mobilization.

The military reform is very painful for the officer corps. According to Serdyukov's plan, the number of general officer billets is to be cut from 1,107 to 886; colonels from 25,665 to 9,114; lieutenant colonels from 88,678 to 15,000; majors from 99,950 to 25,000; and captains from 90,000 to 40,000. The officer corps will lose 13,313 out of 21,813 of its most desirable billets in the Moscow headquarters.

The command structure is to change from the current four-level one (military district-army-division-regiment) to a U.S.-style, three-level one (military district-operational command-brigade). The 65 institutions of military education are to be consolidated into 10. These drastic changes challenge the self-interest of officers, some of whom will be discharged while others will have to learn how to do their jobs in new ways. Many of these officers cling to the purported NATO threat as they strive to preserve the Soviet-type, mass-mobilization military -- and thousands of officers' billets -- and impeded Serdyukov's reforms.

The 600-pound gorilla hiding in the verbiage of the new doctrine is the question of how to arm the military with the high-tech weapons listed in the document. The Russian defense industry suffers from outdated plants, an aging work force, and the incompatibility of a system built by Josef Stalin with the realities of a market economy.

The new doctrine suggests that Russia somehow invigorate investment into innovative technologies and keep its independence as an arms manufacturer. While debating the best way to direct the Russian economy toward technological innovation, Russia's leaders appear to be moving away from defense industry autarky. During a meeting with Western experts on Russia last September, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin reportedly said Russia wanted to cooperate with Western nations in weapons manufacturing.

The doctrine, which designates NATO as a source of danger to Russia, appears to be in conflict with the emerging weapons acquisition policy: importing selected major weapon systems from NATO members. The plan to buy a Mistral helicopter carrier from France (and other possible suppliers were reportedly Spain and the Netherlands) is a clear indication that Russian leaders are frustrated with the inability of their defense industry to produce modern armaments. Russia may benefit from importing and coproducing weapons, but it may also have to adjust its foreign policy to the reality of dependence on Western suppliers.

Nothing in the new doctrine points to growing aggressiveness on the part of Russia either at the conventional or nuclear levels. The doctrine suggests that the ongoing radical military reform has, at best, a lukewarm endorsement by the high command. If Serdyukov loses Putin's support, the reform may be left unfinished.

The doctrine avoids the thorniest issues. It contains no hint as to how Russia will supply its military with new weapons and how it might deal with what may become the greatest military challenge to Russia -- the rise of China. One may surmise that Moscow has not yet come up with answers to these fundamental questions.

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