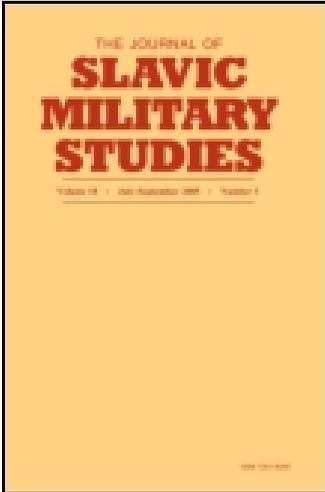


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A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation

KEIR GILES

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Fundamental reform of Russia's military has passed through a number of distinct phases since its inception in late 2008. This paper describes the phase of consolidation and stability begun in early 2011. Based on research to June 2012, and pre-dating the replacement of Anatoliy Serdyukov as Russian Defence Minister, the paper shows how early planning and forecasting deficiencies were addressed from 2011 onward, with continuing support at the highest level for the overall aims of military reform. Ongoing problems such as procurement and manpower are discussed as serious challenges to Russian military aspirations, and further specific challenges affecting each individual arm of service are described. In conclusion, Russia's new military capabilities, and the state's rationale for introducing them, are considered.

INTRODUCTION

The current transformation of the Russian Armed Forces marks the final demise of the Soviet military, with a decisive step away from the cadre unit and mass mobilization structure inherited from the USSR. The first stages of this fundamental reform, implemented following the summer of 2008, have been well documented in both Russian and foreign analyses.¹ But the

¹ Among many others, see Mikhail Barabanov (editor), *Novaya Armiya Rossiï*, Moscow, *Tsentri analiza strategiy i tekhnologiy*, 2010. Nygren, McDermott and Pallin (editors). 'The Russian Armed Forces in Transition', Routledge, 2012. Bettina Renz and Rod Thornton, 'Russian Military Modernization. Cause, Course and Consequence', *Problems of Post-Communism* 50(1), January/February 2012.

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ongoing process of transformation entered a qualitatively new phase during 2011, affecting all areas of military endeavor and—in all probability—shaping the force that will emerge after the reform process is deemed complete.

This article describes the current developments in overhauling both the form and content of the Russian military, with the intention of turning it into a force ready and capable for 21st-century conflict as Russia sees it. Subsequent articles in this issue will discuss further whether the transformation effort is on target to achieve this aim, and broader views on this and other tools of influence at Russia's disposal.

A NEW PHASE

After the application of shock therapy to the Russian military in the autumn of 2008, and subsequent twists and turns in both policy and implantation, which left Russian officers joking about rollercoasters and about their new secret weapon being complete unpredictability, 2011 saw the beginning of a smoother and more stable transformation process. In part, this appears due to new supervisory arrangements at the highest level, with the Security Council of the Russian Federation (SCRF) now approving reform plans.² The apparent effect has not only been to introduce stability by planning further ahead than in the early stages of reform, but also providing a more methodical approach—with fewer instances of Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov attracting criticism for enthusiastically embracing ideas from abroad without first assessing their suitability for Russian conditions.³

Key personnel decisions suggest that the current transformation process continues to enjoy President Putin's approval and support, and consequently that reform is set to continue along its current path. First, despite continuing perennial predictions of the imminent departure of Defence Minister Serdyukov,⁴ he was one of the small minority of cabinet ministers to retain their post in the reshuffle following the presidential elections. Second, during the equally sweeping replacement of a large number of Russia's most senior commanders in April and May 2012,⁵ Col.-Gen. Aleksandr Postnikov (also known as Postnikov-Streltsov) was appointed deputy Chief of General Staff (CGS) and widely tipped as a successor to Nikolai Makarov in the

² Keir Giles, 'Who Gives the Orders in the New Russian Military?' NATO Defense College, March 2012.

³ Keir Giles, 'Russian Operations in Georgia: Lessons Identified Versus Lessons Learned', in *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*, *op. cit.*

⁴ For a particularly vitriolic example, see Konstantin Sivkov, 'Serdyukov ne prosto nepopulyaren – on omerzitel', KM-Novosti, 17 May 2012, <http://www.km.ru/v-rossii/2012/05/17/ministerstvo-oborony-rf/k-sivkov-serdyukov-ne-prosto-nepopulyaren-omerzitel>.

⁵ Vladislav Kulikov, 'Medvedev proizvel kadrovyye perestanovki v voyskakh', *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 May 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/05/06/oficeri-site.html>.

top job.⁶ Analysis as early as February 2006 identified Postnikov as a key individual benefiting from the ‘stovepipe’ promotion of Makarov and a number of reform-minded senior officers.⁷ This appointment indicates that despite losses along the way, there is still a cadre of Makarov protégés from Siberian Military District supporting his ideas on reform and in a position to implement them.⁸

At the same time, reputed opponents of reform, including former Deputy CGS Col.-Gen. Valeriy Gerasimov and former Air Force Commander-in-Chief Col.-Gen. Aleksandr Zelin, were sidelined or dismissed—Zelin, allegedly, for opposing the method by which Russia’s new Aerospace Defence Command was created⁹ and for bypassing the chain of command to protest over educational reform for the Air Force.¹⁰ It remains to be seen whether Zelin’s new post, as deputy prime minister in charge of development of the aviation sector, is a meaningful position.¹¹

Before considering how this new phase of reform affects each of Russia’s combat arms, it is worth reviewing progress in the accompanying task of re-equipping the forces.

PROCUREMENT AND REARMAMENT

Russia’s arms purchasing program announced in 2011 and scheduled to run to 2020 attracted excited headlines, and broke all records for the proposed level of spending.¹² The hugely ambitious rearmament program, as well as the state of Russian armaments in service before it began, have generated a wealth of statistics, as quoted liberally in other articles in this issue, but as always a dearth of meaningful and measurable ones—a favorite index, the ‘percentage of modern weapons’ available in service, is cited almost universally but apparently never defined.

The purchasing program itself is proceeding in fits and starts—there is more positive news available than in previous years, but full implementation of the program would still seem highly improbable even if the assumptions made about the amount of budget funds available were valid. As it is, the failure of the price of oil to remain at the level stipulated for the Russian federal

⁶ ‘*Naznachen novyy nachalnik Genshtaba*,’ *Argumenty Nedeli*, 4 May 2012. <http://www.argumenti.ru/army/n338/174844>.

⁷ As cited in Giles: ‘Georgia: Lessons Learned’, *op. cit.*

⁸ Sergey Ishchenko, ‘*General’skaya uborka*’, *Svobodnaya pressa*, 27 April 2012.

⁹ Ivan Gladilin, ‘*Voyenny tandem pristupil k “zachistke kadrov”*’, *KM-Novosti*, 28 April 2012. <http://www.km.ru/v-rossii/2012/04/28/organy-vlasti-rf/voenniy-tandem-pristupil-k-zachistke-kadrov>.

¹⁰ ‘*Naznachen novyy nachalnik Genshtaba*,’ *Argumenty Nedeli*, 4 May 2012. <http://www.argumenti.ru/army/n338/174844>.

¹¹ Vladislav Kulikov, ‘*Medvedev proizvel kadrovyye perestanovki v voyskakh*’, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 May 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/05/06/oficeri-site.html>.

¹² Andrey Frolov, ‘Russian Military Spending in 2011–2020’, Moscow Defense Brief, No. 1 2011.

budget to break even renders the purchasing targets even more exotic.¹³ Nevertheless, there are substantial and important differences between this arms purchasing program and its predecessors.

One such difference is increased acceptance of purchasing military equipment abroad, and the larger number of equipment types for which this can be done. Russia's victory parade on 9 May 2012 included Italian Lince armored fighting vehicles (AFVs). While the parade should not be treated as indicative of real substantive changes in the forces themselves, it is certainly indicative of what is considered politically acceptable; and it was shortly followed by an announcement that Italian Centauro tank destroyers were also under consideration for purchase.¹⁴

Significantly, interest had also been shown in German Boxer AFVs, but any purchase was prevented by export restrictions. In articles published in leading Russian print media ahead of the presidential election, Vladimir Putin explained that Russia wished to purchase small quantities of foreign equipment in order to acquire the underlying technology: buying 'single examples of systems, units, materials and technologies. . . will allow us swiftly to resolve urgent tasks in the defence sector and. . . serve as the basis for acquiring technologies and knowledge'.¹⁵ Applying the same logic, in mid-April Rosoboroneksport announced that talks with China on sales of the Sukhoi Su-35 had been frozen because China was interested in purchasing only a limited number of the new aircraft. Nonetheless, a number of European defense enterprises are willing to continue to supply Russia with small sample batches of equipment.

Another new element in the current procurement program is the purchase abroad of equipment which is by no means new, and which arguably could have been sourced from Russian producers—for example, the reported purchase of Eurocopter AS350 Squirrel helicopters.¹⁶ This adds a new dimension to the internal argument over buying abroad, in particular in the field of UAVs. While it is recognized that Russian technology still lags behind in this area, despite early progress during the Soviet period, there is still dissatisfaction at buying examples of older Israeli technology, which are considered the 'grandfathers of current US and Israeli UAVs'.¹⁷

This debate takes place against the backdrop of ongoing infighting between the defense industry and the Ministry of Defence and General Staff.

¹³ For detailed discussion of this issue, see the 'Russian Defense Policy' blog, in particular at <http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2012/04/23/defense-news-4/>.

¹⁴ Aleksey Nikolskiy, '*Rossiya ispytyvayet italyanskiye kolesnyye tanki*', Vedomosti.ru, 12 May 2012. http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/1732497/rossiya_ispytyvaet_italyanskie_tanki#ixzz1ukx7fOyW.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, '*Byt' sil'nyimi: garantii natsional'noy bezopasnosti dlya Rossii*', *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 17 February 2012.

¹⁶ Aleksei Nikolskiy and Andrei Trifonov, '*Rossiya kupit inostrannyye vertolety*', Vedomosti.ru, 22 February 2012. http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/1510709/6_mlrd_konkurentu#ixzz1ukxglu1J.

¹⁷ Viktor Dyatlikovich, '*Beschelovecheskoye budushcheye*', *Russkiy Reporter*, 24 April 2012. <http://www.rusrep.ru/article/2012/04/24/buduhee>.

This public spat reached a peak ahead of the March 2012 presidential elections,¹⁸ with President Putin backing the defense industry against those who argued that its output was no longer fit for purpose. One of the key tasks of Deputy Prime Minister Dmitriy Rogozin, in his new role as defense and space industry supremo, was to bring order to the procurement process. This has involved heavy criticism of the defense industry—never quite in direct opposition to Vladimir Putin—and the willingness to trample vested interests, as witness his role in the cancellation of flagship procurement projects such as the BMP-3 and BMD-4M.¹⁹

But the changes that Rogozin would wish to introduce are so deep, and the challenges to ingrained assumptions so severe, that progress is slow and painful, and reverses are common. There are continuing instances of open discord between Rogozin and Chief of General Staff Nikolai Makarov,²⁰ most recently over plans to produce a next-generation strategic bomber.²¹ Meanwhile, Rogozin's personal style, not diminished in the slightest on his return to Russia from his colorful tenure as head of the Russian Mission to NATO, keeps colleagues, opponents and observers equally alert—not least through his continuing habit of causing havoc with unexpected announcements released via Twitter and shortly afterwards issuing retractions or explanations.²²

Nonetheless, pragmatic decisions on equipment purchasing and disposal are now being made that appear more closely related to Russia's force optimization goals and purchasing capability. An example is the purchase of Su-30SM multi-role aircraft—a localized variant of the Su-30MKI as successfully supplied to India. This is an aircraft that should, in theory, despite noises to the contrary by the manufacturers, be well within Russian capabilities to produce early and in significant quantities.²³ At the other end of the service lifespan, the long-awaited trimming of the tank fleet appears to have started in earnest, with disposal of T-64, T-55 and even T-80 models finally under way.²⁴ Thus at least in some areas, equipment programs are beginning to fall in line with plans for reorganized and better-equipped units in the individual commands.

¹⁸ 'The winner is. . .' Russian Defense Policy, 9 March 2012. <http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/the-winner-is/>.

¹⁹ 'Defense news', Russian Defense Policy, 25 April 2012. <http://russiandefpolicy.wordpress.com/2012/04/25/defense-news-5/>.

²⁰ 'Zakupki bronetekhniki prodolzhasya, nesmotrya na slova Makarova', *RIA Novosti*, 14 February 2012. http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20120214/565663330.html.

²¹ 'Rogozin i Makarov posporili iz-za novogo bombardirovshchika', *Army News*, 6 June 2012. <http://army-news.ru/2012/06/rogozin-i-makarov-posporili-iz-za-novogo-bombardirovshchika/>.

²² 'Rogozin utocnil sroki nachala proizvodstva tankov na platforme "Armata"', *RIA Novosti*, 13 April 2012.

²³ Maya Mashatina, 'Sukhoi Su-30SM: An Indian Gift to Russia's Air Force', *RIA Novosti*, 23 March 2012. <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20120323/172357523.html>.

²⁴ Anton Denisov, 'Russia Announces "Massive" Tank Scrappage Scheme', *RIA Novosti*, 23 March 2012. http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20120323/172346264.html.

GROUND FORCES

In the wake of Defence Minister Serdyukov's much-derided announcement that the Ground Forces structure had been transformed by 1 December 2009 into 85 permanent-readiness brigades, 'ready at one hour's notice', the process of reorganization into real brigade structures has continued to roll out and adapt. Throughout 2009–2010, new brigade-style groups were created on the basis of existing military hardware, organization and doctrine, resulting in a temporary compromise table of organization and equipment (TOE). The year 2011 saw structural transformation within these new organizations, including the beginning of re-equipment and rearmament where available. The second stage of conversion, from late 2011 onwards, has seen the beginning of the reorganization into 'heavy', 'medium' and 'light' brigades.

Planned since 2010, this ambitious program of adaptation to the specific circumstances and requirements of each of Russia's Military Districts has now been given a more realistic timeframe, and is currently scheduled to run to 2015. The 'heavy' brigade is to be the core Ground Forces unit, will maintain permanent combat readiness status, and will be equipped with heavy tracked-chassis armored fighting vehicles. 'Medium' (also known as 'mobile') brigades will be armed with wheeled-chassis armor and are intended for use as rapid-response units. 'Light' brigades are to be highly mobile, equipped with light armored vehicles.²⁵ Former Air Force C-in-C Col.-Gen. Zelin stated in March 2012 that the General Staff intended for his command to be capable of lifting a light brigade anywhere within the country, or abroad if necessary.²⁶

According to Russian reporting, as of 1 January 2012 a total of 96 brigades of all types were in existence, with no reflection as yet of the new plans for light-medium-heavy subdivision:

- 4 tank brigades
- 36 motor-rifle brigades
- 1 force protection brigade
- 4 airborne assault brigades
- 7 special forces brigades
- 2 reconnaissance brigades
- 8 missile brigades
- 8 artillery brigades
- 4 rocket artillery brigades

²⁵ Barabanov, 'Novaya armiya', *op. cit.*

²⁶ Viktor Litovkin, '7 aviabaz, 28 modernizirovannykh aerodromov i noveysbiye samolety. Glavnokomanduyushchiy VVS Rossii general-polkovnik Aleksandr Zelin rasskazal "NVO" o razvitiit otechestvennoy voyennoy aviatsii', *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, 16 March 2012.

- 10 SAM brigades
- 2 engineer brigades
- 15 arms storage and repair depots, established as reserve units.²⁷

Despite capability improvements overall, including in the sensitive northwest of Russia,²⁸ priority in re-equipping and reorganizing the Ground Forces is still going to the Southern Military District—extending from the early establishment of ‘new look’ units in South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the armed conflict in Georgia in 2008.²⁹ According to some reports, this district has seen almost total re-equipment with ‘modern’ vehicles and weapons systems—for example, the T-90A and BTR-82A.³⁰ This emphasis on the southern part of European Russia is indicative of where Russia feels it is most likely that issues will arise that posit a military solution, and where ground forces will be in use earliest.³¹

Significant and abiding challenges in implementing transformation plans remain. The availability of funding for grandiose procurement programs is an issue that affects all sectors of the Russian military, and it will be discussed further below. But the perennial personnel problem is of particular relevance to the Ground Forces. Stated targets for manpower are still not admitting defeat over contractization, and instead pretend that a substantial increase in contract recruitment is possible to cover shortfalls in conscription.³² Meanwhile, the abandoning of plans for permanent-readiness units fully manned with professional servicemen has led to mixed manning units with reported falls in skill levels—compounded by the fact that a one-year, not two-year, conscription period means that conscripts are experiencing significant differences in their training depending on whether they were inducted in winter or summer. This has given rise to alarm over the performance of some units in exercises, as the proportion of servicemen with very little experience rises.³³

²⁷ ‘Russian Military Reform from administrative reorganization to structural reform’. Presentation by Andrey Frolov and Mikhail Barabanov, Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), at US National Defense University, 26 April 2012.

²⁸ Forss, Kiianlinna, Inkinen and Hult, ‘*Venäjäjän sotilaspoliittinen kehitys ja Suomi*’, Finnish National Defence University Series 2: Research Reports No. 47. 2011.

²⁹ Keir Giles, ‘Understanding the Georgian Conflict, Two Years On’, NATO Defense College, Rome, September 2011. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/series.php?icode=9>.

³⁰ Sergey Kononov, ‘*Obnovlennaya oborona Severnogo Kavkaza. Generaly otchitalis o prakticheski polnom perevooruzhenii voysk v regione*’, *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, 25 October 2011. http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2011-10-25/6_kavkaz.html.

³¹ See also comments on the ‘southern flank’ in interview with Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev: ‘The Real Threats for Russia, the USA and the EU Lie in the Current Instability’, *Kommersant*, 12 January 2012.

³² As stated, for example, by Vladimir Putin in a pre-election article: Russia should have 700,000 professional servicemen (including officers) by 2017. Vladimir Putin, ‘*Byt’ sil’nymi: garantii natsional’noy bezopasnosti dlya Rossii*’, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 17 February 2012.

³³ See, for example, ‘*Ucheniya na Kamchatke: rakety s kreysera “Varyag” ne doletali do tseli, boyevaya tekhnika zastrevala v peske*’, *Novyy Region*, 22 September 2011. <http://nr2.ru/society/349713.html>; Igor

At the same time, the stated overall complement of the Armed Forces remains one million men. This figure, long recognized as unachievable,³⁴ continues to be repeated even after the effects of the reduction in the conscription term have become clear, despite repeated demonstrations in Russian open-source media that it is a fiction.³⁵ This may account for Russia's military reserve system still being in transition, and showing symptoms that its organizers are still thinking in terms of providing manpower for a mass mobilization army. It will be interesting to see whether changes introduced in 2012 finally align reserve status, liabilities and training with the stated structure and manning principles of the forces.

Another challenge that poses particular difficulties for the Ground Forces is that of selecting and training NCOs. Despite early recognition of the importance of developing NCOs into more effective leaders, administrators and operators, progress appears painfully slow. Reporting in early 2012 suggested that some NCOs were still undergoing the 10-month warrant officer (*praporshchik*) course in order to fill administrative posts—despite the fact that *praporshchiki* had notionally been abolished. Meanwhile, poor planning and basic failures of arithmetic in predicting the required numbers of officer cadets has led to several thousands of cadets graduating from military academies as officers, but continuing to serve as NCOs.³⁶

June 2012 saw the graduation of the first 'long-course' NCO cadets from the Ryazan airborne forces institute. The course, lasting over two years, saw 241 enrolled, with 180 surviving the course to graduate.³⁷ The tiny numbers, and the length of the course, bring the extent of the challenge into perspective when compared with the requirement for tens of thousands of trained and effective NCOs in order to meet Russia's ambitions for its military. The problem was formally recognized in May 2012, with the announcement that over 10,000 posts that had been downgraded to be filled by NCOs would revert to requiring commissioned officers.³⁸ This followed sustained reporting of units being unable to carry out their functions since the NCOs or conscripts tasked with carrying out duties previously assigned to officers simply did not have the training or experience to do so, with examples including an anti-air missile unit deciding on its own initiative to rehire dismissed officers after exercises proved conscripts were incapable of commanding

Kravchuk, 'Takogo pozora VMF RF eshche ne znal. Pokazushnyye ucheniya na Kamchatke', Gaidpark, 20 September 2011. <http://gidepark.ru/user/2976644430/article/424394>.

³⁴ Keir Giles, 'Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? Russia's Military Plans Versus Demographic Reality', Conflict Studies Research Centre, October 2006.

³⁵ Aleksey Nikolskiy, 'Minoborony: nekomplekt v Vooruzhennykh silakh dostigayet 20%', Vedomosti.ru, 9 June 2012. http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/1837940/voennyh_ne_hvataet#ixzz1ydVdnGXy.

³⁶ Keir Giles, 'Who Gives the Orders in the New Russian Military?' NATO Defense College, March 2012.

³⁷ Viktor Litovkin, 'VDV commander Shamanov interviewed on intermediate results of VDV reform', *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, 2 March 2012.

³⁸ *Agentstvo voyennykh novostey*, 23 May 2012; *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 29 May 2012.

Buk systems.³⁹ In the move to ‘professional’ NCOs, as with the development of officer manning overall, the Russian military’s ambitions have run ahead of what is possible without detailed long-term planning and a corresponding fundamental cultural shift in the understanding of what precisely effective noncommissioned servicemen are and how they are formed.

AIR FORCE

The end of the first stage of reform in the Air Force saw 52 so-called air bases replacing a much larger number of notionally equivalent units. In common with the creation of joint strategic commands (OSKs), the system closely resembles the one established earlier in Belarus, where different circumstances forced early and more radical transformation of the military. Supposedly complete by the end of 2009, this renaming was followed in 2010 by consolidation: by mid-2010, there were 37 bases for both the Air Force and the Air Defence Forces (PVO), and by the end of 2010 there were officially just eight category one bases (notionally equivalent to a former air force division) and seven category two (equating to an air regiment). Plans after 2010 point to an eventual establishment of 10 ‘super-bases’, each containing several air groups, with a home base each in a satellite system. These 10 should be made up of one tactical aviation air base in each Military District, plus a further six—two each of Long-Range, Transport and Naval Aviation.⁴⁰

Russia’s Aerospace Defence Command (VKO) was activated on 1 December 2011—1 December having emerged as the common D-day each year for organizational change. The appearance of this new structure began the second phase of Air Force reform by bringing about a fundamental change to air defense tasks. Based on the Space Troops, but absorbing PVO and missile defense capabilities in Moscow, radar units, and some army air defense units, the VKO is billed as one of Russia’s responses to U.S. plans for missile defense in Europe. As noted above, the sacking of Air Force C-in-C Zelin has been attributed inter alia to his opposition to the way VKO was created. And at the time of writing, the establishment of the new command and the precise extent of its duties and how they overlapped with those of the Air Force appeared still controversial, with Russian interviewees unwilling or unable to comment.

Shortly before his dismissal, Col.-Gen. Zelin had given an impressively long and detailed interview on the problems facing the reorganization of his command—indeed, the tone of the interview may not have inclined Defence

³⁹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2 April 2012, as cited in ‘OSC Report: Military Increases Officer Billets to Address Combat Readiness Problems’, Open Source Center, 14 June 2012.

⁴⁰ ‘Reforming Russian Air Force’, Presentation by Andrey Frolov, Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), at US National Defense University, 26 April 2012.

Minister Serdyukov or other civilian leaders to retain him in place.⁴¹ Zelin, in particular, highlighted command and control issues, and Russian commentators back him in questioning the effectiveness of subordinating air units to the OSK, arguing that this may lead to the ‘regionalization’ of air power rather than its concentration. Other challenges facing the Air Force include a lack of experience of conduct of modern large-scale air operations, a shortage or absence of modern types of air weapon such as active seeker air-to-air missiles, air-dropped munitions with satellite correction, ‘semi-strategic’ precision guided cruise missiles, modern electronic warfare suites, the continuing low rates of aircraft reliability and serviceability, and safety issues and attrition, where matters are improving but loss rates remain at levels which would be unacceptable by Western standards. Finally, the potential lack of funding for the current arms purchasing program, and the slow rate of delivery of new aircraft, are of fundamental concern.

NAVY

Transformation of the Russian Navy began in earnest later than serious change in other arms of service. In 2009–2011, the key change for the Navy was subordination to OSKs, albeit accompanied by deep concern over what this entailed for prosecution of an independent maritime doctrine.⁴² What change did take place affected not warships but other combat arms and support services, and mirrored the reorganization taking place in other services: naval aviation was grouped into ‘air bases’ as per the Air Force, marine infantry was mostly reorganized into brigades as with the Ground Forces, and outsourcing of logistics and support services began as throughout the military.⁴³

The second stage of reform, from 2011 onwards, includes a reorganization of fleets divisions to address top-heavy structures where divisions contain only a few, or even just one, warships—a phenomenon singled out by CGS Makarov early in the reform process as indicative of the urgent need for change.⁴⁴ Headquarters units and command structures have been pruned, and the effect of increased funding has been felt in increased sea time and flying hours.

The fluctuating fortunes of the Navy as a whole can be traced in the declared plans for building of capital ships. At the time of writing, aircraft carriers are once again promised for the medium term. But doubts remain over Russia’s shipbuilding capability—accentuated by a succession

⁴¹ Litovkin, ‘7 aviabaz. . .’, *op. cit.*

⁴² See ‘The Role of the Navy’, in Giles, *Russian Operations in Georgia*, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Dmitriy Boltenkov, ‘The Russian Navy’s “New Look” Reform in 2009–2011’, Moscow Defense Brief, No. 2, 2012. <http://www.mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2012/item3/article3/>.

⁴⁴ ‘Pohyy tekst vystupleniya generala Makarova’, *Kommersant Vlast*, 13 July 2009.

of disappointments with the long-term submarine building and refit program, exemplified by delays and faults with the Severodvinsk and Aleksandr Nevsky.⁴⁵

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

When considering the effect of the transformation process overall, a number of distinct areas of the Russian military need to be considered separately, either because they are singled out for special treatment, or because they are entirely new creations, such as the VKO discussed above.

The former category includes the Airborne Assault Troops (VDV), whose special role led to the retention of a divisional structure—but with the possibility of independent brigades being established in the future, according to their commander in March 2012.⁴⁶ The VDV have not been immune to the failure of the contractization program, with original plans for fully professional units (including the prototype 76th Airborne) rolled back to mixed manning. Nevertheless, one Western analyst observes that the VDV remain the most professional Russian military formation, and the most able to act with little visible preparation—adding in this context that Russia's foreign policy ambitions will 'inevitably result in occasional Russian military interventions abroad'.⁴⁷

Besides the VKO, the latter category includes the 'Cyber Security Command' announced by Dmitriy Rogozin in March 2012⁴⁸—apparently in response to the creation of similar establishments overseas, in the same way that VKO was established in response to U.S. plans for missile defense. At the time of writing, few specific details are available on this supposed new entity within the Russian military organization. The first official doctrinal statement on the role of the Russian military in cyberspace, the 'Conceptual Views on the Activity of the Russian Federation Armed Forces in Information Space', was released at the end of 2011, and it described cyber force tasks that would bear very little resemblance to those of equivalent commands in the West.⁴⁹ The differences from published doctrine in the U.S. or the UK are substantial.

⁴⁵ See Thomas Nilsen, 'Brand new attack submarine not ready for service', *Barents Observer*, 24 January 2012. <http://barentsobserver.com/en/briefs/brand-new-attack-submarine-not-ready-service> and related reports at <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/nuclear-submarine-needs-more-testing> and <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/dozens-major-flaws-newest-submarine>.

⁴⁶ Litovkin, 'VDV commander Shamanov. . .', *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Rod Thornton, 'Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces: The Lessons of the Georgian Conflict', USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, December 2011.

⁴⁸ 'Russia May Form Cyber Command – Rogozin', ITAR-TASS, 21 March 2012. <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c154/371568.html>.

⁴⁹ Keir Giles, 'Russia's Public Stance on Cyber/Information Warfare', in Czosseck, Ottis and Ziolkowski (editors), *4th International Conference on Cyber Conflict*, Tallinn, Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), June 2012.

The document is defensive in tone and focuses on prevention of information war, including allowing for a military role in negotiating international treaties governing information security.⁵⁰

In particular, the 'Conceptual Views' contain no mention of the possibility of offensive cyber activity. At first sight, this would seem a continuation of the pattern whereby this activity is not seen as the domain of the military; previous attempts to introduce this capability were publicly scotched by the FSB.⁵¹ Nevertheless, comment by CGS Makarov at a meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences in January 2012 gave a very different message:

- The Russian Armed Forces are able in the very near future to set up special sub-units and a so-called 'Cyber Command', which will work in three main areas:
- Disrupting adversary information systems, including by introducing harmful software;
- Defending our own communications and command systems;
- Working on domestic and foreign public opinion using the media, Internet and more.⁵²

The reference to 'introducing harmful software' appears to be the first official avowal of an offensive cyber role for a Russian government body. Meanwhile, the third 'main area', influencing public opinion, is a reminder that Russia deals in cyber warfare only as an integral component part of information warfare overall.

A final area that needs special consideration is Russian activity in developing and introducing new types of strategic weapons, and continuing strengths in nonstrategic nuclear weapons. The entry into force of the New START treaty in February 2011 saw the start of intensive Russian activity aimed at developing and introducing new strategic weapons systems, including at least three new ICBM programs. Tellingly, several of these are being conducted in conditions of secrecy, running counter to the common Russian habit of loudly proclaiming new advances in weapons technology.⁵³

Nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) remain in the Russian inventory in large numbers and intended for use in a wide range of scenarios,

⁵⁰ 'Russia's Draft Convention on International Information Security', Conflict Studies Research Centre and Institute of Information Security Issues, Moscow State University, April 2012. http://www.conflictstudies.org.uk/files/20120426_CSRC_IISI_Commentary.pdf. Conflict Studies Research Centre and Institute of Information Security Issues, Moscow State University.

⁵¹ Keir Giles, "Information Troops—A Russian Cyber Command?", Tallinn, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), June 2011.

⁵² 'Rossiya: odna armiya i tri mneniya', *Forum Ministerstva oborony Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 1 March 2012. http://www.forum-mil.ru/news/rossija_odna_armija_i_tri_mnenija/2012-03-01-1447.

⁵³ Mark B. Schneider, 'Russian Nuclear Modernization', Presentation at National Institute for Public Policy, 20 June 2012.

including for 'de-escalation'. Lying outside the bounds of New START, NSNW are, according to two Western analysts,

prized and important assets to Moscow, and they have become even more prized and important assets as Russia's conventional military has become weaker. They are seen more and more as the fallback option if Russia one day faces some sort of defeat in a conventional conflict.⁵⁴

'The result is that when a threat escalates from armed conflict to local war, we will have to go over to the use of nuclear weapons', agrees one leading Russian analyst.⁵⁵

Thus while conventional forces remain in a state of transition, with a perceived decrease in their effectiveness, nuclear forces fill the deterrence gap in a manner reminiscent of the Russian Armed Forces' nadir in the late 1990s. Scenarios for the use of NSNWs can be deduced from exercises that culminate in their use: dangerously, however, NSNWs are not covered by public Russian doctrine, with, in addition, no transparency for effective deterrence—a point to be explored in detail by Dima Adamsky in a subsequent article.

This, plus current Russian efforts to develop precision very low yield and low collateral damage nuclear weapons, lends a keener edge to Russian statements on the possibility of preemptive strikes to neutralize perceived threats. At the time of writing, the highest-profile example of this is comments by CGS Makarov at the Moscow conference on missile defense on 3–4 May 2012—so often misleadingly or incompletely quoted that it is worth reproducing in full:

Bearing in mind the destabilizing nature of the missile defense system, specifically the creation of the illusion of carrying out a destructive strike with impunity, a decision on pre-emptive use of destructive means at our disposal will be taken during the period when the situation deteriorates. Deploying new strike weapons in the south and north-west of Russia for destroying the missile defence systems by fire, including the deployment of the Iskander missile complex in Kaliningrad Oblast, presents one of the possible options for destroying missile defence infrastructure in Europe.⁵⁶

Despite the repetitiveness with which it is threatened, Iskander is far from the only means at Russia's disposal for the destruction of BMD sites in Europe.

⁵⁴ Renz and Thornton, 'Russian Military Modernization', *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Konstantin Sivkov, as quoted in Gregory Lannon, 'Russia's New Look Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24(1), pp. 26–54, February 2011.

⁵⁶ As cited in *Vzglyad* newspaper, available at <http://www.vz.ru/politics/2012/5/3/577140.html>. Transcripts and slides of presentations made by the U.S. side at the same conference are available at http://moscow.usembassy.gov/missile_defense.html

Besides the NSNWs discussed above, developments in cruise missiles are seen by some analysts as alarming.⁵⁷ And the deployment of S-400 missile systems to Kaliningrad presents particular interest given their reported additional ground attack role.⁵⁸ Again, in contrast to the habitual noise and bluster surrounding threats of deploying Iskanders to Kaliningrad, this system has been deployed with no visible public announcement. This, together with the departure from the classic pattern of deploying Russia's most advanced anti-air and anti-missile capabilities around the capital first, argues that this deployment is a statement of intent that should be taken at least as seriously as the eventual Iskander move.

Despite the widespread attention it received, Makarov's statement on countering the BMD problem, in effect, contained nothing new; but it served as a useful reminder to those who consider that assurances of good intent will be sufficient to assuage Russian suspicion of BMD and the willingness to act on that suspicion. The continuing impasse over missile defense, and promised Russian countermeasures, have the potential to increase military tension in Central Europe to levels not seen since the end of the Cold War; as one analysis puts it, 'hair triggers and tactical nuclear weapons are not comfortable bedfellows'.⁵⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Continuing macro adjustments make it clear that further change should be expected on the way to 2020, the common strategic planning horizon date for many of Russia's doctrinal statements. So while the new phase of Russia's military reform has brought greater stability and predictability to the transformation process, it remains too early to draw conclusions on the fine detail of the force that will result. This is especially true of the Navy, the victim of ongoing reverses in the debate over new capital ships. Often defined by financial arguments, these debates also hint at questions over the role and usage of a blue-water navy if there is no evident role for long-range power projection in the current military doctrine—the old adage going that the Russian military intervenes in places it can drive to.

In the meantime, despite the arrival of new uniforms and equipment that already make the Russian Armed Forces look more like a modern military than the force that was in use in Georgia in August 2008,⁶⁰ their role as

⁵⁷ Dennis M. Gormley, 'Cruise Missiles and NATO Missile Defense—Under the Radar?', IFRI Security Studies Centre, Spring 2012.

⁵⁸ Schneider, 'Russian Nuclear Modernization', *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Renz and Thornton, 'Russian Military Modernization', *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ For detailed descriptions of new uniforms currently under testing, see Denis Mokrushkin, 'Novaya polevaya forma', 10 April 2012. <http://twower.livejournal.com/771557.html#cutid1>.

a foreign policy tool—validated by that conflict—still jars in 21st-century Europe.⁶¹

It appeared clear from the earliest stages of post-2008 change in the Russian Armed Forces that it was now clear to Serdyukov, Makarov and their supporters what the military was *not* needed for: namely, countering a massive land incursion by means of mobilized mass. While the idea of vulnerability to U.S. and NATO hostile intentions remains strong, this vulnerability is finally no longer seen in Cold War-era conventional military terms: instead, it is missile defense and information security in the broad, Russian sense that come to the fore, even while lingering suspicions over a limited Libya-style intervention still provide a driving force for military modernization.⁶²

The private internal debate over what precisely Russia *does* need a military is likely to have been influenced in later stages by the ‘mild panic’ experienced by the Russian leadership when observing the fate of Muammar Gaddafi.⁶³ The emphasis on reorganization and re-equipment in the Southern Military District indicates clearly enough that this is the area where Russia considers it most likely that the Ground Forces are likely to be employed in the foreseeable future. This arises not only from security concerns over the next Western intervention, be it in Iran, Syria or another candidate yet to emerge—reinforced by the persistent Russian perception, leaning on the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq, that the U.S. and its allies do not always grasp the second- and third-order consequences of precipitate action. It also allows freedom of action in bringing hard influence to bear on Georgia with none of the doubts and disasters that attended the August 2008 intervention. According to one U.S. analyst, ‘It is . . . quite clear that once the reforms are fully enacted, Russia’s ability to project power outside its borders in regions other than the ‘south’ will be severely constrained. But at the same time, the reforms will allow ‘increased capacity to perform successful military operations along [Russia’s] southern periphery, which includes several former union republics of the USSR’.⁶⁴

As for rolling out the example of the Southern Military District to the remainder of Russia’s Armed Forces, two distinct obstacles threaten ambition in terms of both force structure and re-equipment. Plans for the first remain questionable because of simple facts of demography, and for the

⁶¹ ‘Russia—Future Directions’, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 1 October 2008. See also Frederic Labarre, ‘Defence Innovation and Russian Foreign Policy’, in *Russia after 2012*, by J. Larry Black (editor), Routledge, 2012.

⁶² Keir Giles, ‘The State of the NATO-Russia Reset’, Conflict Studies Research Centre, September 2011.

⁶³ ‘Zapreshchennoye nastupleniye: Intervyu prezidenta Akademii geopoliticheskikh problem general-polkovnika Leonida Ivasbova’, *Segodnya*, 8 March 2012. <http://www.segodnia.ru/content/106674>.

⁶⁴ Lannon, ‘Russia’s New Look Army Reforms’, *op. cit.*

second because of a simple lack of the wherewithal to fund the enormous procurement program.

It has been apparent to observers both within and outside the Russian Federation since well before the start of the current reforms that a reduction in the conscription term would be the beginning of a slow-motion disaster for the Russian military's manpower plans.⁶⁵ Five years on, Russia is continuing to scramble to broaden the conscription pool, and debates continue over deferments for students, accepting conscripts with a criminal record, and even extending conscription liability to the age of 30.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the fiction is maintained at the highest level that Russia enjoys a 'million-man army', despite the impossible nature of this claim being demonstrated again and again.⁶⁷

A similar denial of reality long colored the debate over funding for procurement,⁶⁸ even well after former Minister of Finance Aleksey Kudrin was induced to resign after pointing out that the plans were unaffordable.⁶⁹ On his pre-election tours, Vladimir Putin would point out that after the current spending plans 'there is no more money'—but not that there was not enough even to cover those plans.⁷⁰ And the absence of the promised funds is compounded by ongoing difficulties in administering procurement and restarting production in moribund facilities—problems that, at the time of writing, have just caused parts of the State Defence Order to be postponed for three years.⁷¹

Nevertheless, while many ambitions for the Russian military's 'new look' will not be met, it is undoubtedly the case that post-transformation Russia will have a very different force available from the one that went into action in Georgia in 2008, and one that is more effective, flexible, adaptable and scalable for achieving Russia's foreign policy aims.⁷² The advice given to President Putin on what precisely is achievable using the military tool will be broader accordingly.

⁶⁵ Keir Giles, 'Russia's Military Plans versus Demographic Reality', Conflict Studies Research Centre, May 2006.

⁶⁶ Mikhail Lukanin, 'Demographics vs. the Russian Army', Moscow Defense Brief, No. 1 2011.

⁶⁷ Most recently in Nikolskiy, '*Minoborony*', *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Ruslan Pukhov, '*Natsionalnaya oborona: vozmozhna ekonomiya*', *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, 16 March 2012. http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2012-03-16/11_economy.html.

⁶⁹ 'Kudrin Stands Firm on Defense Spending During "Timeout"', *The Moscow Times*, 10 October 2011.

⁷⁰ Kira Latukhina, '*Lomat' stereotypy*', *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 21 February 2012.

⁷¹ Konstantin Bogdanov, '*Gosprogrammuy vooruzheniya pridetsya perezagruzit' za tri goda*', RIA-Novosti, 2 July 2012. <http://www.ria.ru/analytics/20120702/690180731.html>.

⁷² Labarre, 'Defence Innovation', *op. cit.*