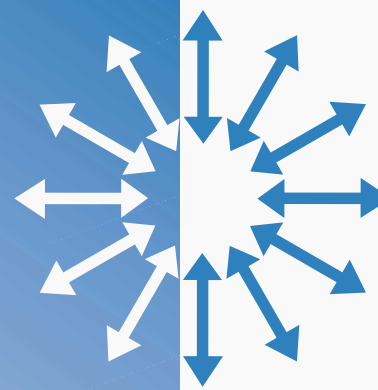


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Pavel Baev

Putin's military reform Two Trajectories for the First Presidency

Summary

By early 2001, launching a comprehensive military reform in Russia has yet again become one of the top political priorities. The first year of Putin's presidency was essentially a time lost for reforming the military system. This aversion to taking responsibility for far-reaching decisions may be explained by Putin's lack of experience with any kind of leadership, or it may be a feature of his personal style centred on pragmatic self-preservation of the regime. The appointment of Sergei Ivanov as the new Defence Minister in late March 2001 may mark the start of serious and sustained efforts in restructuring and downsizing the Armed Forces which could bring tangible results by the end of Putin's first presidency. However, with every week lost with launching a meaningful reform project, the best case (as presented in this paper) is becoming less and less achievable and the space of possible options is narrowing down towards the worst case.

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Putin's Military Reform: Two Trajectories for the First Presidency

by Pavel Baev

Introduction*

In mid-January 2001, President Putin signed a package of documents on reforming Russia's military structures prepared by the Security Council and the General Staff. These documents are supposed to elaborate the basic decisions taken during the series of meetings of the Security Council during autumn 2000.¹ They are also supposed to conclude the loud debates on the military reform in 2000 which had revealed, rather embarrassingly, deep splits in the military leadership. A background for these debates was the *Kursk* catastrophe, which brought high public attention to the disastrous deterioration of the military. Another part of the background was the Second Chechen War, which had been gradually disappearing from the news but continued to take a heavy toll from the Army. The urgent need in restructuring and reorganization of the whole military system is obvious, but even the appointment of Sergei Ivanov, former Secretary of the Security Council and Putin's trusted 'lieutenant', as the new Defence

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Minister has not brought a definite answer to the question on whether the approved decisions amount to a real start of a meaningful reform. And if they do, what could be the results of this reform by the end of Putin's first presidency?

The answer to the first question can hardly be given with much certainty, and on the second question it can only be given by defining the range of possible results with various conditions and reservations. This paper will aim at exploring these questions with a full understanding of the inevitable lack of precision in the answers. It will start with a brief look at the experience in reforming the Russian Armed Forces accumulated during the 1990s. It will then examine the decisions taken and not taken during Putin's first year in power, seeking to identify the available choices. Finally, it will present two trajectories leading respectively to the best and the worst possible military posture three years from now. While the real development would probably happen somewhere in between these two options, this exercise, hopefully, is still useful for defining the space of forthcoming changes.

Yeltsin's Army: Downsizing Without Restructuring, Abuse Without Attention

The point of departure for assessing the experience of the 1990s is the fact that the enormous Soviet-built military machine had gone through more radical transformation than any other part of the state apparatus, with the possible exception of the GOSPLAN. Two most significant changes were the numerical reduction from about 4 million to 1.5 million and the redeployment of about 1.5 million troops from Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and other parts of the former USSR to the Russian territory.² Implemented without any consistent plan and significantly under-financed, these changes badly affected the integrity of military structures. And in late 1994, the debilitated Army was pushed into the First Chechen War and had to mobilise its last reserves in order to sustain combat operations.³

It is perfectly possible to assert that no meaningful military reforms were

undertaken in Russia during the 1990s, however, under the cover of numerous empty statements, three distinctive attempts at reshaping the military instruments can be discovered. The first one was at the very beginning of the new Russian state, when President Yeltsin for nearly half a year was oscillating between various blue-prints, seeking to find an optimal combination of Russia's own military organization and the joint military structures for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The decision for leaving the inherited Soviet military system essentially intact was taken partly under the pressure of several violent conflicts in the vicinity of Russia's borders, where sufficiently efficient interventions were undertaken, and partly due to the need to secure the loyalty of the Armed Forces in the escalating confrontation with the Supreme Soviet, that culminated in the tragic events in Moscow in October 1993. The second attempt was centered on Defense Minister Grachev's plans to build around the core of Airborne Troops powerful Mobile Forces deployed partly near Moscow and partly in the 'frontline' North Caucasus Military District (MD). The plans were poorly designed, badly mismanaged and essentially abandoned with the beginning of the First Chechen War.⁴ The third attempt was undertaken in the summer of 1997, after the defeat in that war, and perhaps deserves a brief revisiting.

This effort at reshaping the military structures was undertaken when it had become absolutely clear that a meaningful military reform could not be postponed much longer and when the issue of rehabilitating the Armed Forces had acquired a political angle. Defence Minister Rodionov was desperately pushing forward quite elaborate and far-going plans; there were also several alternative proposals developed by civilian experts.⁵ But the presidential entourage opted for the minimalist and cheapest approach, and for a more reasonable Defence Minister. The military reform launched in mid-1997 was essentially a packaging of several long-overdue structural measures (like merging the Air Defence into the Air Force or reducing the number of military districts).⁶ Its only big idea – to integrate all components of strategic deterrence under one command – was effectively blocked by

resistance from the Air Force and the Navy (despite being really close to the heart of Defence Minister Sergeev).⁷ Thus, the opportunity to use a defeat for reviving the Army by implementing deep reforms (as, for instance, was the case after the Crimean War or the Russo-Japanese War) was lost.

The numerical cuts envisaged by the 1997 reform package (from 1.500.000 to 1.200.000) were not going far enough (1.000.000 would have been a more realistic figure for the short-term), but at least they were consistently implemented.⁸ Shrinking of available financial resources after August 1998 directly necessitated further numerical cuts, perhaps to the level of 750,000.⁹ We can approximately estimate that from that date every month lost for launching a new military reform translated into the need to cut another 10,000 troops – which generally points towards the Armed Forces of about 500,000 as an optimal and economically sustainable size.¹⁰ However, in the high-intensity political battles around the Kremlin in autumn 1998 – summer 1999, the problem of reforming the military was neglected and postponed ‘until after’, except for a reinforced emphasis on nuclear instruments as a ‘defensive’ (and not entirely rational) reaction to NATO’s operation in Kosovo.¹¹ The public debates also dried out.¹²

Putin’s Hesitant Start: Chechnya, the Top Brass and the *Kursk*

Vladimir Putin’s arrival to power was directly linked to the problem of build-up and use of the military power; while the political context of the Second Chechen War and its exploitation for electoral purposes go beyond the scope of this paper, some aspects of this protracted conflict are relevant for both the launch of a new reform and for its further trajectory. One of those involves a heavy emphasis placed by the new leadership in Moscow on restoring the pride and prestige of the Army. In every public speech in early 2000, acting President Putin reiterated the key message: ‘The Army has regained trust in itself and society believes in and trusts its Army’.¹³ It resonated well with the strong support for the war in the public opinion and reinforced Putin’s broader aim at rebuilding a strong state.¹⁴ At the same time, Putin was not

prepared to provide any guidelines for a military reform, since the issue was not popular at all with the top brass and not winning any votes in the public opinion. In fact, the war has become the reason and the instrument for burying the problem of military reform with enthusiastic contribution from the top brass.¹⁵ But the conduct of combat operations, even with some extra funding and continuing public support, has put the Army under great pressure; while it was perfectly possible to neglect the question of reforms on the election campaign trail and in the first 'victorious' phase of the war, it was certain to resurface – and on a much larger scale.

Before the reform issue acquired new urgency, the military leadership and the Security Council had spent a great amount of time and energy on producing a series of fundamental documents, including the National Security Concept (approved in January 2000) and the Military Doctrine (approved in April 2000). These documents were supposed to provide clear mid-term guidelines for building up the state's military system, but failed to do it in a quite spectacular way, being in fact closer to broad declaration of intentions produced on the basis of the lowest common denominators between several bureaucracies.¹⁶ For that matter, neither of them contains any mention of the military reform, which was also entirely neglected in Putin's 'conceptual' address to the parliament in July 2000.

The first signal of the aggravating problem with the direction of military build-up was the public quarrel in July 2000 between Defence Minister Sergeev and Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin over setting priorities to the strategic nuclear forces or the conventional forces and allocating funds in the defence budget accordingly. While tensions between the two military super-bureaucracies are quite traditional, this time such bitter disagreements over the most fundamental issues revealed that no compromise appeared possible. Putin, however, refused to back any of the two positions, refrained from firing either or both of the 'duellists' (as was widely expected), and ordered the Security Council to prepare a blueprint that would enjoy a bureaucratic consensus.¹⁷ Taking this cautious approach, he may have recognized that the

problem goes much deeper than just a feud between two top brass 'clans'. Sergeev, while arguing that nuclear forces are central for Russia's 'Great Power' image and pointing towards the US plans to deploy the National Missile Defense (NMD), also provides economic estimates of financial soundness of his priorities, playing in tune with market reformists in Putin's entourage. Kvashnin, while arguing that strong conventional forces are necessary for meeting the most acute challenges to Russia's security, including Chechnya, pushes quite unrealistic financial claims and sticks to the scheme of confrontation with NATO.

The *Kursk* disaster in August 2000 placed these quarrels into the broad context of deep deterioration of military structures and brought, even if for a short time, serious public attention to the status of the Armed Forces. Three political 'platforms' for advancing alternative reform projects were quickly erected, while one more military claim was added to the Kvashnin-Sergeev tug-of-war. The first of the party-political projects is advanced by Yabloko and its main designer is Alexei Arbatov, who had been developing a series of relevant proposals for years (Arbatov, 1998; Arbatov, 1999). While often labelled as 'extremist', he is certainly able to elaborate plans that make both financial and strategic sense. The obvious weakness of this 'platform' is Yabloko's marginal influence in the State Duma,¹⁸ besides, the military leadership rejects it off-hand due to the scale of proposed cuts, while the economists in Putin's entourage disagree with the proposed budget increases. The second party-political project is presented by the Communist Party in cooperation with the Movement in Support of the Army (founded back in mid-1997 by late General Rokhlin). It is a much less elaborate and essentially declarative 'platform' which basically calls for rebuilding a Soviet Army of about a half-size,¹⁹ while paying less attention to Chechnya and more – to the looming confrontation with NATO. Its main presenter is Viktor Ilyukhin, but its only military 'asset' is former Defence Minister Igor Rodionov. The third project is less of a party-political nature (though linked to the OVR faction in the Duma) and represents an effort of the Council on Foreign and Defence

Policy to recover at least some ground lost in the 1999-2000 election marathon. It borrows some ideas from Arbatov, adds some points outlined by Shlykov, but mostly builds on the expertise of Andrei Kokoshin, who places a particular emphasis on restoring the ties between the Armed Forces and the military industries.²⁰

As for the 'extra' military project, it is pushed forward by the Navy command, which traditionally belongs neither to the MoD, nor to the *Genshtab*. While narrow-focused and 'sectoral', this project also has several strong points. The admirals are not only exploiting the 'Russia – Great Naval Power' image, but playing on Putin's 'soft spot' for the sea power (as a native St. Petersburger) and his 'guilt complex' centred on the *Kursk*. It is also the only project that has direct links to the military (in particular, shipbuilding) industries, and their interests are lobbied strongly by Vice Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov. Overall, the scale of accumulated problems in the Navy is such that symbolic increases in funding would have zero effect, while chances to get more than those are slim.²¹

The task to 'harmonize' all these projects and proposals went to the Security Council, which also has its own 'master-plan', featuring the key ideas of integrating the reforms of all 'power structures' and centralizing the control over implementation of these reforms in this super-ministry. The bureaucratic compromise was allegedly achieved in November, when the Security Council announced that the main guidelines of a new plan were approved by the President. The only firm parameter of this plan was the numerical reduction of the overall strength of the 'power structures' by 600,000 during five years, including the cuts of 360,000 in the Armed Forces (Korbut & Sokut, 2000). The package of decrees signed in January 2001 (with at least a month delay against the initial schedule) is supposed to cover all essential details of this plan. There are, however, serious reasons to assume (with the reservation about incomplete information) that this effort at launching the reform misses so many crucial questions that it may well turn out to be a non-starter.

It is perfectly clear that neither numerical cuts, nor increases in the defence

budget, nor a combination of both could possibly qualify as a military reform. The reductions might appear to be rather deep (about a third of the Armed Forces' current strength) but, being spread over five years (not three, as originally discussed), they in fact come close to the 'natural shrinking' due to diminishing draft. The budget generosity might appear to be unprecedented (from 140 to 219 billion roubles in the 2001 budget, or to the level of about 2.8% of the GDP), but the 'new money' could cover only the increases in officers' salaries plus a part of extra expenses related to Chechnya. The Armed Forces have accumulated 'internal' (non-paid salaries and benefits) and 'external' (payments to suppliers) debts on the scale compared with their overall budget; in 2000, some measures were taken to cover those, but the planned increases in the defence budget are not sufficient to resolve this problem.²²

Besides financing and downsizing, the issues that are in the centre of the discussion in the Security Council are essentially of secondary importance and involve, at least partly, undoing of the restructuring undertaken in 1997-1998.²³ One question aims at re-establishing of the Army Headquarters (disbanded in 1997), taking this branch of the Armed Forces out of direct subordination to the General Staff. Another issue concerns the separation of several space-related agencies from the Strategic Missile Forces (RVSN) as a part of the longer-term plan of reducing and downgrading of the latter.²⁴ Former Defence Minister Sergeev had abandoned his grand scheme of creating the Strategic Deterrent Forces and had accepted his defeat in the bitter confrontation with the General Staff even before his was sacked in late March 2001. His successor Sergei Ivanov has inherited this 'capitulation', which signifies more than just a failure of the attempt to keep the strategic forces in a better shape at the expense of the conventional forces; it marks a setback for reform efforts that attempted to integrate modernization with economic feasibility.²⁵ The 'Chechen' generals, who have been pushing so vigorously for Sergeev's departure, are essentially demanding rebuilding the Soviet military machine, only slightly reduced in scale, and Putin might find it as difficult to

explain to them the new economic realities, as it is to 'pacify' Chechnya.

There are two kinds of organizational obstacles that have been standing in the way of launching a military reform during Putin's presidency. One part of the problem is that it is the military leadership that is charged with developing the main guidelines and the specific plans for reforms. While Sergeev was the loser in the bureaucratic infighting, the General Staff has not emerged as the winner, since there is little doubt there is little doubt that the top brass cannot produce a sufficiently radical (and inevitably painful) blueprint for reforming their domain.²⁶ A real reform can only be a presidential initiative, executed by a committed team of reformers with sufficient political support under constant financial supervision. The second part of the problem is that the reform of the Armed Forces has to be separated from reforms of other 'power structures', important as they are. There may exist convincing argument for integrating several reform strategies in one comprehensive military reform,²⁷ but this sort of arguments have been used mostly for mounting obstacles by increasing the complexity of the problem – and for doing very little in real terms. In this sense, placing the Security Council in the centre of coordinating the reform efforts, which includes 'distributing' numerical cuts and financial bonuses between various 'powerhouses', may prove to be not that helpful. It even makes sense to isolate the problem of Armed Forces' reform from the problems of revitalizing and converting the defence industry, since these two parts of the former Soviet military-industrial complex, tightly integrated as it was, now have essentially separate lives.

Two Trajectories to 2003

Making projections for Russia's future could never qualify as anything more than a highly uncertain exercise – and the deadline at the end of the year 2003 is certainly entirely artificial (the election cycle notwithstanding). What might make this particular attempt at making mid-term forecasts useful is the emphasis on drawing the boundaries of reasonably possible options, avoiding both excessively optimistic predictions (which, admittedly, are in a rather

short supply for the Russian case) and catastrophic scenarios. The latter could appear increasingly probable, but in essence require different tools of analysis. As for the deadline, it could be justified by Grigory Yavlinsky's argument about his '500 Days' programme from 1990 – success or failure of any reform is decided by the first two years of its implementation.

Among the numerous 'external' (in the sense of being outside the military-security realm) factors that could determine the difference between success and failure of the Armed Forces' reform, the dynamics of Russia's economic development is probably the single most important one. The sheer impossibility to make any reliable estimates of this factor provides some justification for taking the scenario of steady if unspectacular growth (2-4% a year) as a basis for constructing both the best and the worst options on their own merits. One underlying assumption is that in order to achieve this growth, Russia cannot channel more than 3% of its GDP into the defence sphere. Three more years of relative stability is maybe too much to ask for: the on-going severe energy crisis in the Far East shows how fragile the most basic infrastructure has become, but going from one *Kursk*-like disaster to another – pragmatic policy as that might appear – would amount to following a pattern of state collapse.

The Best Case

The point of departure for this option is a clear understanding in the state leadership that the present military posture is not just unsustainable in the short-term but present perhaps the most serious challenge to Russia's national security. Making the military reform into a state priority of the highest order would then directly influence a number of political decisions aimed at setting conditions for the advancement of reforms. One such decision involves reaching a compromise with the US on amending the ABM Treaty in such a way that the deployment of the NMD would become relatively uncontroversial. This would allow Russia to proceed with deep reductions of its strategic arsenal and to receive substantial aid from the US for maintaining

nuclear safety. Another important decision would be avoiding any repetition of loud quarrels with NATO over the enlargement issue, even if the decision regarding the Baltic states is taken in Brussels. Russia would have to show maximum restraint in all possible conflicts along its southern periphery, avoiding any costly security commitments and perhaps moving forward with troop withdrawal from Tajikistan. The most difficult decision is about Chechnya and, paradoxically as it may seem, the best case for Moscow in this war would be to return to political solutions and compromises, accepting yet another military defeat. With all his personal stakes in a victory, Putin has consolidated a solid enough political base to make this turnaround, without which all efforts at reforming the military structures would remain deadlocked.

The crucial question about where to start with a new reform project has a definite answer: the leadership and organization. At the moment, Putin – even with a clear understanding of the urgency of reforming the military system – does not have a single committed reformer in the 'security' department of his entourage.

He has entrusted this task to Sergei Ivanov, but this loyal 'apparatchik' can by no means qualify as a dynamic leader or a committed reformer. With the help of Lyubov Kudelina (former deputy finance minister, now deputy defence minister), Ivanov will probably be able to put accounting for the military budget in order, but we would hardly succeed in transforming the super-bureaucracy of the Ministry of Defence into a compact civilian structure. Trying to consolidate high political profile of his ministry, Ivanov is certain to run into conflict with the General Staff which will resist any attempt to reduce its role to 'technicalities'. In this new bureaucratic clash, Kvashnin's General Staff could seek to mobilize support from the cohort of 'Chechen generals' and emerge as the centre of opposition to any political solution in Chechnya.

President Putin would have to suppress this 'rebellion' and perform a healthy 'cleansing' among the top brass, but then a new round of reform in the Ministry of Defence would be in order. In order to advance deep

restructuring and modernization of the Armed Forces this bastion of military bureaucracy should be converted into a ministry for military reform, led by a competent and authoritative politician.

Putin's cadre choices are rather limited, and the most capable military leader is probably Andrei Nikolaev, who has a solid General Staff background and the experience of reforming the Border Service. In his current position of the Chairman of the Defence Committee of the State Duma, he has expressed critical views on the pattern of military reforms; his personal loyalty to Putin is also questionable due to close links with Luzhkov, but he definitely has energy and personal integrity to accomplish the task.²⁸ The new Ministry of Defence would then become the main generator of plans and distributor of resources for the reform, leaving most of the issues related to their practical implementation to the General Staff.

The issue that could serve as the central point for the new reform project is the shift to the all-volunteer Army and abolishing the draft. While this goal has been proclaimed many times,²⁹ the military leadership has blocked every move in this direction by producing calculations of enormous costs.³⁰ The challenge for the new military leadership would be to proceed with immediate and visible steps in implementing this goal without jeopardizing the whole project. This can be achieved by a twin emphasis: building a corps of professional sergeants (Shlykov, 2000), and creating all-volunteer units, starting at the battalion level. The latter would be linked with maintaining several 'full combat readiness' divisions; this was prescribed by the 1997 reform package and in fact was the major factor in the initial successes of the federal forces in Chechnya in autumn 1999.³¹ Numerical reductions then would not be a goal in themselves but rather means in strengthening the healthy core of the Armed Forces. The guidelines here would be cutting the total strength of the Armed Forces below 1,000,000 by the end of 2003, and moving towards the level of 750,000 during the next four years.

Reductions in the strategic arsenal should be targeted on the most obsolete high-risk systems (first of all the SS-18 and SS-19 ICBMs and *Delta III*

submarines) and secured by cooperative programs with the US and other interested parties (including Norway). This would allow allocating more resources to strategic modernization, including the expanded production of *Topol-M2* ICBM (up to 30 missiles a year) and construction of the first *Borey*-class SSBN. The Long-Range Aviation would become multi-functional and primarily non-nuclear, thus reducing the traditional strategic triad to a dyad.³²

The key concept for the reform of conventional forces should be that of Mobile Forces, compact but capable of meeting the immediate security challenges in the southern strategic direction. The modernization programmes should be aimed not as much at acquiring new weapon systems as on upgrading the C³I systems and investing in basic infrastructure. In the Air Force a key priority should be a significant increase in pilot training, but the Navy even under the best possible circumstances would remain the third priority and would have to take further numerical cuts. Overall, consistent implementation of a new reform project would help the Armed Forces to restore integrity and prestige badly damaged in Chechnya.

The Worst Case

It has never been difficult to predict disasters for Russia but the option described below in fact does not contain any system failures or technological catastrophes. Its main feature is the inability of the state leadership to decide what major changes in the Armed Forces' macro-structures have to be implemented and to put forward rational priorities. Various military-security problems may enjoy sustained political attention but the decision-making would remain a closed and ad hoc process with problematic implementability. The desire to find a 'final' solution for Chechnya would result in further reliance on military means, which would determine permanent deployment of a heavy grouping of forces in the critically unstable North Caucasus. Relations with the West would deteriorate due to the confrontation with the US over the NMD issue, where Russia would opt for such 'asymmetrical counter-measures' as withdrawal from START treaties and annulment of

unilateral commitments related to tactical nuclear weapons, which would inevitably lead to discontinuation of the US cooperative 'threat reduction' programmes. Perceived military threat from NATO would necessitate strengthening of Russia's groupings in the western theatre, including Kaliningrad.

President Putin would feel a permanent pressure from the military leadership for more resources and would find his Commander-in-Chief authority and ability to implement decision increasingly limited. His personnel policy would be reduced to cadre reshuffling in the top brass without any deep organizational changes, so the Defence Ministry and the General Staff would remain competing super-bureaucracies with overlapping responsibilities. The 'Chechen' generals would be able not only to block any efforts at downsizing the Army but also to build influential political alliances, first of all at the regional level.³³ The 'RVSN-nuclear' lobby would be able to hold its positions by playing up the strategic confrontation with the US. In this situation, Putin's attempts to keep the top brass under control relying primarily on the FSB could be only partially successful.

The military leadership would continue to stick to the Soviet model of a 'mass army', insisting that direct threats, like Chechnya, and new force projections, first of all towards the Central Asia, require manpower-intensive deployments. The conscription system could be expanded, but the demographic factors and the gradual shift in the public opinion against the war in Chechnya would result in shrinking of the draft pool. The gap between the official and the real numerical strength of the Armed Forces would widen again leaving many units in the status of empty shells. The General Staff would push forward its plan for consolidating of the supply & logistics systems of the Armed Forces, Interior Forces and 'other armies' on the level of military districts, but such an 'integrated rear' could hardly be functional due to vastly different requirements, resulting in further disorganization.³⁴ Paying the officers salaries would continue to consume most of the financial resources allocated to the Armed Forces, but the top brass would insist of acquiring

some 'new generation' weapon systems. Those could only be produced and purchased in low numbers, against any economic or technological rationale, and cannot be properly integrated with outdated C³I systems; a further consequence would be chronic lack of funds for keeping up the basic infrastructure.

As far as the strategic deterrent forces are concerned, Russia may opt – abandoning the START limitations – for maintaining its heavy MIRV-ed ICBMs (SS-18, SS-19, SS-24, but perhaps not SS-25) extending their service lives and accepting higher risks of accidents. As a part of the 'asymmetrical answer' to the NMD advanced by the US, Moscow could withdraw also from the INF Treaty and re-open the production line for the SS-23, as well as accelerate the production of the new tactical missile *Iskander*. As a part of the answer to NATO 'encroachment' towards the Baltic states, tactical nuclear weapons may be deployed in Kaliningrad.³⁵ These initiatives would inevitably divert resources from producing the Topol-2M (down to perhaps 5 missiles a year), but this ICBM would be redesigned for three warheads.³⁶ In the Navy, resources would mostly go into keeping the SSBNs *Delta III* and *Typhoon* in service and replacing their SLBNs, so the work in Severodvinsk on the new *Borey*-class submarine would be slowed down or even stopped altogether. In the Strategic Aviation the main focus would be on 'buying back' all remaining bombers from Ukraine and making some of them operational by disassembling others.

As for the conventional forces, Russia would undertake uncoordinated efforts to counter perceived security challenges in the western and southern directions. A joint military grouping with Belarus might be built to include several 'heavy' divisions, while Ukraine would be under pressure to minimise its links with NATO. The plans to create powerful Mobile Forces would stumble over growing problems with strategic mobility, so most resources would go into beefing up the forces in the North Caucasus, but it is exactly there that tensions between various 'power structures', with their separate lines of command and systems of supply, may seriously escalate. The region

may experience a new chain of low-intensity conflicts, which would put the over-stretched military capabilities under heavy stress. Overall, the policy of building up the conventional forces and advancing their modernization without clear guidelines and firm priorities would amount to undermining their combat capabilities and eroding the integrity of their key structures.

Conclusions

The first year of Putin's presidency was essentially a time lost for the military reform. Doctrines were carefully formulated, only to be proven to be of very little practical use. Bureaucratic battles were fought without either a decisive victory to one side or a compromise. Many 'decisive victories' were proclaimed in Chechnya but the end of the war is still nowhere in sight. Relations with NATO have visibly improved but behind the currently high-profile disputes on the missile defence issues loom even more divisive debates on the second round of enlargement, in which the issue of Kaliningrad may acquire very serious proportions indeed. The President remained hesitant to take serious cadre decisions even when public quarrels among the top brass required those. The appointment of Sergei Ivanov as Defence Minister is more of a bureaucratic compromise than a mandate to kick-start serious reforms that would go further than numerical cuts and budget streamlining.

In his position as Commander-in-Chief, Putin was not able to gather a sufficient expertise for the choice between competing blue-prints which all appear to make some strategic sense but do not appear economically feasible. The *Kursk* disaster, instead of becoming a trigger for radical reforms, has remained just a warning of possible new catastrophes. This aversion to taking responsibility for far-reaching decisions may be explained by Putin's lack of experience in any kind of leadership, or it may be a feature of his personal style centred on pragmatic self-preservation of the regime. The bottom line is that with every week lost with launching a meaningful reform project, the best case as outlined above is becoming less and less achievable and the space of possible options is narrowing down towards the worst case.

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Notes

¹ The only information about the package (which is said to contain more than 30 documents) is a brief article placed on the government-funded website strana.ru (see Orlov, 2001). Neither traditional leaks nor any more substantive official information have appeared in the next couple of weeks.

² For a sympathetic and highly competent view see Lambeth (1995). My analysis of the reform efforts during that period can be found in Chapter 3 of my book (Baev, 1996).

³ One of the best critiques of Russia's military performance in that war is Lieven (1998).

⁴ On the Mobile Forces see Allison (1997, pp. 187-188), Hall (1993), Baev (1996, pp. 127-135).

⁵ See, for instance, a report from the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy 'Russia's Military Reform' (1997), The article by Alexei Arbatov (1998) is also quite informative.

⁶ While I was quoted as characterizing that as a 'monumental decision' (Specter, 1997), I also did express serious reservations concerning the political will to go further.

⁷ The debates on this plan in the Defense Ministry and among experts have been uncharacteristically sharp, betraying more than just traditional inter-service rivalry. See Bulavinov & Safronov (1999); Golts (1999). Such prominent politician as Aleksandr Lebed (1998) also strongly argued against.

⁸ Defence Minister Sergeev reported that to President Yeltsin in the last days of 1998; see 'Yeltsin Says...' (1998).

⁹ For a solid analysis with a particular emphasis on financial constraints see Arbatov (1999).

¹⁰ My assessments on several options, relevant for early 1999, can be found in Baev (1999); the beginning of the Second Chechen War, admittedly, was not foreseen.

¹¹ A new emphasis on nuclear deterrence, which should have compensate for the weakness of conventional forces, was set at the meeting of Russia's Security Council on 29 April 1999, where President Yeltsin signed three secret decrees; one of them allegedly prescribed development of new tactical nuclear weapons. Neither the content of those decrees nor their implementation has become known. See Sokut (1999).

¹² A rare exception, which appeared already after the start of the new war, was a report prepared by Vitaly Shlykov; see *Chechnya and the Status of the Russian Army* (1999).

¹³ This quote is from an award ceremony in the Kremlin's Aleksandr Hall (Shukshin, 2000). Speaking in Volgograd next week, Putin not only awarded 'excellent mark'

to the operation in Chechnya, but argued that it proved that 'all that talk about our Army falling apart and losing preparedness are all blatant lies' (Demchenko, 2000).

¹⁴ An opinion poll, conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation in mid-February 2000, showed sharp changes in the attitude to the Armed Forces. On the question about prevailing attitude in the society towards the Army, 45% said 'positive' and 29% - 'negative', comparing with 19% and 56% respectively in February 1999 and 21% and 56% in February 1998. On the question about whether the Armed Forces were able to ensure Russia's security, 62% said 'yes', comparing with 35% in 1999 and 45% in 1998. The questions about reforming the military, however, showed much consistency: as in previous years, 60-65% saw the need in conducting a reform, while around 70% were against numerical cuts. See 'Polls Show...' (2000).

¹⁵ I have elaborated this argument in a book chapter that examines the links between the Second Chechen War and the military reform (Baev, 2000).

¹⁶ Some debates on the new Military Doctrine took place in early 2000 on the pages of the weekly *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, but their impact on the fine-tuning of the document was minimal. See Sokut (2000).

¹⁷ As a result of this clash, both the Defence Ministry and the General Staff were essentially paralysed. See Petrov (2000), Solovyev (2000).

¹⁸ Arbatov (2001) claims that Yabloko's leadership had a 3,5-hours long meeting with Putin in late December 2000 on which 'much of the time was devoted to military issues and security matters', but this hardly puts his proposals on a fast track.

¹⁹ There is hardly any new features in this project comparing with Zuganov's electoral programme, as described in Solovyev (2000).

²⁰ Kokoshin now is a Duma deputy elected on the OVR party list, but sits quietly in the Committee on Industry and Construction; for his views on the military reform see 'Security Defence', 2000.

²¹ For a gloomy overview see Hodarenok (2001c).

²² New acquisitions in 2000 were financed by some 78%, but the promises to cover old debts have been reduced and transferred to the 2001 budget which is supposed to provide funds for covering 50% of the estimated 32,5 billion roubles owned by the Ministry of Defence to the industries. See Sokut (2001a); Kosals (2000).

²³ Strategic rationale behind these back-and-forth restructuring with inevitable damage to the integrity of command and control systems is much weaker than the bureaucratic interests involved. See Hodarenok, (2001b).

²⁴ While the reduction in the number of strategic missiles and warheads is both technically unavoidable and prescribed by the START treaties, the wisdom of downgrading the relatively efficient and politically high-profile RVSN remains questionable. See Timofeev (2000).

²⁵ On Sergeev's priorities see Galeotti (1998), on his intentions and chances to reform the military structures see Golts (2000).

²⁶ Dmitry Trenin (2000) argued that the problems of reform could not be resolved without a serious revision of the national security strategy, the drafting of which should not again be delegated to the military leadership.

²⁷ For a balanced and updated presentation of such argument, see Hodarenok (2001a).

²⁸ For Nikolaev's views on strengthening and modernizing the Armed Forces in order to meet the threats they are facing see his articles in NVO (Nikolaev, 2000a, 2000b); his political views focused on the 'left centre' are spelled in Nikolaev (200c).

²⁹ Yeltsin's decree of May 1996 was perhaps nothing more than an election trick, but Putin expressed a very definite preference for a professional army in a December 2000 interview ('Army...', 2000).

³⁰ For a reliable analysis of additional costs see Arbatov & Romashkin (2000).

³¹ On the character of deployment in the Second Chechen War, see Orr (2000).

³² On this technically unavoidable shift see chapter 4 in Sokov (2000).

³³ I have elaborated on possible roles of the military leadership in Baev (2000).

³⁴ For a generally positive view on implementing this plan through subordinating all 'rear' services to the military command see the interview with the Chief of the Rear of the Armed Forces General Isakov (2001).

³⁵ While the nervous excitement provoked by a *Washington Times* article (Gertz, 2001) could have been entirely misguided, the point is that Russia can indeed move naval or land-based TNV to this enclave without violating any treaty provisions. It is rather improbable that Putin would put this strong card on the table without carefully assessing the inevitable damage (which still does not exclude a massive miscalculation), and no physical movement of nuclear weapons would happen without a political decision. The military, however, could have conducted some work on the infrastructure in the Kaliningrad oblast in anticipation of such a decision, and that obviously came at cross-purpose with Putin's European 'charm offensive'.

³⁶ Three successful test launches of *Topol-2M* were conducted in 2000, but only four missiles were introduced into service, while six were considered to be the minimal target. See Sokut (2001b).

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