

# The Trajectory of the Russian Military: Downsizing, Degeneration, and Defeat

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Since the end of the Cold War, the Russian military has deteriorated so badly that instead of providing security it has become a major source of insecurity for the state it is supposed to protect. The demilitarization of the Russian state during the 1990s was as drastic as it was debilitating: the massive military machine inherited from the Soviet Union was reduced by a factor of three in terms of the numerical strength of the army and by at least a factor of ten in terms of share of gross domestic product (GDP) allocated to defense.<sup>1</sup> This radical demilitarization went forward without any clear plan or understanding of Russia's optimal military capabilities and without sufficient government control or supervision.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the political leadership frequently used (and abused) the military for its own purposes. As a result, Russia's armed forces have suffered huge losses of prestige and self-esteem.

With the assumption of Vladimir Putin to the presidency on December 31, 1999, the military's situation started to change, although not

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<sup>1</sup> Figures on the strength of the Soviet army and share of GDP allocated to defense are rough estimates. Vitaly Shlykov provides a useful estimate of the militarization of the Soviet economy in his chapter in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> For a balanced analysis of Russia's military posture in the mid-1990s, see Roy Allison, "The Russian Armed Forces: Structures, Roles, and Policies," in Vladimir Baranovsky, ed., *Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute, 1997), pp. 164–195.

with the speed and determination that will ultimately be required.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning, the new president was aware of the need to rebuild the armed forces into a reliable instrument of power. In this regard, the second war in Chechnya helped not only to secure his election but also to boost morale in, and societal support for, the military. Shortly after taking office, Putin increased military funding. The *Kursk* submarine disaster in August 2000, however, was a stark reminder that the military's structural problems cannot be resolved merely by pumping more money into the defense bureaucracy.

Putin's first term began with the adoption of a new national security concept and a new military doctrine, both of which were meant to provide guidelines for developing Russia's military structures.<sup>4</sup> Not content with the minimalist goal of arresting the degeneration of the armed forces, Putin declared his intention to restore the country's combat capability and to push for military modernization by reengaging the domestic industrial base. In so doing, the president hoped to reestablish the military's reputation. To assist him in this ambitious endeavor, he appointed his most trusted adviser, Sergei Ivanov, as minister of defense and called for the full cooperation of the battle-hardened "Chechen generals" in the General Staff.

At the end of Putin's first term, the lack of results was, to say the least, disheartening. Conditions within the armed forces continued to deteriorate, and the lack of security remained a huge concern. Indeed, military reform and revitalization are probably the two areas where Putin has had the least success while encountering the greatest challenges to his

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough analysis of Russia's military posture at the start of the Putin era, see Stephen J. Cimbala, ed., *The Russian Military into the Twenty-first Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2002). On Putin's immediate tasks and the possibilities for reforming Russia's military structures, see Pavel Baev, "Russian Military: The Best Case," and "The Worst Case," both in Marc Galeotti and Ian Syngé, eds., *Putin's Russia: Scenarios for 2005* (London: Jane's Special Report, February 2001), pp. 35–45 and 99–108.

<sup>4</sup> The military doctrine and the national security concept, approved in early 2000, saw extensive debate in the pages of *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*. See, for instance, Sergei Sokut, "Doctrine for a Transitional Period," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, October 22, 1999. For an overview, see Alexei Arbatov, "The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya," Marshall Center Papers no. 2, July 2000; see also Charles Dick, "Russia's New Doctrine Takes Dark World View," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 2000, pp. 14–19.

leadership. More significant than the time already lost is the realization that the Russian armed forces are not just resistant to reform but are fundamentally incapable of achieving it.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter examines the decision making involved in the effort to rebuild the Russian armed forces. It argues that the shallowness of military thinking and the inflexibility of Russia's military structures, particularly at the top, are responsible for the lack of success thus far. But these are not the only factors. Other factors include the civilian leadership's lack of interest in military affairs and their willingness to leave the armed forces to the generals. The chapter weighs the relative importance of these inputs for the absence of military innovation in Russia first under Boris Yeltsin and then under Vladimir Putin.

The chapter divides the turbulent post-Soviet era into four periods, each of which began with a watershed event, and then assesses the state of political-military relations during that period as well as the military's performance (see table 2.1). The chapter also seeks to explain why the Russian armed forces have failed to adapt to their new reality, despite the continuing deterioration of Soviet-style military structures and the emergence of new challenges—including the pressing need to modernize. It concludes with a brief discussion of possibilities for upgrading and “Europeanizing” the Russian armed forces at the start of Putin's second term.

#### EARLY CHAOS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

It is impossible to know whether the Soviet Union could have found a way to avoid collapse. What is clear is that the fatal blow was struck with the failed coup of August 19–21, 1991, for which many would hold the military responsible.<sup>6</sup> The military's lingering guilt about its involvement

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<sup>5</sup> See Vadim Solovev, “It's Easier to Build a New Army Than to Reform the Existing One,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, September 12, 2002. The obvious analogy is with military reform under Peter the Great, who abandoned the *strel'tsi* (traditional forces) and created the *potyeshny* (token) regiments. Although this analogy may seem interesting, it is misleading because the former was a professional Praetorian-type organization that was disbanded in favor of a “European” army raised through the brutally enforced drafting of peasant slaves.

<sup>6</sup> According to one reexamination, the role of Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov in this regard was crucial: “If we had to name the single person whose actions did most to doom the coup to failure, it would be, ironically, Yazov.” See Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2001), p. 211.

**TABLE 2.1**

Four Periods in the Transformation of the Russian Military

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Watershed</b>	<b>Political Context</b>	<b>Major Crisis</b>	<b>Tasks for the Military</b>
August 1991– December 1993	Military coup	Consolidation of Yeltsin's regime	Confrontation in Moscow	Withdrawals, downsizing, peacemaking
January 1994– September 1996	Parliamentary elections	Yeltsin's re-election	War in Chechnya	Fighting, peacekeeping
October 1996– September 1999	Peace in Chechnya	Struggle for succession	Financial meltdown	Restructuring, peacekeeping
October 1999– present	Invasion of Chechnya	Consolidation of Putin's regime	War in Chechnya	Fighting, projecting power

in the coup attempt would influence its responses to Russia's rapidly changing political environment for years to come.

President Yeltsin, who with firm determination sought to bury many of the remnants of the USSR, dismissed its discredited Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, while carefully conveying to the military leadership his intention to preserve the armed forces' integrated structures.<sup>7</sup> Upon assuming office on January 1, 1992, Yeltsin had only limited time to decide what to do with the massive Soviet military machine he had inherited. The new president clearly recognized the need to exercise control over this colossus if he were to win the battles for power ahead.<sup>8</sup> Weeks grew into months until, in early May 1992, Yeltsin announced his decision to embrace two of the former Soviet Union's most powerful institu-

<sup>7</sup> For a penetrating analysis of this final spasm where the military may have been able to prevent the dissolution of the Soviet Union, see William Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> On the dual character of Yeltsin's personality and the political regime, see Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

tions—the ministry of defense and the General Staff—rather than create a new, civilian-controlled system of military command.<sup>9</sup>

Yeltsin's decision, however, did not prevent him from reshuffling the top brass. His newly appointed defense minister, Pavel Grachev, a former paratrooper with little respect for bureaucratic order, completely altered the composition of the leadership. This action, however, had only a marginal impact on the military's core interests. As commander in chief, Yeltsin ordered massive cuts in the size of the armed forces, but was careful not to downsize the central military apparatus, which would ultimately evolve into an unwieldy superstructure with huge redundancies. Yeltsin thus missed the best opportunity his government would have to redesign and streamline the post-Soviet military. Instead, he would continue to focus on securing the loyalty of the military elite.

Although reassured that its core institutional interests were safe, the high command still had to implement two nonnegotiable presidential orders: (1) to make deep cuts in the force size of every branch of the armed forces, and (2) to accelerate troop withdrawals from East Germany, as well as from several newly created post-Soviet states. Violating every basic postulate of Soviet military doctrine, these orders necessitated the reassessment of Russia's security threats. In this regard, the military leadership was forced to conceal its obsession with confrontation with the West and to admit that Russia's main sources of threat were either internal or within the former Soviet space.

As a result of this strategic reassessment, the Russian military undertook a sort of "homecoming" that was both a success and a disaster.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, there is hardly another peacetime event in the annals of military history that can compare both in scale and in level of self-destructiveness with the massive withdrawal of the Soviet military machine from its western bulwarks and its redeployment deep within Russian territory. At the start of this process in the late 1980s, there was some semblance of a master plan. Russia's embrace of its Soviet heritage, however, combined with the military's accelerated withdrawals from Germany—not to mention from the Baltic States and Azerbaijan—would produce a process

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<sup>9</sup> On details of this missed opportunity, see Pavel Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles* (London: Sage, 1996), particularly chap. 3.

<sup>10</sup> See Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Russia's Wounded Military," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 74, no. 2 (March–April 1995), pp. 86–98.

verging on chaos. Tank divisions of the first line were hastily squeezed into hundreds of trains, often to be unloaded in the middle of nowhere to wait in vain for logistical support in the building of new bases.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, demands were increasing for the removal of Soviet/Russian strategic nuclear assets from Ukraine and Kazakhstan, not to mention tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup>

Amid the chaos, the military leadership showed scant interest in addressing the spectrum of new security threats confronting Russia. As a result, the government's new military doctrine was little more than a cliché-ridden document with scattered references to emerging challenges.<sup>13</sup> Yeltsin's approval of this doctrine in mid-October 1993 was presented as a reward to the armed forces' top echelon for passing the crucial test of political loyalty. Earlier that month, the military leadership, perhaps against its better judgment, had ordered tanks onto the streets of Moscow—this time in support of the president.<sup>14</sup> From the military's perspective, the decision to back Yeltsin rather than the parliament in the failed putsch represented the lesser of two evils. Despite serious difficulties in identifying with the notion of a "new Russia," military leaders chose to embrace the presidency as a legitimate institution because Yeltsin at least gave them a sense of mission. They may have also been motivated by a desire to erase memories of the failure of the 1991 coup.

In sum, President Yeltsin emerged as the clear winner from Russia's early, post-Soviet power struggles. Crucially, however, his "smart" poli-

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<sup>11</sup> On the plight of the 10th Guard Tank Division, for example, which was redeployed from Magdeburg to the barren steppes of Voronezh Region, see Andrei Kolesnikov, "Tankodrom," *Moskovskie Novosti*, September 11–18, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Nikolai Sokov notes that in early April 1992 the Russian government "was in a state of panic," upon recognizing that "the nuclear arsenal was slipping away from its hands." See Sokov, *Russian Strategic Modernization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough analysis of this text, see Charles Dick, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, special report, January 1994. See also Vladislav Chernov, "Significance of the Russian Military Doctrine," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1994), pp. 161–166.

<sup>14</sup> For a remarkably accurate assessment of the role of the military in the putsch, see Brian Taylor, "Russian Civil-Military Relations after the October Uprising," *Survival*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 3–29; for broader political context, see Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), particularly chap. 5.

tics of keeping the military on his side established a pattern of nonleadership that has only exacerbated the decline of Russia's military structures.

#### SLIDING INTO THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR

The military leadership's decision to support Yeltsin in October 1993 led many analysts to conclude that the armed forces would play a central role in the political arena.<sup>15</sup> The president, though, did not share this assessment, for two reasons: (1) the doubts shown by the military brass when coming to his rescue during the putsch, and (2) the weak performance of pro-government and pro-reform parties in the December 1993 parliamentary elections. In the political battles to come, Yeltsin believed that he would need more reliable instruments of power than just the Russian military.

This thinking became evident in early 1994 with the president's decision to significantly reduce all military expenditures in the state budget and increase funding for agencies that controlled various paramilitary forces, including the Federal Counterintelligence Service, the ministry of emergencies, and the Federal Communication Agency (FAPSI).<sup>16</sup> The idea of strengthening these "armed bureaucracies" had its origins in 1992, but was only institutionalized after Yeltsin conferred with Aleksandr Korzhakov, head of the presidential security service, on a wide range of new responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the high command complained in vain as it tried to advance proposals on who should take over the border service and assume control over some elements of the interior troops. Although the General Staff's concerns about the growth of about a dozen "other armies" were sound,<sup>18</sup> it would nonetheless have to com-

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Stephen Foe, "Civilian and Military Leaders in Russia's New Political Arena," *RFE/RL Research Report*, April 15, 1994, pp. 1–6.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of these so-called power structures, see Marc Galeotti, "Policing Russia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, special report no. 15 (September 1997); and Marc Galeotti, "Heirs of the KGB: Russia's Intelligence and Security Services," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, special report no. 19 (July 1998).

<sup>17</sup> On Korzhakov's evolution from Yeltsin's bodyguard to "gray cardinal," see Sergei Parkhomenko, "Merlin's Tower," *Moscow News*, April 28–May 4, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Chief of the General Staff Mikhail Kolesnikov first advanced the proposal to take overall control of all Russian armed formations at a meeting of the Duma Defense Committee in mid-1994. See Alexander Rahr, "Russia's Five Armies," *RFE/RL News Brief*, no. 22, May 25, 1994; the proposal would be reiterated

pete with them for resources and influence, largely because of the military's inability to provide security for the regime. Besides being outmaneuvered in such bureaucratic intrigues, the military brass seemed unable or unwilling to tackle Russia's broad spectrum of internal security threats.

To increase its influence, the military leadership sought to expand the definition of "internal threats" to include conflicts in the former Soviet space. As a result, the first half of 1994 saw a sharp rise in "diplomatic" activity by Defense Minister Grachev, who one week would be negotiating a cease-fire in Nagorno Karabakh (insisting, with little success, on a Russian-led peacekeeping operation) and another week was pressuring Latvia to extend Russian troop withdrawal deadlines. Grachev's enthusiastic, if somewhat amateurish, attempts at "power projection" built on the reasonably positive results of several ad hoc "peace operations" launched by Russia in mid-1992 from Transdnistria to Tajikistan.<sup>19</sup> Supporting Grachev's "shuttle diplomacy" were two mechanized infantry divisions that had been designated as peacekeeping units. Meanwhile, blueprints for the creation of mobile forces were hastily drawn up.<sup>20</sup>

These activities reflected more than the personal ambitions of Defense Minister Grachev, whose job qualifications had always been questionable. They also indirectly reflected significant shifts in the military's perception of its core mission. Although in many ways resembling a "bureaucratic preserve" of the USSR, the ministry of defense and the General Staff were not completely insensitive to the potential danger of proliferating "small wars," and thus made some changes to reflect this growing awareness. The resulting new culture was a peculiar mix of old bureaucratic ways and new war-fighting skills, of deadly corridor intrigues and battlefield maneuvering, of a high respect for paperwork and low respect for human life.<sup>21</sup>

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on numerous occasions. For a discussion at the start of Putin's presidency, see Mikhail Khodarenok, "Time to Collect Stones," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, January 31, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> For an analysis of these initiatives and operations, see Pavel Baev, "Russia's Experiments and Experience in Conflict Management and Peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 1, no. 3 (autumn 1994), pp. 245–260.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the creation of mobile forces, see Robert Hall, "Russia's Mobile Forces—Rationale and Structure," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1993, pp. 154–155; for more recent analysis, see Roy Allison's chapter in this volume.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed examination, see Pavel Baev, "The Plight of the Russian Military: Shallow Identity and Self-defeating Culture," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 29, no. 1 (fall 2002), pp. 129–146.



An event that powerfully reinforced this culture was the first Chechen war, launched in December 1994. The failure of the Russian military to defeat the Chechen separatists only strengthened its self-protection impulses. The lack of support among the Russian people for the Chechen mission left the military feeling betrayed and ostracized. The high command, which had initially been less than enthusiastic about sending troops to Chechnya, assumed that the deployment would be just another “peace operation.” It was therefore caught completely unprepared for the fierce resistance that Russian troops encountered in Grozny, the Chechen capital. One of the few sound ideas that Defense Minister Grachev had tried to advance prior to the war was the need to transform the North Caucasus into a frontline military district that could shield Russia against rising instability in the region. However, most of the units redeployed there (e.g., the 7th Airborne Division transferred from Kaugas, Lithuania, to Novorossiisk, Russia) had already lost much of their combat capability. Hence, the start of the first Chechen war witnessed the Russian military’s desperate efforts to cobble together battalions that ultimately proved incapable of putting down the insurgency.<sup>22</sup>

The beginning of the first Chechen war brought to an immediate end all experiments with restructuring the armed forces (and buried the idea of creating mobile forces) because Russia needed to mobilize all of its strategic reserves to sustain the fighting in Chechnya. Yet as debilitating as the conflict was in the midterm, it had the short-term effect of forcing the Russian army to close ranks.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, in an effort to shore up his re-election chances, President Yeltsin promised an end to universal conscription by the year 2000.

Surprisingly, neither the Chechen war nor the urgent need for military reform was a major issue in the 1996 presidential election. The specter of a communist revanche overshadowed the campaign. Yeltsin proclaimed “victory” in Chechnya while securing a real ballot-box win in the general election. The notion of military reform, initially postponed to ensure the

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<sup>22</sup> See Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 3; see also Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, chap. 6.

<sup>23</sup> I identified this effect in Pavel Baev, “Military Aspects of Regionalism,” in Graeme P. Herd and Anne Aldis, eds., *Russian Regions and Regionalism: Strength through Weakness* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 120–137, particularly p. 124.

top brass's loyalty and then further postponed by the Chechen war, lost credibility. Meanwhile, the military's troubles continued to escalate.

#### HALF-HEARTED REFORMS AMID BYZANTINE INTRIGUE AND MELTDOWN

Russia's peace agreement with Chechnya, signed in September 1996, was devastating confirmation of the total defeat of the Russian military. The Kremlin replaced the leadership of the "power structures" (including Korzhakov and Grachev) and gave its new charismatic and decisive "security czar," Aleksandr Lebed, a free hand to tackle the most urgent problems. Lebed's moment of glory, however, proved remarkably brief. After his abrupt departure in mid-October 1997, the military, under a new defense minister, Gen. Igor Rodionov, began a reassessment of its institutional interests.<sup>24</sup>

The military's defeat in Chechnya should have provided a powerful catalyst for self-evaluation and improvement. It is therefore incredible how little intellectual energy and organizational effort the high command channeled into drawing lessons from this experience. Perhaps it feared exposure of its own incompetence: indeed, it was much more convenient simply to play up the notion of "political betrayal" than to acknowledge defeat.<sup>25</sup> It is also possible that General Rodionov, believing that he had only outdated Soviet models to draw on, chose to recycle old arguments about confrontation with the West rather than develop any truly innovative ideas of his own.

Rodionov would not have dared take this direction in the absence of a permissive political environment, which the first round of NATO enlargement conveniently supplied. For Yeltsin's followers, it is possible to argue that the ailing president, while still a "committed integrationist," was "forced to retreat rhetorically" to accommodate a shift in public opinion.<sup>26</sup> The military brass, however, sought to exploit the

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<sup>24</sup> See Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Warrior Who Would Rule Russia: A Profile of Aleksandr Lebed* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> For an investigation of this psychological phenomenon on the eve of the second war, see "Chechnya and the Posture of the Russian Army," *Voenny Vestnik*, no. 6 (Moscow: MFIT, October 1999), [http://www.mfit.ru/defensive/vestnik/vestnik6\\_1.html](http://www.mfit.ru/defensive/vestnik/vestnik6_1.html).

<sup>26</sup> See Coit D. Blacker, "Russia and the West," in Michael Mandelbaum, ed.,

opportunity presented by this rhetorical retreat.

Rodionov was not an ideological hawk: his main objective was to promote a program for rebuilding Russia's conventional forces, citing the threat of NATO expansion to buttress his position. This approach allowed him to sidestep turf wars with other "armed bureaucracies" where, with few allies in the Kremlin, he had little chance of success. Rodionov's program targeted many of the army's problems, but it had one serious shortcoming: it required massive funding, which was simply unrealistic given the state's depleted coffers. After being skillfully undermined, Rodionov was replaced by the considerably savvier Air Marshal Igor Sergeev.<sup>27</sup>

Sergeev's priorities had largely been defined by his remarkably successful career in the strategic missile forces. Biding his time, Russia's new defense minister watched as Andrei Kokoshin, an academic by training who had written extensively on U.S. national security strategy, advanced his own military reform plan. Earlier, as a deputy to Defense Minister Grachev, Kokoshin had implemented a moderately useful agenda. He was given a real chance to push for the radical modernization of the high command with his surprise appointment as secretary of the powerful Defense Council. Kokoshin made a good start when Yeltsin approved a reform package in mid-1997 that included cuts in force size (particularly in the number of "hollow-shell" divisions [i.e., divisions with only 20–25 percent of the personnel of a regular division]) and some long-discussed restructuring (such as the merger of Russia's air defense and air force).<sup>28</sup> Further progress was stymied, however, by Russia's financial meltdown in August 1998. The economic downturn that followed created a deep polit-

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*The New Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), pp. 167–193, at p. 169.

<sup>27</sup> Secretary of the Defense Council Yuri Baturin, who played the key role in undermining the ministry of defense, vanished into obscurity after Rodionov's departure. For an explanation, see *Epokha Eltsina* [Yeltsin's epoch] (Moscow: Vagirus, 2001), chap. 10; for Rodionov's bitter reflections on his abbreviated tenure, see Igor Korotchenko, "Perestroika of the Army Should Be Started with Sergeants," interview with Igor Rodionov, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, January 17, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Although I was quoted as characterizing this as a "monumental decision" (see Michael Specter, "Russia's Military: Hungry, Angry, and Broke," *International Herald Tribune*, July 29, 1997), it was the far-reaching plans for optimizing the military machine that I really had in mind.

ical crisis in which Kokoshin made some unfortunate tactical choices.<sup>29</sup>

Kokoshin's subsequent departure paved the way for Sergeev to promote his vision for reshaping the ministry of defense. Sergeev's priority was to build up Russia's strategic deterrent capability and consolidate the strategic nuclear forces under one command. The plan had many shortcomings but was nevertheless deemed feasible, provided that the country's scare resources (which were effectively halved by the collapse of the ruble in August 1998) were tightly concentrated. To make his case, Sergeev turned again to NATO-centered threat assessments. The start of NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999, which unleashed a storm of anti-Western rhetoric in Moscow (including a presidential reference to a "third world war"), provided Sergeev with a perfect opportunity to promote his plan.<sup>30</sup> NATO's actions, however, also revealed the shocking inadequacy of Russia's overall military posture—and that inevitably meant the scrapping of Sergeev's ambitious agenda.

Sergeev's plan had two basic problems. First, strategic "muscle" was of no use in a world of growing unconventional security challenges. Second, and more serious, Sergeev did not have enough time or perhaps courage to advance the crucial second part of his plan: downsizing and modernizing Russia's conventional forces, which would have necessarily involved a head-on confrontation with the General Staff.<sup>31</sup> Given their many overlapping functions, the two behemoths of the high command—the ministry of defense and the General Staff—were often at loggerheads. This time, however, there was a new factor: a clash of cultures. Sergeev's defense ministry, richly populated with "missile men," had little interest in small wars or peace operations, and above all embraced the military's bureaucratic values.<sup>32</sup> The General Staff, headed by a seasoned veteran of the Chechen war, Gen. Anatoly Kvashnin, attracted "warriors" deter-

<sup>29</sup> On Kokoshin's influence on Russian military thinking, see Jacob W. Kipp, *Forecasting Future War: Andrei Kokoshin: Scholar and Bureaucrat* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office, 1998), <http://call.army.mil/finso/fmsopubs/issues/kokoshin.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> At a special meeting on April 29, 1998, the Security Council approved three secret decrees on increasing Russia's nuclear buildup; one of those allegedly prescribed development of new tactical nuclear weapons. See Sergei Sokut, "Russia's Priority State Interest," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, May 7, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> For a sympathetic view on Sergeev's uphill battles, see Aleksandr Golts, "The Last Chance of a Technocrat," *Itogi*, July 28, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Much of the experience gained in conducting "peace operations" in various

mined to rebuild Russia's conventional forces and was seemingly uninterested in modernizing the armed forces.<sup>33</sup>

Another challenge in the second half of the 1990s was the phenomenon of creeping regionalism, which, spurred by Russia's defeat in Chechnya, eliminated the centralizing impulse the war had created. Fueled by both a lack of funds and a lack of attention from the ministry of defense, the trend toward regionalism involved the growing dependence of military units on supplies provided by regional political authorities.<sup>34</sup> Although still limited, the trend symbolized the "uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable unraveling of central power," which in August 1998 appeared to be leading the country toward collapse.<sup>35</sup> Yet the crisis also generated new reintegrative impulses, particularly among political elites who recognized the clear and present danger of yet another state meltdown.

Overall, the "peaceful pause" in Yeltsin's second term represented a lost opportunity for deep, structural military reform. The Russian military failed to innovate not merely because of the lack of a coherent doctrine or clear objective, or only because of bureaucratic inertia. The lack of government funding should have pushed the military toward becoming more innovative, but it did not. As the political leadership became increasingly preoccupied with concerns of succession, the military high command vowed to preserve the country's traditional focus on the West as the principal enemy. At this point, deeply held beliefs and vested interests developed their own synergy. The military leadership showed only a limited ability to learn from both its humiliating defeats and its propensity for internal quarreling during a period when political leadership was nowhere to be found. At the same time, however, Russian society seemed to display a new readiness to invest in the reinvigoration of the armed forces.

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formats from 1992 to 1994 was lost when Deputy Defense Minister Georgiy Kondratyev resigned in early 1995 to protest the invasion of Chechnya. For more on this, see Roy Allison's chapter in this volume.

<sup>33</sup> For a positive angle on Kvashnin's job performance, see Mikhail Khodarenok, "By No Means a Saboteur," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, March 22, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> As Martin Nicholson pointed out: "The penury of the armed forces has made local commanders increasingly dependent on regional elites for pay, food and housing." See Nicholson, *Towards a Russia of Regions*, Adelphi Paper no. 330 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1999), p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> See Gail Lapidus, "State Building and State Breakdown in Russia," in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 348–354, at p. 350.

## THE MARCH AWAY FROM REFORM

Vladimir Putin's meteoric rise to power is often explained away as a public relations exercise in manipulating a confused citizenry. In reality, however, his ascendancy had everything to do with the well-timed, skillful use of military force. Still, the high expectations of the armed forces and pronounced fears within Russia's fast-shrinking liberal circles about the remilitarization of the state and society appeared largely unfounded at the end of Putin's first term. Indeed, surprisingly little was accomplished in revitalizing Russia's military structures during this period, while the supposed victory in Chechnya evolved into a bloody quagmire.

This section begins with an evaluation of Russian threat perceptions. It then examines Putin's relationship with the military leadership, followed by a review of some new features in Russian force deployments and power projection capabilities.

*Doctrinal Dead Ends and False Threat Assessments*

Putin's first years in the Kremlin witnessed a serious reevaluation of security threats to the Russian Federation and a proliferation of goal-setting documents—with remarkably little relationship between the two. In laying out his objectives, Putin carefully built on existing doctrinal statements, including the National Security Concept of 1997.<sup>36</sup> However, neither the military doctrine, nor the national security concept, nor any of the follow-up position papers (including the Naval Doctrine of May 2001) offered a constructive analysis of the revolutionary shifts in Russia's security environment. As such, they could not provide useful guidelines for retooling the country's military organization. Indeed, the disconnect between the perceived (and elaborately described) role of the military and Russia's real defense posture was nothing short of surreal. The military's upper echelon apparently preferred to live in its own fantasy world rather than engage in difficult debates about the future of the armed forces. This escapist tendency might have been relegated to the annals of political psychoanalysis if the damage to the integrity of Russia's military structures had not been so great.

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<sup>36</sup> For an insightful examination of the 1997 National Security Concept, see Raymond Aron, "The Foreign Policy Doctrine of Postcommunist Russia and Its Domestic Context," in Mandelbaum, *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, pp. 23–63.

The failings of these doctrinal statements are particularly glaring with regard to the prioritization of security threats and challenges that, in principle, should have provided the foundation for formulating requirements for the military's mission. Many analysts have observed that it was in this respect that the Soviet character of the new doctrinal statements was especially apparent, not because of textual similarities (the USSR never had a formal military doctrine until 1987, when Gorbachev decided that one was needed) but because of their references to a "besieged fortress" that had to rely on the military for survival.<sup>37</sup> There is more to the longevity of this perverse worldview than the inherent conservatism of military thinking or the tendency to focus on worst-case scenarios; the bottom line is that this was a political decision.

Riding high on a wave of "patriotic mobilization," President Putin initially saw no need to prioritize some branches of the armed forces at the expense of others: to do so would have inevitably alienated particular interests in the military bureaucracy. Responding to a broad range of dangers, risks, and threats, Putin ordered an increase in the military's budget that reflected awareness of these concerns. If he had any illusions about the military leadership's ability to distribute the monies fairly, however, the public quarrel between Defense Minister Sergeev and Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin in July and August 2000 quickly dispelled them.<sup>38</sup> In an act of insubordination, Kvashnin initiated the clash, arguing that he lacked the resources to sustain the war in Chechnya. The force of this argument was enough to prevent Putin from undertaking any immediate effort to reorganize the military.<sup>39</sup>

There was thus no way that Putin could avoid setting priorities. As a self-styled pragmatist, the new president drew two conclusions from two indisputable facts: (1) the protracted nature of the war in Chechnya, and

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<sup>37</sup> Thus, Dick points out: "In Soviet times, a world war was defined as an attempt by international capitalism to extirpate the forces of socialism. Perhaps the new military doctrine contains an equally paranoid echo of this thinking, with a world war being seen in the context of an effort to crush or dismember Russia." See Dick, "Russia's New Doctrine Takes Dark World View," p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> On the resonance of this scandal, see Aleksandr Golts and Dmitri Pinskiy, "Babylonian Vertical," *Itogi*, August 15, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Formally, the chief of the General Staff is subordinate to the minister of defense, and Kvashnin's open mutiny went far beyond traditional grumbling or disloyalty. See Aleksei Petrov, "No Worse Disaster than Two Heads for an Army," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, July 27, 2000.

(2) the overwhelming military superiority of the West. Putin's first conclusion was that Russia's capabilities for fighting small wars ought to be increased. Second, the possibility of confrontation with the United States and NATO had to be reduced, if not eliminated. For a variety of reasons, Putin found it difficult to act swiftly on the first priority, but he took immediate steps to begin reshaping Russia's relations with the West.<sup>40</sup> He started by canceling all plans for the buildup and integration of the strategic forces, thus sending Sergeev into retirement. In addition, he downplayed alarmist assessments of the U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty and declared that the 2002 Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions (nonbinding as it is) would remove strategic deterrence from the international agenda.<sup>41</sup> Moscow had apparently interpreted the ratification of this treaty by the U.S. Senate in March 2003 as further evidence of the diminishing importance of strategic arms control in the global arena.<sup>42</sup>

The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001, are often portrayed as a turning point in Russia's relations with the West.<sup>43</sup> In fact, they simply opened the way for Putin to declare that confrontation with the United States and NATO no longer made sense and that the time had come to develop a mature partnership. This dramatic shift, in turn, pushed the military into rethinking its mis-

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<sup>40</sup> For more on these reasons, see Pavel Baev, "The Challenge of 'Small Wars' for the Russian Military," in Roger McDermott and Anne C. Aldis, eds., *Russian Military Reform, 1992–2002* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). See also Roy Allison's chapter in this volume.

<sup>41</sup> Alexei Arbatov argued that the cancellation of Sergeev's plans weakened Russia's hand in negotiations with the United States. See "Russia-U.S. Summit Would Solve Nothing," interview with Alexei Arbatov, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 7, 2002. For a critical evaluation of the U.S. approach, see Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "One Day Wonder," *American Prospect*, August 26, 2002.

<sup>42</sup> See Viktor Sokolov, "U.S. Bribes Russia with the Ratification," *Strana.Ru*, March 7, 2003, <http://www.strana.ru/print/173187.html>. Rose Goettmoeller's chapter in this volume provides an elaborate perspective on this problem.

<sup>43</sup> Thus, Dale R. Herspring asserted, "No event has had a greater impact on Putin's relations with the military than September 11." See Herspring, "Putin and Military Reform: Some First Hesitant Steps," *Russia and Eurasia Review*, September 10, 2002, [http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rev\\_001\\_007\\_001.htm](http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rev_001_007_001.htm).



sion and the composition of its future forces.<sup>44</sup> The top brass barely had time to absorb the consequences of this new challenge when in October 2002 Chechen terrorists took several hundred hostages captive in a Moscow theater. The crisis ended with the deaths of a large number of the hostages and established beyond doubt that the war in Chechnya would continue to define the key requirements of the Russian armed forces in the years to come.

Demanding more than the superficial reformulation of Russia's national security concept, Putin ordered the sustained concentration of military efforts on countering the threat of terrorism—an order that pushed military thought toward a conceptual dead end.<sup>45</sup> As in the early 1990s, the armed forces were once again confronted with a range of tasks for which they had neither the capabilities nor the training—and for which they would always be at a disadvantage compared with Russia's other “armed bureaucracies.” The only solution from the military's perspective was to substitute the threat of terrorism with an array of other security threats emanating from the historically unstable South—from Afghanistan to Georgia. A direct corollary would be the military's shift in strategic focus from lending support to the Federal Security Service (FSB) in its efforts to dismantle terrorist networks to claiming a lead role in projecting military power across the wider Caspian area. This change in focus is not unlike the U.S. strategic reorientation away from destroying al-Qaeda and toward invading and occupying Iraq,<sup>46</sup> a strategy frequently associated with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.<sup>47</sup> One major difference, however, is that the U.S. military is

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<sup>44</sup> Gen. Andrei Nikolaev, head of the Duma Defense Committee until 2004, complained bitterly that the political paradigm “‘Russia has no enemies’ demanded the elimination of the very term ‘war’ from all major documents prepared in the General Staff.” See “Duma's Plan of the Military Reform,” interview with Andrei Nikoleav, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, February 8, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Initial efforts to frame the idea of a “counterterrorist war” using existing templates were not very convincing. See, for instance, Leonid Ivashov, “Sliding into a ‘Rebellion-War,’” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 13, 2002; and Andrei Nikolaev, “We Are in a Terrorist War,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 15, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> For further elaboration, see Fiona Hill, “Putin and Bush in Common Cause?” *Brookings Review*, Summer 2002, pp. 33–35.

<sup>47</sup> As one commentator pointed out: “Fairly or not, Paul Wolfowitz has become a lightning rod for much of this criticism, and “cry Wolfowitz” has already

going after an enemy it can deal with. The Russian military leadership, on the other hand, is confronted with a yawning gap between conceptualizing threats from the South and organizing forces to counter them.

*The Taming of an Entrenched Defense Establishment*

Demonstrating firm leadership in revising Russia's threat assessments, President Putin remains much more cautious about pushing the high command to follow his lead. This reticence can probably be explained by his own long career in another vast bureaucracy, the KGB.<sup>48</sup> Putin has difficulty understanding that a major part of the problem with transforming the Russian military is the government's own bloated bureaucracy. At the same time, he has shown awareness of the potential political challenge from the military's "Chechen quarters."

Campaigning in 1999 largely on a "war ticket," Putin, though not inviting "warriors" into his inner circle, elevated the role of the General Staff. Given his doubts about the loyalty of the "Chechen generals," it is not surprising that their relations have been far from cordial.<sup>49</sup> Through careful reshuffling, Putin has sought to promote generals who were not involved in Chechnya (such as Commander of the Land Forces Gen. Nikolai Kormiltsev),<sup>50</sup> and reassign those who were to positions of lesser political importance.<sup>51</sup> Although it is nearly impossible to check the spread of the "warrior culture" within the ranks, Putin has successfully restrained the political ambitions of its key figures to ensure that a charis-

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become a catchphrase for the pressing questions about U.S. credibility."

Michael Hirsh, "Neocons on the Line," *Newsweek*, June 23, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> On the impact of the government's bureaucratic culture on Putin's leadership style, see Dale R. Herspring, "Who Is Vladimir Putin?" *Russia and Eurasia Review*, November 5, 2002, [http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rer\\_001\\_011\\_001.htm](http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rer_001_011_001.htm).

<sup>49</sup> For more on these mutual suspicions, see Pavel Baev, "Putin's Court: How the Military Fit In," PONARS Policy Memo no. 153 (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, December 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Kormiltsev was awarded the rank of army general in June 2003; characteristically, very few of the 97 officers who were promoted to general at this annual event had served in Chechnya. See "Russia Has More Generals," *Grani.Ru*, June 12, 2003, <http://www.grani.ru/War/p.35237.html>.

<sup>51</sup> The public scandal around the removal of Gen. Gennady Troshev in late 2002 showed the limited usefulness of this cadre policy. See Vladimir Temny, "Terrarium of Comrades in Arms," *Grani.Ru*, December 19, 2002, <http://www.grani.ru/War/m.17475.html>.

matic leader does not emerge as a possible challenger. His actions, however, have further eroded the loyalty of the military leadership and contributed to the visible estrangement of the top brass from their commander in chief.

Recognizing this problem, Putin has sought to neutralize at least some of its more corrosive effects—for example by installing Sergei Ivanov, his most trusted adviser, as minister of defense in March 2001 (even at the expense of weakening the coordinating role of the Security Council). The president, however, has not given Ivanov a mandate to radically reshape the structure of the military leadership; thus, the defense minister's duties have primarily involved overseeing the implementation of the military's budget as well as maintaining extensive foreign engagements. Ivanov has achieved significant improvements in streamlining the flow of money within the military machine, but to the disappointment of career military bureaucrats, he has been unable to exploit his ties to Putin to secure increases in military funding.<sup>52</sup> Ivanov has found himself increasingly isolated within his own bureaucracy, outmaneuvered on every important issue by the maverick Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin.<sup>53</sup>

Behind these petty cabinet intrigues is the larger question of who controls power in Putin's regime. The president's reluctance to antagonize the military establishment does not explain the lack of serious effort at downsizing and rationalizing the redundant superstructures of the high command. The deadlock in Chechnya should have increased the urgency of such efforts, but it may also contain a clue as to why this has not happened.

Although Putin relies on the "power structures" as the conduit of his policies and as the main source of his power, he has reasons to fear their becoming too strong and possibly making him hostage to their parochial interests. The president may have more confidence in the FSB, placing other "armed bureaucracies" under its supervision; he clearly does not want to deal with a well-organized military united by a proactive "warrior culture."<sup>54</sup> Evaluated from this perspective, Chechnya becomes less of a

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<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in the major battles around the 2003 budget, the argument for increasing the military's share was hardly heard. For incisive commentary, see Yuliya Latynina, "Black Hole in the Third Reading," *Novaya gazeta*, November 25, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> On Ivanov's limited clout, see Mikhail Khodarenok, "Grachev's Effect," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, August 22, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Putin's sudden reshuffling of the "power structures" in March 2003 has

political liability and more of a useful instrument in Putin's efforts to increase his control over, and reduce his dependence on, the "power structures."<sup>55</sup> It allows Putin to decide whom to finger as a scapegoat following an ambush or terrorist attack and whether to punish or spare officials in the military-bureaucratic pyramid, so long as the responsibility for the Chechen debacle remains squarely on the shoulders of the military, the ministry of interior, and indeed the FSB.

In sum, Putin's record of reshuffling rather than restructuring the military's top echelon during his first term suggests a preference for neutralizing potential political challenges rather than preparing to defend Russia's interests against emerging security challenges.

### *Regionalization and Reorientation toward the South*

As a believer in centralized control, President Putin worried from the start about the weakening effects of unchecked regionalism on the Russian state. Responding to this concern, he launched an ambitious program of recentralization based on the strengthening of bureaucratic controls. The consolidation of Russia's military structures was an important element of this program. In addition, while Putin understood that he could initially count on the mobilizing effect of the second Chechen war, he also knew that this alone would not be enough. He therefore undertook a series of coordinated organizational measures to reinforce his advantage.

In May 2000, Putin announced the creation of a new "layer" of power between the federal center and the 89 "subjects" of the federation consisting of seven administrative "super-regions."<sup>56</sup> The centerpiece of

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mainly strengthened the FSB "empire" (which once again includes the border service and the FAPSI); it has not helped the military leadership in strengthening its influence. See Ilya Bulavinov, "Power Play," *Kommersant*, March 12, 2003. On the bureaucratic logic of these changes and the risks involved, see Mark Kramer, "Oversight of Russia's Intelligence and Security Agencies: The Need for and Prospects of Democratic Control," PONARS Policy Memo no. 281 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2002).

<sup>55</sup> I initially made this argument in Pavel Baev, "A Useful War?" *Russia and Eurasia Review*, December 17, 2002, [http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rer\\_001\\_014\\_001.htm](http://161.58.193.170/pubs/view/rer_001_014_001.htm); and elaborated it further in Pavel Baev, "Examining the 'Terrorism-War' Dichotomy in the 'Russia-Chechnya' Case," *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 24, no. 2 (August 2003), pp. 29–46.

<sup>56</sup> For a penetrating analysis, see Nikolai Petrov, "Seven Faces of Putin's Russia," *Security Dialogue*, vol. 33, no. 1 (March 2002), pp. 73–91.

the initiative was the integration of the activities of all of the “power structures”—from law enforcement to the military—under the supervision of seven plenipotentiary presidential envoys.<sup>57</sup> The seven districts of the interior troops were chosen as the basis for constructing the superregions. All other “armed bureaucracies” (with the significant exception of the FSB) were to reconfigure their organizational structures accordingly. Of particular importance for the armed forces was a proposal to integrate their rear services with those of the interior troops. This would offer starving military units an opportunity to improve their access to supplies, thus loosening their dependence on local authorities.<sup>58</sup>

Advertised by Putin as “consolidating and cementing the Russian state,” the plan nevertheless quickly ran into a number of organizational roadblocks.<sup>59</sup> The offices of the presidential envoys were successfully established and staffed, but the difficulties of integrating the work of the entrenched bureaucracies were much greater than the designers had envisaged. The plan’s fundamental weakness, however, was the envoys’ inability to control the distribution of resources, so that their only true source of power was access to the president—uncertain as that could be. The ministry of interior successfully sabotaged the proposal for integrating the rear services, while the “harmonization” of various administrative processes faced its own hurdles.<sup>60</sup> The military leadership, seeing few benefits in subordinating its activities to the presidential envoys, followed through with their plan in September 2001 to merge the Volga and Urals Military Districts, an obvious challenge to the seven-units design. Overall, by the end of Putin’s first term, the new structure had begun to show signs of bureaucratic redundancy. Meanwhile, concerns about the center’s ability to control regional developments acquired new urgency.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For an early assessment, see Andrei Korbut, “The Kremlin Unites Powermen in the Regions,” *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, May 19, 2000; and Aleksandr Golts, “Seven Jokers in One Pack,” *Itogi*, May 26, 2000.

<sup>58</sup> See “Troops Are Strong through Their Magazines,” interview with Gen. Vladimir Isakov, chief of the rear of the armed forces, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, March 2, 2001.

<sup>59</sup> As quoted in Marina Volkova, “The Kremlin Wants to Transform the State,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 19, 2000.

<sup>60</sup> For an informed overview, see Nikolai Petrov, “The MVD & FSB Vertical: Cadre Decide Everything,” *Politcom.Ru*, October 2, 2002, [http://www.politcom.ru/2002/aaa\\_p\\_vz413.php](http://www.politcom.ru/2002/aaa_p_vz413.php).

<sup>61</sup> Analyzing persistent attempts by the Kremlin to create the impression of strict

Today, questions regarding the rationale of Russia's military deployments are increasingly being raised. Whatever the muddle of doctrinal guidelines, the small group of security experts who advise Putin have, from the start, believed that Russia would confront a range of security threats from the South—from Chechnya to the broader Caspian area—with its explosive combination of state rivalries, oil riches, and terrorism.<sup>62</sup>

To address these threats, the military would have to position troops closer to potential theaters of operation, while other forces (serving as a strategic reserve) would need to be made more mobile. Neither of these requirements, however, has been met. The merger of the Volga and Urals Military Districts made some sense in orienting the new headquarters toward Central Asia, but it did nothing to strengthen the military's assets. Thus, the 201st Division on permanent deployment in Tajikistan increasingly looks more like a "lost legion," while Moscow's attempts to buttress Russia's military presence in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan since late 2001 (in the context of the U.S. military operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan) have been neither impressive nor logistically sustainable.<sup>63</sup> And despite their denotation, airborne divisions and brigades concentrated around Moscow (Tula, Ryazan, and Pskov) would require weeks to be transported by rail to the Caspian region.<sup>64</sup>

In the summer of 2002, on Putin's direct orders Russia conducted military exercises in the Caspian Sea. The show of force, however, hardly impressed Russia's southern neighbors, which had already had direct exposure to U.S. military deployments in the region.<sup>65</sup> A crucial test

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control, Stephen Holmes advanced the proposition that Putin "is aiming to conjure real power in the future by fabricating the illusion of power now." See Holmes, "Simulations of Power in Putin's Russia," in Andrew C. Kuchins, ed., *Russia after the Fall* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), pp. 79–89, at p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> For an examination of that set of perceptions, see Pavel Baev, "Russia's Policies in the Southern Caucasus and the Caspian Area," *European Security*, vol. 10, no. 2 (summer 2001), pp. 95–110.

<sup>63</sup> In the end, only one composite squadron of tactical aviation has been deployed to Kant, nearby Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. See Sergei Sokut, "We Will Deter Terrorists from Bishkek," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, December 6, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> On the degradation of the airborne troops, see Mikhail Timofeev, "VDV—No Change Yet," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, April 5, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> For an account of the maneuvers, see Sergei Sokut, "The Military Returns to the Caspian," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, August 18, 2002; on the reaction in the region, see Roger McDermott with Alex Vatanka and Pavel Baev,

occurred in September 2002, when a sharp escalation in tensions between Russia and Georgia provoked Moscow to threaten to launch a swift military operation in the Pankisi Gorge. The Russian high command had to admit, however, that aside from punishing air strikes, it had few forces available for such a campaign.<sup>66</sup> The irreducible strategic fact is that the war in Chechnya, while underscoring Russia's need to strategically position forces toward the Caucasus and Central Asia, drastically reduces its ability to do so.

In conclusion, Putin's first term saw a steady rise in instability south of Russia's borders, culminating in the March 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. The strategic deployment of the Russian armed forces, however, did not reflect this new reality. Although the risks of military regionalism have been checked, its root causes have not.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, interservice rivalries and the General Staff's barely concealed hostility toward any suggestions at restructuring the military have taken a heavy toll on combat readiness. Meanwhile, Russia's military infrastructure has become so badly compromised that basic principles such as flexibility and interoperability have become essentially meaningless.

#### DIALECTICS OF SELF-PRESERVATION AND INNOVATION

The primary reason for the degeneration of the Russian armed forces since the early the 1990s has been the absence of innovative drive within the military itself. Although universally accepted that the military is among any state's most conservative social systems, it is not devoid of a

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"Central Asian States: Split Loyalties," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 16, 2002, pp. 82–90.

<sup>66</sup> Moscow then had to cut short its well-orchestrated propaganda campaign and accept a face-saving compromise. See Mikhail Khodarenok, "Threaten and Forget," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, October 4, 2002; and Grigory Yavlinsky, "This Could Prove a Costly Escapade," *Moscow Times*, September 23, 2002.

<sup>67</sup> My research into the risks of disintegration (see, for instance, Pavel Baev, *Russia in 2015: Could the Former Super-Power Turn into a Battle-Ground?* IFS Info 3/02 [Oslo: Institutt for forsvarsstudier, March 2002]) has generated a peculiar resonance in the far-right segment of the Russian media. One commentator found in it "undisguised preparation for aggression" (see Vyacheslav Tetekin, "With a Hidden Stone," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, September 3, 2002), while an analytical group asserted that "such information attacks on such a level never happen by chance" (see NAMAkon, "On the Offensive Positions," *Zavtra*, March 2, 2003).

desire for self-preservation. It should therefore be capable of upgrading its key structures when its existence is at stake. Why then has the Russian military failed so consistently to generate ideas about ways to reinvent itself to fit a vastly changed environment?

The simplest answer, according to many in the armed forces, is Russia's lack of resources. Convincing as this answer may initially seem, it does not explain the military's inability to optimize the use of available assets. Indeed, successive finance ministers have cut short the military brass's desperate pleas for more funding with one simple question: Where will the money go? Thus far military leaders have failed to provide an adequate response. Not surprisingly, then, in the fierce battles around the 2003 budget, the military was again put last among the government's "power structures."<sup>68</sup>

The Russian military is not the only such organization slow to adapt to post-Cold War realities. The German *Bundeswehr*, for example, despite significant downsizing and profound soul-searching on whether to integrate parts of the former East German *Volksarmee*, has essentially remained a heavy, low-mobility force best suited to countering the tank corps of the long-vanished Group of Soviet Forces in Germany.<sup>69</sup> Even the U.S. military, despite its determination to remain on the technological cutting edge, has experienced serious difficulties in reshaping itself to meet new challenges.<sup>70</sup> The difference is that key Western powers throughout

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<sup>68</sup> Thus, in June 2003 the FSB received the largest increase—up to 6 billion additional rubles—for expanding its fight against terrorism, despite the plan to transfer responsibility for Chechnya to the interior ministry; the ministry of defense request was turned down. See "Duma Approves Additional Funds," *Strana.Ru*, June 18, 2003, <http://www.strana.ru/stories/02/05/29/3045/184135.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Although Germany has made several significant contributions to international peace operations, far-reaching plans for restructuring its military have appeared only in the context of urgent pressure for modernizing NATO and providing substance to the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy at the start of this decade. See Antonio Missiroli, ed., *Enlargement and European Defence after 11 September*, Chailiot Paper no. 53 (Paris: EU ISS, June 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Although it is currently the radical ideas of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that capture the most attention (see, for instance, Evan Thomas and Martha Brant, "The Education of Tommy Franks," *Newsweek*, May 19, 2003, pp. 14–19), serious debates about the trajectory of the U.S. military can be found in Ashton B. Carter and John P. White, eds., *Keeping the Edge: Managing Defense for the Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).



the 1990s could afford to be slow in investing in armies of the future; in some cases, and Germany may again be an example, there was even some reluctance within these societies to develop interventionist forces. From the Russian perspective, that slowness was often interpreted as confirmation of the West's belief that Russia had merely replaced the Soviet Union as the likely target of a future confrontation. This helps to explain why throughout the 1990s Russia's top military leaders stubbornly clung to their position that NATO was the greatest threat to the homeland. Russia's experience in a variety of local conflicts since the 1990s, however (in addition to the Soviet Union's vast and painful experience in Afghanistan in the 1980s), should have disabused them of this notion.

The point of departure for any large-scale, innovative effort in a complex military organization is an internal crisis with macropolitical ramifications. Russia is in the midst of such a crisis. In responding to a new threat to the integrity of the state, the political leadership would normally push for the reorganization of the military to ensure its usefulness and dependability. Responding both to this pressure and to the effects of the crisis within its own domain, the military leadership would in turn create a reform team to generate an "innovation impulse." The team's work within the high command would then receive support from a wider cohort within the officer corps. Successful innovation requires the convergence of these political "outside-in" and military "inside-out" reform drives.

Preventing such convergence in the Russian case has been the divorce between the particular interests of the leadership and the systemic interests of the broader political and military domains. The political leadership, which was primarily concerned with consolidating its own power, considered a reinvigorated, internally coherent military a potential challenge. Meanwhile, the military leadership was primarily concerned with trying to preserve the bloated superstructures of the high command, and thus viewed every reform initiative and effort to channel resources into force modernization as challenges to its privileged position.<sup>71</sup>

As discussed earlier, this obsession with self-preservation at the expense of force improvements can be traced to Yeltsin's decision to keep

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<sup>71</sup> General Kvashnin told the Committee on Defense of the Duma with characteristic bluntness, "It would be unethical to call the on-going transformations in the Armed Forces a military reform." See "Anatoly Kvashnin on Ethics," *Grani.Ru*, February 10, 2003, <http://www.grani.ru/War/m.22429.html>.

the Soviet ministry of defense and General Staff intact. The problem today is that only Russia's "Chechen generals" have the power and position to assist Putin in his efforts to reform the military. Whatever ambitions the president may have about restoring Russia's grandeur, however, he values loyalty as a *sine qua non* of support, and these maverick "warriors" would never pass this crucial test. The innovative drive during Putin's first term was therefore purely symbolic.

#### A BREAKTHROUGH IN THE SECOND TERM?

As Putin and his team settle into a second term, they may feel more confident in their ability to counter any hypothetical challenge from military "opponents," which in turn could provide an opportunity for launching wide-scale military reform. Given how much time has already been lost to procrastination, however, reform will be meaningful only if it is truly radical. Several initiatives—for example, the conversion of the 76th Pskov Airborne Division into an all-professional unit—that today can only be described as small steps to nowhere might then become useful building blocks in the effort to reform the Russian armed forces.

Besides the necessary political conditions, which are too many and too complex to discuss here,<sup>72</sup> three key scenarios could determine the level of success or failure of military reform in Russia: (1) the thorough reorganization of the high command; (2) the termination of the war in Chechnya, and (3) the building of a mature partnership with the United States and NATO. Although in many ways different, all three are nevertheless tightly interconnected.

The first and perhaps most difficult challenge is the transformation of the Russian high command, which structurally and culturally presents the greatest resistance to military reform. At the end of Putin's first term, the General Staff may have felt confident in its ability to counter any attempt by the Kremlin to enforce meaningful reform. Its conservatism, however, has long since become a self-destructive force that must be overcome. The General Staff's inflexibility requires that military reform begin with the radical reorganization of this institution, which is essentially a well-preserved superstructure from World War II. The most important ele-

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<sup>72</sup> For a balanced preview of Putin's second term, see the final two chapters in Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

ment in this reorganization would involve the streamlining of the supreme body of the military command to preclude overlap among the high commands of the armed forces, and with the ministry of defense.<sup>73</sup> The reorganization of the defense ministry must proceed in parallel; this cumbersome bureaucracy should be converted into a civilian institution with two principal functions: (1) providing guidance to the political leadership on military matters, and (2) developing detailed military budgets.

The problems with the war in Chechnya are all too clear: it consumes huge amounts of energy and money and keeps the armed forces under tremendous pressure. Breaking the deadlock would require a bold political initiative, and neither the notion of “Chechenization” currently being explored by the Kremlin nor a return to the lawless status quo ante represents a promising solution.<sup>74</sup> Only by ending this self-defeating war is Russia likely to become a full partner in the global antiterrorist coalition. This multidimensional partnership ought to include a broad range of objectives, from countering weapons of mass destruction threats to intercepting the financial flows of terrorists. The key target for the Russian military, however, would probably be Central Asia. As of this writing, Russian officials are pressing the point that the U.S. military presence in the region is “temporary.”<sup>75</sup> It would therefore require a serious psychological reorientation for Moscow to recognize U.S. troops as “friendly forces” and work toward increasing their “staying power.”<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, only significant (even if poorly maintained) Russian military assets in the region combined with U.S. capabilities for strategic deployment can prevent broad regional destabilization in the event of a crisis (e.g., the

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<sup>73</sup> For an expert analysis of this problem, see Vitaly Shlykov, “Does Russia Need the General Staff?” *Voenny Vestnik*, no. 7 (October 2000).

<sup>74</sup> For a thoughtful analysis, see Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Malashenko, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> This point was reiterated at the meeting of the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils of the Member States of the Collective Security Treaty in Moscow in late March 2003. See Aleksandr Orlov, “SNG and the Iraq Crisis,” *GazetaSNG.Ru*, March 20, 2003, <http://gazetasng.ru/article.php?id=41737>.

<sup>76</sup> Given that it was Russia that threatened to launch air strikes against the Taliban in autumn 2000, it may appear paradoxical that in early 2003 it was Norwegian, not Russian, troops who performed combat missions against surviving groups of Taliban fighters. See Gunnar Johnsen, “To Historiske Norske Bomber” [Two historic Norwegian bombs], *Aftenposten*, January 30, 2003.

spontaneous collapse of the rigid authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan).<sup>77</sup>

It might be tempting to dismiss the third scenario—the building of a mature partnership with the West—as mere wishful thinking, especially given that the negative fallout from the ongoing Iraq war could be deep and lasting.<sup>78</sup> If there are grounds for making this case in practical terms, they have not yet been laid.<sup>79</sup> Such a partnership would require a new level of unity within the expanded Western camp: specifically, within a reinvigorated NATO alliance. The bitter split between the United States and “old Europe” (led by France and Germany) that preceded the start of the Iraq war, while bringing much joy to many in Moscow’s “enlightened” political elite,<sup>80</sup> did not help to promote Russian partnership with the transatlantic community. However, if NATO remains committed to engagement with Russia, the key to success will be Moscow’s ability to move beyond cultivating links with the alliance to designing joint projects that can make the Russian military a compatible partner.

So far, few such projects have been taken up at the Russia-NATO Council, despite the proven usefulness of this format in other areas. The real value of cooperation, however, is in joint operations across the Eurasian “war zone” stretching from Afghanistan to Albania, where violent conflicts aggravated by terrorism will continue to generate challenges to international security. Examples of such operations include Russian participation in UNPROFOR in the Balkans; IFOR/SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and later KFOR in Kosovo (despite Moscow’s deep reservations about NATO’s role in this endeavor).<sup>81</sup> Against the backdrop of

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<sup>77</sup> For a penetrating analysis, see Martha Brill Olcott, “The War on Terrorism in Central Asia and the Cause of Democratic Reform,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 11, no. 1 (winter 2003), pp. 86–94. A case for Russian-U.S. security cooperation in Central Asia is made in Dmitri Trenin, “Southern Watch,” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 56, no. 2 (spring 2003), pp. 119–131.

<sup>78</sup> For a convincing argument for moving beyond damage limitation, see Robert Legvold, “All the Way: Crafting a U.S.-Russian Alliance,” *National Interest*, winter 2002/03, pp. 21–31.

<sup>79</sup> The rationale for this maneuvering is examined in Alexei Arbatov, “The Iraq Crisis: Moment of Truth,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 28, 2003; on Russia’s European aspirations, see Dmitri Trenin, “Russia in a ‘Wider Europe,’” *Briefing*, no. 10 (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, October 2002).

<sup>80</sup> See Vitaly Tretyakov, “It Is America’s Funeral,” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, March 21, 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Detailed analysis of Russia’s military contribution to peacemaking in the

the Iraqi crisis in early 2003, Moscow decided to discontinue its military involvement in these operations. The official explanation for this decision is rather muddled, but some have pointed to several corruption scandals involving the headquarters responsible for these operations.<sup>82</sup>

The prospects for joint operations in Eurasian trouble spots increasingly depend on the ability of the Russian military to perform in high-risk situations differently from the pattern established in Chechnya. To participate in emergency deployments on a reasonably equal footing with, for instance, the European Union's future rapid reaction force, Russia will have to prioritize the buildup of special units with access to compatible equipment and training. While the counterterrorist units of the ministry of interior and the FSB currently enjoy most of the attention, serious and sustained efforts have also been focused on upgrading Russia's airborne troops. From this perspective, the "professionalization" of the 76th Airborne Division opens some possibilities for engaging NATO in reforming the Russian military.<sup>83</sup> While the General Staff has been jealously secretive about this "experiment," perhaps expecting it to deliver more negative results than positive lessons,<sup>84</sup> President Putin obviously anticipates that it will be a success and a first step toward abandoning universal conscription, which has long since lost public support.

The Northern Fleet could also benefit greatly from practical cooperation with the United States and NATO. It was the *Kursk* catastrophe in

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Balkans can be found in a report entitled *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of the IFOR Operation*, by the members of a joint U.S.-Russian research project of the same name (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office, 1998), <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/fmsopubs/issues/ifor/toc.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> See Vadim Solovyev, "Russian Soldiers Are Leaving the Balkans Because Their Commanders Stole from Them," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 23, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> My understanding of NATO's readiness to contribute to reforming the Russian military has expanded from discussing an unpublished paper by Christopher Donnelly in which the author argues, "It is in our interests that Russia should have strong and effective armed forces." Donnelly, NATO special adviser for Central and Eastern European affairs, "Reshaping Russian Armed Forces—Security Requirements and Institutional Responses," November 28, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> Several visits to the Pskov base by parliamentary delegations resulted in accusations that the military leadership had deliberately sabotaged the "experiment." See Vladimir Temny, "Come Here, Not There," *Grani.Ru*, March 11, 2003, <http://www.grani.ru/War/m.25514.html>.

August 2000 that, despite all efforts to blame the West, opened President Putin's eyes to the extraordinary decline of the Russian navy and the massive effort that would be needed to reverse it.<sup>85</sup> Putin, however, has done little to check the navy's continued degeneration, relying instead on superficial demonstrations of military muscle flexing and, in one particularly pathetic display, the raising of the St. Andrew flag on a Russian ship sailing in the Arabian Sea during the first year of the Iraq war.<sup>86</sup>

The Kola Peninsula, which contains the highest concentration of nuclear weapons, reactors, and fuel in the world, is another area where joint cooperation with the West has been useful—in this case, to help reduce a huge environmental threat. Some steps have already been taken, including the signing of an agreement with NATO on joint search-and-rescue submarine operations in spring 2003; however, a greater openness and demonstrated readiness to accept international environmental organizations as partners are required for making serious progress in this area.<sup>87</sup>

In sum, the prospects for improving military cooperation focused on the radical modernization of the Russian armed forces may appear to fall outside the realm of what is politically desirable and practically feasible in the foreseeable future. However, with so much time lost to expediency, so many resources lost to theft and corruption, and so many lives lost to war, the pattern of cautious advances through incremental steps is producing rapidly diminishing returns. Military reform has been proclaimed over, in favor of self-serving conservatism, yet the problem remains. Russia's leaders need to find a way to muster the energy to reform the country's armed forces, starting at the top. Their predecessors' inability to do so should serve as warning of the price of failure.

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<sup>85</sup> See Pavel Baev, "The Russian Navy after the *Kursk*: Still Proud but with Poor Navigation," PONARS Memo no. 215 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2002).

<sup>86</sup> On the hectic efforts to prepare a naval squadron for deployment in the Indian Ocean, see Vladimir Mukhin, "Russian Marines Are Ready to Land in Iraq," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 21, 2003; on the continuing decline of the Northern Fleet, see Svetlana Meteleva, "Following Kursk," *Moskovsky Komsomlets*, January 22, 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Current news and in-depth analysis of nuclear risks on the Kola Peninsula can be found on the Bellona Foundation website, [http://www.bellona.no/en/international/russia/navy/northern\\_fleet/index.html](http://www.bellona.no/en/international/russia/navy/northern_fleet/index.html).