

Russian Nuclear and Conventional Weapons: The Broken Relationship

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin's leaders and generals have consistently believed that whatever happens to their conventional forces, if worst comes to worst, they can rely on their nuclear weapons as a deterrent. After all, no country was about to attack the Russian Federation with its triad of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, for the Russians this was more of an illusion than reality because in spite of some minor improvements (e.g. the addition of the SS-25 or Topol-M and the SS-24), the fact is that its nuclear forces are deteriorating along with its conventional forces. Indeed, at present Moscow has neither a competent conventional nor nuclear force. The former are in the midst of a major reform project encouraged by Moscow's poor performance in the war with Georgia while two-thirds of its nuclear triad is for the most part unusable.

Background When the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) were created in 1959, they were primarily an extension of the Soviet Army's long-range artillery. Indeed, most of the officers came from that tradition, and it would be the ground leg of the nuclear triad that would be the most important.. Of the other two legs of the triad, the navy was second in importance with the air force in third place.¹ This meant that the land-based ICBMs were the most powerful components of the Soviet and later the Russian military's nuclear forces. As a consequence, over the years they received the majority of resources and attention. Indeed, the domination of the ground based systems led the Soviets to ignore or at least pay minimal attention to coordinating the three legs. For practical purposes

¹Rose Gottenmiller, "Nuclear Weapons in Current Russian Policy," in Steven E Miller and Dmitri Trenin, eds., *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*, (Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 2004), 183-186.

they were three independent arms.

By the beginning of the nineties, a significant part of the Russian nuclear triad had come to the end of their service life. After all, the majority of the missiles had been deployed in the sixties and seventies. Even the sea based ballistic missile submarines *B* the Yankee, *Delta I* and *Delta II* had been put into operation in 1968-1974.² The Soviets were well aware of the need to modernize their nuclear forces, but the collapse of the USSR interrupted the nuclear modernization process. Moscow had planned to deploy new types of missiles *A* with shorter delivery times and shorter booster phase, and to equip them with multi-element last stages, or *>buses=* to saturate the and thus disable the information

² Vladimir Dvorkin, *Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces After the USSR Reforming and Prospects*, in Yuri Fedorov and Beril Nygren, eds. (Stockholm, Swedish National Defense College, 2003), p. 114.

processing systems and destruction capabilities of the future American ABM defense.³ Unfortunately, by the time the regime collapsed in 1991, the ICBM modernization program was not completed. The same was true of the other two legs of the triad.

In 1991 Gorbachev established the Strategic Deterrent Forces (SDF) which unified the three legs. However, the collapse of the USSR meant that the SDF were located all over the country including on many of the newly independent countries. There was an attempt to save the SDF with the attempt to create a combined military force under control of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For a number of reasons, by the beginning of 1992, it was clear that the CIS was dead on delivery.⁴ Indeed, by the middle of 1992 the key question was how

³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴ For a discussion of the problems from a Russian perspective, see, Dale R

to withdraw the nuclear weapons from US countries ^B how to get them back to Russia. New countries such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus wanted no part of this nuclear force. However, the process of withdrawing and re-stationing these missiles on Russian soil, undermined whatever progress had been made in coordinating the actions of the three legs. To make matters worse, budgetary allocations were insufficient just to maintain these systems let alone modernize them.

Nukes and Conventional Weapons in the Nineties. The nineties were a difficult time for the SDF. For example, the size of Moscow's nuclear arsenal fell 4-4.5 times. The reasons were simple: the collapse of the Russian economy made it increasingly difficult not only to purchase, but to maintain its nuclear

Herspring, *The Kremlin and the High Command: Presidential Impact on the Russian Military from Gorbachev to Putin*, (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2006), esp. chapter 3.

stockpiles. One Russian source claimed in 2002 that since 1991, Russia has no resources to maintain the previous nuclear force of about 10 thousand on strategic delivery vehicles and about 20 thousand of sub-strategic nukes.⁵

The situation confronting Moscow's conventional forces was dismal at best. For example, while Russia's generals sat by and watched the American conventional forces roll through Iraqi troops like a hot knife through butter during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The chances Moscow's generals could keep up with the West were diminishing quickly. This was obvious in the area of procurement which fell by more than 80% between 1991 and 1994.⁶ Similar by

⁵ Yuri Federov, *No First Use of Nuclear Weapons*, London, 15-17 November 2002, *Pugwash Meeting no. 279*, 2.

⁶ *Defense Ministry on Reform Efforts - Budget*, *FE/RL Daily Report*, August 22, 1994.

October 1994, "As some 85 nuclear submarines were docked because the navy could not afford to operate them"⁷

Turning to conventional forces, consider the following. In 1991 the military ordered and received 585 combat aircraft. In 1995 it received only 2 combat aircraft.⁸ This was not only the case in the air force but throughout the armed forces. To quote the same source, "In most developed countries, between 60 and 80 percent of all weapons are new in Russia the figure is 30 percent. Assuming this situation remains unchanged, by the year 2005, the military will have only 5.7 percent new weapons. Gradually, we will slide toward the category of armies of third-world countries."⁹

⁷ Robert V. Barylki, *The Soldier in Russian Politics: Duty, Dictatorship, and Democracy Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction, 1998), p. 127.

⁸ "A Conversation without Middlemen," Moscow TV, September 14, 1995 in

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), September 18, 1995.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The Military Doctrine of 1993. Something had to be done. Accordingly, Moscow decided to modify its military doctrine. Thus on 2 November 1993, the Russian government issued a document entitled, *Principle Guidance on the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*,¹⁰ (PGMD).¹⁰ This statement of military doctrine was based on the first ever National Security Concept (The Basic Provisions of a Foreign Policy Concept) previously adopted by the Security Council. In it Moscow essentially stated that it had no alternative but to rely on nuclear weapons in an emergency and that it was prepared to use them first if the country's survival was at stake. This was Moscow's form of deterrence. Indeed, the only mission assigned to the nuclear forces was to remove the threat

¹⁰ For a copy of this doctrine in English, see, *The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*,

of nuclear war by deterring its initiation against the Russian Federation and its allies.¹¹

It would be wrong to think that Russian military experts seriously believed that Russia could get along with nuclear weapons alone. General Maknut Gareev, generally considered one of Russia's leading military thinkers, commented,

But it is impossible to ensure a reliable defense with nuclear weapons alone. First, many countries have even now the ability (to be increased in the future) of developing a surprise attack not only with nuclear, but also with conventional precision weapons, in order to destroy the nuclear bases of other countries, depriving them of the ability to retaliate or carry out nuclear retribution.¹²

Regardless of how desperate the Krenlin was for new conventional-type weapons,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹² General Maknut Gareev, *If War Comes Tomorrow The Contours of Future*

Armed Conflict, ed. by Jacob Kipp, (London, Cass, 1998), p. 84.

the nineties would continue to be a disaster for the Russian military for both conventional and nuclear weapons. To quote Gottmeier, "The debate over the role of nuclear weapons in Russian national security has been at the center of military reform, with the key questions very much in play."¹³

¹³ Gottmeier, in Miller and Trenin, p. 186.

Yeltsin Ignores the Military. Göttemøller was right. The problem, however, was that Boris Yeltsin did not take military reform, whether on the nuclear or conventional level seriously. He did not consider the West to be a threat, and thus, unlike his generals, was more concerned with his domestic power or the economy than he was with upgrading and reforming the military. In fact, he ignored the military and regularly provided it with far less than even a subsistence budget^B and then the military might only get 40-50 per cent of what it was authorized because the tax collection system in Russia was broken. It led to situations where soldiers were sent out to pick mushrooms to supplement their diet.¹⁴

In 1996, the budget shortfall was R25,000 billion. The situation inside the military was so bad that the average officer was due about R10,000 in back

¹⁴ Herspring, *The Kremlin and the High Command*, pp. 79-119.

pay.¹⁵ The next year the shortfall was R34,000 billion.¹⁶ Because of budget s
 like the foregoing, there was no money for procurement. What there was had to be
 spent on maintenance and provisions for the troops. As Alexei Arbatov put it,
 the budgets from 1997 to 1999 allocated up to 70 percent for maintenance, while
 cutting personnel by 30 percent. This left almost nothing for research and
 development. Funds allocated to them were broadly sufficient for modernization
 of the minimal strategic forces.¹⁷ With this background it is not surprising

¹⁵ As cited in Michael J. Orr, *The Deepest Crisis: The Problem of the Russian Army Today* (Surrey: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, October 4, 1996), p. 1.

¹⁶ *The Sword of Crisis Over the Military Budget*, @ *Krasnaya zvezda* (January 30, 1999) in wnc, February 1, 1999.

¹⁷ Alexei Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine*.

that there were serious differences between advocates of conventional and strategic forces. In fact, the battle was bitter, made worse by the personal dislike between the two main actors: General Anatoly Kvashnin and Marshal Igor Sergeyev.

The Battle Between Kvashnin and Sergeyev. General Anatoly Kvashnin was an army officer, a man who had worked his way up serving in a variety of posts in the infantry (Ground Forces) to become Chief of the General Staff. It should also be noted that Kvashnin's personality matched his infantry background. He was open and blunt, and a person willing to engage in bureaucratic fist cuffs even if that meant being insubordinate vis-a-vis his boss.

Meanwhile, the defense minister, Igor Sergeyev, was a career missile officer. Indeed, he spent his entire career dealing with nuclear weapons. He was

Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya, @ *Marshal Center Papers*, no. 2 (July 20, 2000), 8.

a polished officer who eschewed the kind of bureaucratic politics that Kvashnin revealed in. It was his job to advise Yeltsin while attempting to keep the defense establishment on an even keel. Not surprisingly, the outcome was constant conflict between these two men with Sergeyev constantly toutting the value of nuclear weapons, while Kvashnin argued in favor of expanding conventional forces.

As with so many other areas, Yeltsin was a major part of the problem. First, he changed the law to place both the defense minister and the Chief of the General Staff directly under him. As a result, the Chief of the General Staff was no longer subordinate to the defense minister. That meant that while the defense minister could do his best to convince the Chief to carry out a specific policy, he could not force him to do so. Furthermore, since the General Staff was primarily in charge of operational matters, the Chief could implement his orders as he saw fit. From a military policy standpoint, the result was bureaucratic

chaos. No one knew for certain what Yeltsin's policy was, nor what the MoD policy was on a variety of issues..

In fact, Yeltsin's only policy was to keep the military off balance, to create a situation in which the military would never threaten his position domestically. After all, he was well aware that it was the military that came to his aid in the 1993 coup attempt. Had the generals decided to sit that conflict out, the outcome might have been very different with Yeltsin sitting in a Russian jail. He was not about to take a chance with these generals and admirals. If that meant a weaker military, that was too bad, but it was not that important during the nineties.

One of the few positive things Yeltsin did vis-a-vis the military was to order the Security Council to come up with a new National Security Concept. It was completed on 7 May 1997 and enacted by presidential decree on 17 December

1997.¹⁸ While the Concept laid the basis for a revision of military doctrine, it was far too broad and ambiguous when it came to setting priorities, national interests, and responsibilities.

Meanwhile, in an effort to make structural changes Sergeyev sought and achieved permission to recreate a Strategic Deterrence Forces (SDF). The purpose was to establish a force that combined the strategic nuclear capabilities of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the navy, the air force as well as other units having responsibility for early warning command and control units. Additionally, the country's reconnaissance satellites would be subordinated to the SDF. Finally on March 15, 1999 Yelstin approved a document called *Main Provisions of Russia's*

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the politics involved with this Concept see David J. Betz, *Civil-Military Relations in Russia and Eastern Europe*, (London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 61.

Nuclear Deterrence Policy.¹⁹ The document made it clear that Russia's nuclear forces were the guarantor of the country's national security.¹⁹ The problem with the Concept was that it did not bring about the stability and predictability (stability = I predict it) that is so much a part of military thinking the world over. Generals and admirals cannot plan for the future if they don't know what kind of a conflict they are preparing for or if they do not know what kind of weapons systems and personnel they will have at their disposal. If there were two words that would describe the nineties from the general's and admirals' standpoint they were confusion and chaos. It was clearly time for a new military doctrine.

¹⁹ See *A New Military Doctrine Still Includes Nuclear First Strike*, *The Russia Journal*, 12 May 1999.

Putin and the Military Doctrine of 2000. When Vladimir Putin took over as president of Russia he faced a military that was in need of just about everything. Ships did not sail, planes did not fly, and tanks were not in working order. Indeed, not only did the country not carry out a single division level exercise during the nineties, there were many officers at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level that had not commanded an active unit larger than a company. This lack of military experience would come back to haunt the Russian military in the war against Georgia, for example. Meanwhile, Putin took as one of his primary tasks stabilizing the Russian military. After all, it was fighting a war in Chechnya and its problems could not be ignored.

The 2000 Military Doctrine was approved by Russian Presidential edict 706 on 21 April 2000.²⁰ As it would on other occasions, the Russians refused to

²⁰ A copy of the 2000 document is as *Document* www.scrf.gov.ru/April

clarify the issue of a nuclear threshold. The document made clear that Moscow
 keep the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear weapons
 of other VMD against Russia or its allies, as well as in response to large-scale
 conventional aggression in critical situations for Russian national security²¹

Given the desperate condition of its conventional weapons, it is not surprising
 that the Russians wanted to preserve freedom of maneuver with their nukes. That
 included the use of nuclear weapons even if a conventional war deteriorated
 badly. In fact, the Russian military included such an option in its exercises B
 e.g., West 99, and Autumn 2002.²² The document did not resolve the question of
 which side the Kremlin should or would favor B nuclear or conventional. Indeed,
 if there was anything new in it, it was the recognition of the threat presented

²¹ Fedorov, No First Use of Nuclear Weapons, 3.

²² *Ibid.*

by international terrorism

While Washington may not have realized it at the time, its decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) meant that the Kremlin did not have to get rid of its multiple warhead missiles as demanded by the treaty. From a policy standpoint, the urgency of modernizing existing missiles disappeared. The current ones would suffice. The Kremlin had found a way to maintain its nuclear weapons base on the cheap. Such a policy may work over the short run, but to remain effective not only must the missiles be modernized, new ones must be developed to counter the other sides' counter measures.

Meanwhile, the very expensive naval arm of the Russian triad suffered one problem after another. First, sinking of the submarine *Kursk* - one of the modern submarines in the Russian fleet - in August 2000, presumably a result of a missile exploding on board. Then there was the case of the *Yuri Dogorukiy* - a strategic submarine that was under construction throughout the nineties. The

intention was for it to enter service in 2001. However, when the missile that was designed for (the SS-Nb28) failed, it was redesigned for the Bulava missile, discussed below. It was not until February 13, 2008 that it was finally launched. As a consequence, there was no way the navy could argue for a dominant position in the Russian strategic arsenal.

This brings us back to the ongoing battle between Kвашnin and Sergeyev, which had major overtones for the relationship between nuclear and conventional weapons. The battles between the two men had reached the point where, to quote Alexei Arbatov, "In reality, under the umbrella of the official Russian doctrine, there are now two military doctrines, with all the consequences flowing therefrom."²³ The battle was over the heart of the Russian military which

²³ Alexei Arbatov, "The Dilemma of Military Policy in Russia," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 6, 2000, http://ng.ru/printed/ideas/2000-11-16/8_dilemma.html

side would be favored: nuclear weapons as desired by Sergeyev or conventional forces as favored by Kvashnin? The former maintained that given Russia's weak conventional forces, Moscow's only alternative was to develop its nuclear capabilities to the point where no other state or organization would consider attacking Russia. Kvashnin, on the other hand, maintained that Russia was already faced with threats that could only be handled by conventional forces. After all, one could not seriously consider using nuclear weapons in Chechnya or Bosnia. The military had to have modern conventional weapons to meet these challenges.

For his part, Sergeyev made the familiar argument that all of the conventional forces in the world would not protect Russia in the face of an opponent who had nuclear weapons and the will to use them. To quote Arbatov, "Russia's nuclear arsenal should be sufficient to inflict pre-set damage to any

aggressor under any circumstances.²⁴ However, according to Federov, an analysis of Moscow's nuclear capabilities at that time led to the major conclusion that Russia's nuclear weapons cannot perform the mission of deterrence against the hypothetical aggression at the regional level.²⁵ The obvious problem, as pointed out by Alexandr Golts, is that nuclear weapons are less capable against terrorism than any other.²⁶

The simple fact was that Moscow lacked a coherent military strategy. In particular, the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation was approved only in April 2000, while the Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation was approved in

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵ Federov, *No First Use of Nuclear Weapons*, p. 6.

²⁶ Alexandr Golts, *Armiya rossii: 11 poteryannykh let* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004). p. 139.

July 2001. Programs and plans of military construction were out of proportion to

Russia's economic capabilities.²⁷ To make matters worse, Russia's generals

could not get rid of the idea of a large scale conflict requiring mass armies.

They were still tied mentally to fighting NATO. To quote Locksley,

There are consistent allegations that the doctrine and training sections of the General Staff are governed by >Germans= veterans of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, who are nostalgic about planning and conducting big multi-theater warfare rather than setting the doctrinal conditions and introducing suitable training regulations. Russian military forces have not fully reformed and adopted to the changed threat environment.²⁸

²⁷ Victor I. Esin, "The Military Reform in the Russian Federation: Problems,

Decisions and Prospects," in Federov and Nygren, p. 102.

²⁸ Christopher Locksley, "Concept, Algorithm, Indecision: Why Military Reform Has Failed in Russia since 1992," *Savic Military Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March, 2001, p. 16.

Regardless of what approach Moscow adopted, Putin had to find a way to stop the constant bickering between Sergeyev and Kvashnin.

On July 12, 2000 there was a meeting in the Kremlin, in which Kvashnin argued in favor of disbanding the Strategic Rocket Forces. He had in mind cutting the number of inter-continental missile divisions from 19 to two. ICBMs would go from 756 to only 150 by 2003. This would also decrease the SRF's share of the budget from 18 percent to 15. Sergeyev responded in a newspaper article in which he called Kvashnin's plan, "a criminal stupidity and an attack on Russia's national interests." The next day Putin ordered both generals to "silence their debate and come up with realistic policy proposals."²⁹

Kvashnin repeated his criticism at an August 11 Security Council meeting

²⁹ "Hope Gimmers for Reform," *Moscow Times*, March 29, 2001 via Johnson's

attended by Putin. The latter was frustrated, but realized that he would have to do something. As he stated, "I have been rather tolerant of the debates in the defense ministry and society as a whole . . . Now is the time to bring the matter to its rightful conclusion."³⁰ In the meantime, matters appeared to be going Khrushchev's way. For example, the 1997 decision by Sergeyev to get rid of the Ground Forces as a separate service was reversed.

There was a particularly important meeting of the Security Council on November 9, 2000. During the meeting, Putin acknowledged the importance of nuclear weapons, but he also mentioned the need to address other challenges.³¹ It was clear from his comments that his primary concern was improving the Army's

³⁰ "Development Strategy of the Armed Forces Defined," *Military News*

Bulletin, no. 8, August 2000.

conventional capabilities. The plan adopted by the meeting foresaw a two-staged process. Phase one covered 2001 to 2005 and would focus primarily on personnel. The second focused on giving the military the logistical support it needed.

On March 24, 2001 it was announced that Putin had signed Decree No. 337, "On Supporting the Plan for Conversion and Development of the Russian Armed Forces and Improving Their Structure." The decree broke the SRF into two commands: The Strategic Missile Troops and the Space Troops. Four days later Putin fired Sergeyev, making him a presidential advisor. He was replaced by Sergei Ivanov, a former KGB general and close confidant of Putin. Ivanov's task was to smooth matters over with Kvashnin, while helping create stability inside the military.

In spite of Ivanov's best efforts, it soon became obvious that he could not work with Kvashnin. The latter ignored him just as he had Sergeyev. As noted above, the problem was that the Law on Defense stated that Kvashnin worked for the president, and did not have to clear his actions or ideas with Ivanov. Then

on June 14, at Putin's urging, the Duma changed Article 13 of the Law on Defense to mention only the Defense Ministry: "Oversight for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation is carried out by the defense minister via the Defense Ministry."³¹ Furthermore, Article 15, which had listed the main functions of the General Staff, was declared null and void. This meant that henceforth the Chief of the General Staff worked for the Defense Minister. Several weeks later Kvashnin was himself fired.

³¹ "Federalnyi zakon ob oborone" April 24, 1996 in

<http://wwwnil.ru/articles/articles3863.shtml>

Russia's Nuclear Forces. According to IISS figures, in 2000, the SRF had a total of 771 ICBM launchers. . Meanwhile, there were problems with the navy's new follow-on SLBM and it was cancelled in August 1998 after three test failures.³² During the same year, Vladimir Yakovlev, head of the Strategic Rocket Forces, stated that Moscow would have 20-30 Topol-Ms each year for three years and 30-40 in each of the subsequent three years.³³ In fact, Russia deployed only 10 during 1998 and 1999, and six during 2000.

By 2004 matters had deteriorated further. As one observer noted, "The situation in the manufacturing sector is so serious that in 2004, serial

³² International Institute For Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1999-2000*, London, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 111.

³³ Arms Control Association, "Russia Deploys Six Topol-M Long-Range Missiles," January/February 2001.

production of the Topol-M had to be stopped twice. This was the last straw . . .

If the government does not make the necessary steps in the next 2-3 months, the strategic nuclear force development program will be disrupted.³⁴

Ivanov tried to put a good face on matters, noting in 2005 that the Kremlin intended to acquire six ICBMs and one Tu-160 strategic bomber.³⁵ From a strategic standpoint, this was a joke as one writer noted.

The words about the priority of nuclear deterrence are as usual hanging in the air, because the plan to buy six intercontinental

³⁴ Development of Russia's Nuclear Forces Said Threatened By Lack of Funding, @ *Agentstvo Voennoykh Novostey*, 29 October 2004, in wnc 11/2/04

³⁵ Stenograficheskiy otchet o soveshchani i rukovodyashchego sostave Vozdushnykh Sil, http://president.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/11/09/2022_trebe6337tyre63381_969885.shtml.

ballistic missiles and one strategic Tu-160 missile carrier in 2006 means nothing to anyone. Vladimir Dvorkin, who earlier headed the 4th Defense Ministry's research for strategic arms stated. "With such tempo there is absolutely no certainty about what will remain of Russia's strategic nuclear forces in 2012-2015, after the completely outdated weapons are withdrawn, and whether we will be able to maintain the nuclear balance with the United States at 2,200 warheads determined by the Russian-US Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty."³⁶

On May 29, 2007 Moscow tested a new ground based missile. The SS-24 multiple warhead ballistic missile is similar to the Topol-M except that its primary purpose is to overcome air defense systems such as the one the US previously intended to deploy in Europe. To quote the now former defense minister Ivanov, "These complexes are capable of penetrating all existing and prospective anti-

³⁶ "Russia's Rearming Too Slow to Compete," *Interfax*, November 11, 2005 in

missile systems.³⁷ It was tested in its MIRVed form in November of 2008.

The Miss with the Bulava. Just as the SSF needed a new more modern missile, so did the navy. New submarines were being constructed and a new missile had to be developed. Each of these new Project 955 submarines would carry 12 of these missiles. In addition, they would be back-fitted into the Project 941 submarines. The Bulava, however, was to become a major headache for the Kremlin. In the beginning, Moscow was convinced that this new missile would be a savior for the Russian submarine fleet.

Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov announced that in 2007 the armed forces will acquire a new strategic ballistic missile, the S-30 Bulava Ivanov said that the new supersonic MIRV missile has no equivalent in the world. On 27 September, a Northern Fleet submarine in the White Sea launched a Bulava, which after a 30 minute flight successfully hit a target in the testing ground in Kanchatka. . . .

³⁷ A Russia Tests Missile Able to Penetrate Defense as Putin Warns of European

That same day, President Vladimir Putin said during his national television conference that the Bulava can change its route and altitude in such a way that it makes the missile invulnerable to the strategic-missile-defense systems of >some of our partner countries.³⁸

Reality, however, would be quite different from the previous predictions. For example, a few days later, the MoD reported that a few minutes after the launch of the automatic system of self-destruction was triggered as a result of a deviation of the mission from its trajectory.³⁹

Before discussing the Bulava's problems, some background. In 1998 when the decision was made to build this missile, cost was a key concern. A man named Yuri Solonov, who was the chief designer at the Moscow Institute of

³⁸ Defense Minister Presents New Strategic Missile, @ *RFE/RL Report*, September 29, 2005.

³⁹ Russian Navy Official Confirms Failure of Bulava Missile System, @ *Interfax*, October 25, 2006.

Thermal Engineering (MIT), promised to create a new system the ABulava-30 which is both a land and sea missile. As a consequence the project was transferred from the Makeyev Design Bureau, which had been building the Topol-M to MIT. The amount of money that had been sunk into this project by 2009 was \$7 billion.⁴⁰

Believe it or not, according to some estimates, 40% of the MD-s budget was

⁴⁰ See, [The >Bulava= Should Be Put in the Kremlin: It Does Not Fly,](#) @ *Mskovskiy*

Konsonal et s Online, August 2, 2009 in [wnc 8/4/09](#)

being devoted to the Bulava project.⁴¹ Still, as late as 2008, the MoD was reportedly commenting privately that the strategic nuclear forces are in particularly catastrophic situation.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ministry of Defense has Written Latest Concept, @ *Nezavi si naye vooyennoye obzre niye*, August 19, 2008 in wnc 8/20/08.

If the constant failures by the Bulava was not enough, the Navy was becoming increasingly embarrassed. Why? Because the *Krentin* was building submarines to be equipped with the Bulava missile. The MoD expected to have them in service in 2008. The submarine *Dmitri Donskoy* had been refitted in time to accommodate the Bulava missiles. In addition, a new submarine, the *Yuri Dolgorukiy* was launched in 2009 and ready to go to sea by 2010. Moscow had also begun work on two additional submarines, the *Aleksandr Nevsky* and the *Vladimir Monakh*. This meant that the *Krentin* was faced with the very embarrassing situation of having one submarine that was supposed to be equipped with Bulava missiles going to sea with its missile tubes empty ^B with two more on the way_

For his part, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy maintained that one of the major problems confronting the military in Russia was the decrepit state of its military-industrial complex. There is a lot of truth in his comments ^B the technology in many of the industrial plants is from the seventies or eighties.

Furthermore, the average age of most of those who are competent to work in most of those factories are over sixty. The majority left military factories to work in better paying jobs elsewhere.

Faced with this mess, the Chief Designer, the man who had claimed he could design it in 1998, Yuri Solonov, was fired. After all, the missile had failed seven out of eleven launches since 2004. In fact, Moscow appears stuck with the Bulava. There was talk of inserting the Sineva missile, but it is a completely different system. Furthermore, taking the Bulava tubes and related equipment out of submarines like the *Yuri Dolgorukiy* and replacing them with tubes that would fire the Sineva missiles would be too costly.

Moscow again tried testing the Bulava in 2008 and while one in September was successful, the one in December was not. In the latter case, not one of the reentry vehicles hit their targets at the Kanchatka range. It marked the fifth failure out of 10 launches. As one Russian source put it, ^AAnd the 10th

graded launch from on board the submarine missile-carrier *Dmitry Donskoy* ended in full-scale disaster.⁴³

The bottom line was stated by Admiral Vysotskiy, and that was that the Navy has nothing to replace it with.⁴⁴ According to Vysotskiy, in spite of the unsuccessful tests, the Navy had no choice to press ahead with the program. The missile is slated to be the mainstay of the sea leg of Russia's nuclear deterrent through 2040-2045.⁴⁴

According to Russian sources, the next test of a *Bulava* was scheduled for the end of June on board the *Dmitri Donskoy*. But this was modified in May when it was announced that the missile will be tested again and earlier

⁴³ ^AProgrammed for Failure,[@] *Pravda-KFFF*, February 2, 2009.

⁴⁴ ^ANavy Commander in Chief: There's Nothing with which to Replace the *Bulava*,[@]

Grani.ru, December 16, 2009 in wnc 12/17/09.

than November this year.⁴⁵ The reason, according to the navy is that they have still not been able to determine the reason for the previous launch failures.⁴⁶

The navy suspects that the problems in the assembly of the missile; the only way they can explain why some missiles have worked successfully, while others have not. In the future, the navy stated it will launch three Bulava missiles at the same time in an effort to pinpoint the problem. In the meantime, the new submarines will undergo sea trials, but not really put to sea doing the job they were intended to perform until the Bulava is perfected: whenever that happens.

Long-Range Aviation. Using the one or two Tu-160s available to him, General Igor Khovorov, the commander of Long Range Aviation, stated that during 2006, he planned to carry out ten launches of cruise missiles; not exactly what

⁴⁵ A Three-Way Error Method, @ *Kommersant Online*, May 25, 2010 in wnc 5/26/10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

one would expect from the air force of a superpower.⁴⁷ The next year the commander of the Air Force, announced that an upgraded Tu-160 would enter service with the air force and that another one was in the pipeline.⁴⁸ I imagine -- the effective air arm of the nuclear triad consisted of 4-5 old, if modernized, strategic aircraft_

The situation did not improve over time. For example, every time a senior Air Force officer spoke of new planes, his comments were clearly focused on fighter aircraft, and that is the major concern of the Air Force at present -- the Fifth Generation Fighter. Consider the following comments from a critic of LRA

⁴⁷ A Commander of Long-Range Aviation Outlines Future Plans A *RIA-Novosti*, December 21, 2005 in wnc 12/22/05.

⁴⁸ A Russian Air Force Getting New Bombers, Fighters and Helicopters, @ *Agentstvo voyennykh novostey*, June 17, 2006 in env 6/18/06

Strategic missile-armed aircraft are designed to destroy enemy targets with known coordinates. Recently within the scope of the LRA command and staff drill conducted under the direction of DA (LRA) Commander Major-General Anatoliy Zhi kharev, crews took up Tu-95Ms with practice cruise missiles aboard from Engels Air base. They unsuccessfully executed launches to maximum range (around 2,500) against targets on the northern Pentyoy Range (Vor kut a). It was ~~as~~ ^{as} ~~whispered~~ ^{to} ~~ne~~ that the missiles' deviation from the center of the target did not exceed 20m. This is something of which to be proud⁴⁹

The bottom line is that LRA has a very long way to go before it can be considered a critical part of the strategic nuclear triad.

The Search for a New Military Doctrine 2010. Even though it had only been in effect for three years, by 2003 there were calls for an updating of Russian military doctrine. As General Anatoliy Kulikov put it, ^ABearing in mind the

⁴⁹ ^AStrategic Aviation Maintain Formation_ Supersonic Tu-160s Over the Ocean Broke Away from NATO Interceptors, *Argumenty Nedeli Online*, May 10, 2010 in wnc 5/11/10.

recent war in Iraq, the current military doctrine of Russia does not meet modern requirements for national security. It should be the basis for drafting a national security doctrine of Russia to clearly define modern threats and challenges to Russian armed forces. . . .⁵⁰ From an organizational standpoint, Putin and Ivanov had succeeded in stabilizing the military. However, there were continued problems: B funding for the military had picked up, but there was still not enough to purchase the weapons needed either to modernize the country's conventional forces, or to build the nuclear forces the country needed. As a result, in 2005, Putin formally charged military leaders to come up with a new military doctrine.

One of the key factors of any nuclear doctrine is preemption. Putin had

⁵⁰ A Russian General Calls for Drafting New National Security Doctrine, @

made his position on this issue very clear in 2003, when he remarked, "If the practice of preventive strikes should *de facto* become widespread and grow stronger, Russia reserves the right to such practice." He continued, remarking, "We are against this, but we retain the right to carry out preventive strikes."⁵¹

So what were the major problems beyond the reoccurring issue of preemption? First, as Arbatov noted, was the failure of the doctrine to tell the Armed Forces what kind of enemy they are supposed to prepare themselves against.⁵² A second factor was the absence of a discussion of the threat of terrorism. Meanwhile, under Ivanov's direction (as President of the Security

⁵¹ Putin on Preemption @ *AFP*, in Johnson's List, October 9, 2003.

⁵² True Military Reforms are Entirely Up to the President, @ *Novye Izvestiya*, April 6, 2004, in Johnson's List, 4/6/04.

Council) the latter was preparing a new concept of national security B which, according to the Russian constitution, is supposed to proceed and guide the drafting of military doctrine). In fact, the drafting of both documents would turn out to be more lengthy than anticipated.

There was little change in the concept of nuclear deterrence.

Theoreticians like General Gareyev maintained that it was critical to continue to build-up Russia's nuclear deterrent. Interestingly, he also noted that it would be important for the doctrine to pay attention to A the development of general-purpose forces; the air force, the navy and ground troops.@⁵³

In May, 2009, Medvedev signed the National Security Strategy Document.

That laid the basis for the new Military Doctrine document which he signed on

⁵³ A General Gareyev Says Russia Changing its Military Doctrine,@ *RIA*

February 5, 2010. Insofar as nuclear weapons were concerned, the doctrine of preemption was not mentioned, but the idea was retained. As the document states, "Russia retains the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use against it or (and) its allies of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, or in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation using conventional weapons, if it threatens the very existence of the state."⁵⁴ This led one commentator to call Russia's new military doctrine "An Exercise in Public Relations" as a reference to avoidance of the term preemption.⁵⁵ Otherwise, when it comes to

⁵⁴ "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation Approved by Russian Federation Presidential Edict on 5 February 2010"

http://www.sras.org/military_doctrine_russian_federation_2010 .

⁵⁵ Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russia's New Military Doctrine: An Exercise in Public Relations," February 8, 2010.

nucl ear weapons, the document is not significantly different from the previous editions.

The Shrinking Nuclear Forces. Throughout the nineties and into the next century, not only did Moscow experience problems with particular weapons systems, the fact was that the number of nuclear weapons was decreasing. Note the following criticism: At the start of 1992, the Russian Federation had 6,347 nuclear warheads. When Boris Yeltsin resigned at the end of 1999, he left his successor 5,842 warheads. At the start of 2007, Russia had 681 ICBMs (including SLEBs carried by submarines) with 2,460 warheads and 79 strategic aircraft with 884 cruise missiles. That's a total of 3,344 warheads. If current trends persist (new missiles are being built at an extremely slow rate, while the withdrawal of old missiles is accelerating), the Strategic Nuclear Forces might have no more than 300 ICBMs by the middle of the next decade with no more than

600 warheads.⁵⁶ In short, insofar as Moscow's nuclear forces were concerned the future looked anything but bright.

The Status of Conventional Weapons, 2010. If there were problems with nuclear forces, the problems with conventional weapons were even greater. This was brought home to the Kremlin in great clarity by the War with Georgia. The war began in chaos B especially among the high command in Moscow. As one Russian source put it,

The Main Operations Directorate and the Main Organization Directorate found themselves on August 8, 2008 in the street in the direct sense of the word. On that day the directorates were engaged in carrying out a very strict directive of Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov. Ten KamAZs were lined up at entrances, and property of the General Staff=s two main directorates, packed in

⁵⁶ A Eight Years of Falling Behind and Weakening, A *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No.

27, February 13, 2008 in wnc 2/14/08.

boxes and bundles, was being loaded into them⁵⁷

The result was that many officers learned the news that Georgia had begun military operations against South Ossetia from morning news publications.⁵⁸

When the generals sat down to evaluate Russian performance during the war, they were shocked and quite vocal in discussing problems. This discussion became the impetus for the greatest change in Russian conventional forces since World

⁵⁷ *A Sword of the Empire*, @ *Zavtra*, October 5, 2008 in *wnc 10/6/08*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

War II. In an interview in May 2009, a former VDV intelligence chief, Colonel Pavel Popovskikh, underscored the dated condition of combat training within the elite airborne forces, as well as reflecting on the situation within conventional forces.

Our army is still being trained based upon regulations, which were written in the 1960s. The regulations, manuals, combat training programmes, and the volumes of standards have become obsolete. An old friend recently sent me the volume of standards that is in force, which we wrote already in 1984, 25 years ago. This volume is a reflection of the operation and combat training of the troops and their operating tactics. If the Airborne Troops have remained at the prehistoric level, then we can confidently say that the General Staff and the rest of the troops continue to train for a past war.

The Georgian War was a watershed for Russia. It was clear that the Russian military was plagued with aged equipment, hardware and weaponry, which were dangerously coupled with ineffective command and control systems, poor communications and inter-service coordination. There were also intelligence support failings, failure of the GLONASS navigational system and higher than

anticipated casualty systems partly as a result of problems with inadequate identification of friend or foe equipment. In August 2008, the independent Russian military newspaper, *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, noted that 60-75 percent of 58th Army tanks deployed in Georgia were the old T-62, T-72M and T-72BM none of which could withstand Georgian anti-tank warheads.

There were even among the new weapons that were being produced: when discussing the new T-90 tank in July 2008, the then commander-in-chief of Ground Forces, Army General Alexei Maslov, openly admitted that Russian tanks were lagging behind other countries in the use of modern electronics. As he put it, "Although work to develop a tank battlefield information management system is already under way, its installation on outdated tank models is too costly and therefore not recommended."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ "Russian General Outlines Plan to Supply Army with New Armored

One could go on, but the bottom line is that weapons and equipment in the current Russian Army is antiquated at best. In June 2009 the Ministry of Defense stated that the outfitting of troops (forces) with arms and with military and special equipment currently remains at a level of from 60 - 100%, but the proportion of modern models is around 10%.⁶⁰ It will be many years, perhaps 2020, a year often suggested by Russian military analysts before the

Equipment, @ *Interfax*, November 15, 2008 in wnc 11/16/08.

⁶⁰ National Security Priorities: Improving Legislative Support for Military Organizational Development, @ *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kurier*, June 20, 2009 in wnc 6/21/09.

military that has been reduced to close to 1 million and is undergoing major structural changes will have a relatively modern armed forces.

Using Strategic Nuclear Forces to Offset Conventional Weaknesses. It is clear, that the Krenin=s attempt to maintain a strong nuclear deterrent to provide an umbrella while Russia=s conventional forces were modernized failed on both grounds. First, while Russia maintained a nuclear deterrent of sorts, if anything it shrunk during the Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev periods. As long as the option of a nuclear first use option is available, Moscow has a nuclear deterrent, but it is far less than it was in 1993 or even 2000. Furthermore, for practical purposes, it is limited to ground based ICBMs for the immediate future.

The other two legs of the nuclear triad B the Bulava naval variant is dysfunctional to this point, and the few obsolete Tu-95MS and TU-160 LAR bombers B for practical purposes are irrelevant.

Turning to the conventional forces, the military is clearly in a period of

transition. Defense Minister Serdyukov has undertaken a major restructuring of the Russian military, and faces a monumental task in updating and modernizing its weapons systems. If anything, the quality of the current inventory has continued to deteriorate in spite of some efforts to modernize them. Weapons systems from the 70s, 80s and even nineties are everywhere but they are of little use against weapons systems based on technology from the twentieth century.

There is a major problem facing both the modernization of nuclear and conventional weapons and that is the sad state the military-industrial complex finds itself in. As a Russian general put it in April 2010, "The Defense Ministry cannot buy something that does not guarantee parity in the event of a conflict. . . . The army cannot buy artillery with a range of 20 kilometers when the enemy has 70 kilometers."⁶¹ In another instance, the same

⁶¹ "Russian Military Refuses to Buy Russian Army's Inferior to Foreign

officer made it clear that if incompetence and corruption mean that if Russia cannot find quality conventional weapons in Russia, it will purchase them abroad. A stinging indictment of the country's domestic industrial complex. To quote him again,

Vladimir Popovkin said . . . that the military paid defense industry a \$ billion advance for the building of unmanned aerial vehicles, but never did acquire the vehicles, which are so much needed by the field. And this is why it was forced to purchase them in Israel. The problem is not a lack of know-how or ability, it is the backwardness of the available technology of enterprises of the OPK (defense industrial complex). The fact is that certain directors of design bureaus and plants, instead of channeling the allocated funds into the purchase of modern production lines, put them into the bank to obtain interest to build up their margins.⁶²

Counterparts, @ *Interfax*, April 19, 2010 in wnc 4/22/10.

⁶² *Autumn of Defense Industry: The Russian Army Has Already Been Forced to Purchase Weapons from Overseas Firms*, @ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 11, 2010 in wnc 4/12/10.

How and when Russian industry will be in a position to produce quality weapons whether it is a Bulava missile or a modern fighter jet or an armored vehicle is uncertain. Until it is able to do so, however, the chances of Moscow catching up in either area are minimal unless it buys all of its weapons abroad.