

Conflict Studies Research Centre



**The Modernisation
of the Russian Military:
The Ambitions & Ambiguities
of Vladimir Putin**

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Key Points

- * Contrarily to what many observers, especially in the West, had expected, Vladimir Putin has tried to put military reform back on track. Serious modernisation of the armed forces, in his view, is needed so that the army becomes efficient, less corrupt, and able to operate with foreign troops in multinational operations.
- * To achieve this goal, Putin has tried to overcome the military's long-entrenched institutional autonomy, by which the generals have managed to preserve their predominant authority over the definition and conduct of all aspects of military policy.
- * In reality, what President Putin has tried to achieve is enforcing personal control over the military. Real civil control over the military goes much farther than that, and its absence in Russia leaves large room for manoeuvre for the military to preserve the status quo.

As one of the institutions of the Russian state that is the most resistant to change, the army continues to hinder any attempt to make substantial alterations to its operational and organisational system, and seems impervious to the changes that have taken place in the political and economic life of the country as well as in its international environment. It still benefits from wide administrative and operational autonomy, especially in the matter of choices that concern it directly – structure of forces, allocation of budget resources, education of command personnel, content of training programmes, etc. Sticking firmly to the structures and strategic plans established during the Cold War, Russian generals have shown little desire to implement reforms that either are not in keeping with their deepest convictions with regard to national security, or, more prosaically, are potentially detrimental to their corporate or personal positions.

President Putin has displayed determination to overcome the structural obstacles that his predecessor preferred to skirt round. He has worked to open up the military to outside influences and experience and in parallel to strengthen the control of the political authorities over military matters – including budget issues, education of officers, international cooperation. President Putin may even have envisioned military cooperation with foreign countries as a stimulus to the opening up of the Russian military to new concepts and practices and rejuvenate their vision of the world and of modern warfare.

Vladimir Putin's approach has met with numerous setbacks, as the military has resisted, in some cases successfully, his efforts to make military reform move forwards. After downgrading the institutional status of the General Staff, a bastion of resistance to thorough military reform, the civil authorities have enforced reforms of the Ministry of Defence in the autumn of 2004 that are aimed at consolidating their control over the generals. However, as long as the Kremlin does not display determination to establish *real* civilian control of the military, reform promises to remain as it has been up to now – a hectic process.

Sources of the Modernisation of the Russian Military: The Ambitions & Ambiguities of Vladimir Putin

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“The Russian armed forces need to be of a new quality, and that quality has to manifest itself in everything: combat preparedness, military planning and military science. We are faced with the considerable task of creating a new look for the armed forces.”

Vladimir Putin, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of
the Russian Armed Forces¹

Military reform programmes have followed one after another in Russia since the end of the 1980s. The latest one, adopted in 2003, sets precise objectives relating to the partial professionalisation of the armed forces over the period 2004-2008. All these programmes emphasize the aim of creating an army that is much smaller, highly mobile, and manned by professionals capable of using high-technology equipment. These areas of reform comply with the new security requirements that have emerged on a global scale. In the post-Cold War environment, the militaries are increasingly being asked to take part in crisis management, peacekeeping and counter-terrorist operations, on a national basis or as part of multi-national deployments, and these requirements have been a guide for the changes that have taken place in the military forces of many countries during the last decade.

Nevertheless, the Russian army is a long way from having the new look proposed for it in the various reform plans. As one of the institutions of the Russian state that is the most resistant to change, the army continues to hinder any attempt to make substantial alterations to its operational and organisational system, and seems impervious to the changes that have taken place in the political and economic life of the country as well as in its international environment. In view of this, the most pessimistic observers of the Putin regime are not slow to add to the list of steps backward taken by Russia under Putin’s rule the excessive flexibility that the civil authorities, according to these observers, have been showing towards the army. In these analyses, the Kremlin, given the continuing unrest in the southern part of the country (the North Caucasus), is inclined to consider the military as a partner which has to be treated carefully, which means, among other things, postponing military reform indefinitely. However, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces indicated on a number of occasions in the months before his re-election in the spring of 2004 that the modernisation of the armed forces would be one of the priorities of his second term of office. President Putin even seems determined to overcome the structural obstacles that his predecessor preferred to skirt round. In these circumstances, what are the prospects for decisive progress in military reform between now and 2008?

An Entrenched Tradition: The Institutional Autonomy of the Russian Military

As was stressed before, experts believe that the Kremlin's dependence on the military for ensuring domestic security (Chechnya) has strengthened the hand of the army in its obstruction of any real reform effort. Nonetheless, they attribute the lack of substantial progress in military reform mainly to a tradition that is tightly connected to the central importance of the military in the political and social life of the country. According to this tradition, the military "has a level of administrative and operational autonomy unparalleled in the West", especially in the matter of choices that concern it directly – structure of forces, allocation of budget resources, education of command personnel, content of training programmes, etc. – all choices which in Western societies are made by the civil authorities or are a joint civil-military responsibility. This tradition, linked to "State militarism", the roots of which go back to the reign of Peter the Great, explains, together with other phenomena characteristic of Russian society, the authority which the military has retained over the definition and conduct of all aspects of military policy, and which goes hand in hand with a quasi-monopoly over defence-related management and expertise.²

This privileged position, which derives from an "instinctual deference to the military" on the part of Russian political leaders and society,³ has been reinforced by a number of events which from the end of the 1980s to the present day have produced a de facto strengthening of the room for manoeuvre of Russian generals, by limiting the incentive for the civil authorities to assert their control over and involvement in military affairs. The "rebellions" in the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, the August 1991 putsch, the trial of strength between the Kremlin and the Parliament in 1993, and the Chechnya conflicts have all been occasions when the army has been called upon by the Kremlin to assist. The price of this assistance has been that the civil authorities have not tried very actively to strengthen their control over military policy-making. A corollary, according to certain analyses, is that the political authorities have been even less inclined to break with the status quo in civil-military relations because they want to limit the risk of the army being tempted to turn against the Kremlin or support forces hostile to the incumbent power, a risk that might arise from the difficult budget situation or from the fact of the military having been obliged, against its ethics, to intervene inside the country. This state of affairs has been identified by various Russian experts as a major reason why the successive military reform plans have produced only limited results so far. "Government officials in Russia have little leverage to impose unwanted policies on the armed forces,"⁴ and the task of reforming the military has been entrusted to the army itself. Such an option, as some experts point out ironically, is the "functional equivalent of letting Gosplan carry out market reforms".⁵ Indeed, military leaders have of course shown little desire to implement reforms that either are not in keeping with their deepest convictions with regard to national security, or, more prosaically, are potentially detrimental to their corporate or personal positions.

During the last fifteen years the Russian military has actively tried to maintain the status quo inherited from the Soviet era, as many examples show. Admittedly, there have been substantial reductions in manpower, from 2,700,000 in 1992 to 1,207,000 as at 1 January 2005, but beyond this, little has changed, as military leaders have stuck firmly to the structures and strategic plans established during the Cold War even though these are clearly unsuited to answer the security threats to today's Russia. The military authorities have hindered the project to make the

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armed forces professional, since professional armed forces are the antithesis of the national military tradition (a mass army based on universal conscription). The military, which has kept the ability to manage quite freely the budget resources allocated to it, has tried to sabotage every serious attempt at progress in this area, in particular by demonstrating that it would be impossible for the Defence Ministry to fund such projects without challenging national security. The General Staff has devoted a part of the defence budget to training that is to a large extent aimed at countering the threats of the past, whilst decision-making with regard to arms procurement policy has remained relatively opaque, which has compromised optimal use of procurement resources.

Furthermore, the system of education and training for military personnel has been subject to a “quantitative” reform only (a reduction in the number of institutions and in the size of the funds allocated to running them), rather than to a reform of the substance of the system, i.e. a reform of education and training programmes. As a result, there has been no more than a superficial change during the last ten years, which raises doubts about the quality of the officers that the system is producing and will produce.⁶ As things stand at present, most senior military officers trained during the Soviet era believe that an efficient army is a mass army recruited by universal conscription, and backed up by a large reserve. Trained in concepts which place emphasis on mass numbers, quantity and fire power, Russian officers tend to distrust projects aimed at creating a smaller, professional army far removed from their cultural referents. They have acquired and continue to acquire theoretical knowledge and operational skills orientated towards a major conflict. Therefore, they are not well acquainted with the broader, more fluid and complex security concepts and approaches that have emerged in the post-Cold War years. As they “*developed only skills for fighting World War III*”, the training they have received in relation to local conflicts, low-intensity wars, or fighting terrorism, is limited.⁷ Even officers who are least attached to this view of the country’s military requirements have no wish to brush aside the concepts which allow them to maintain the army’s institutional positions. This would jeopardise their own personal positions within the military, and they are well aware that they would find it difficult to fit into a profoundly modified political and social environment. They understand that in a partially or fully professional army, orientated primarily against “new threats”, they would not have appropriate knowledge or skill to educate, train or command the new forces.⁸ In this context, it is quite understandable that the project for an army intended to respond primarily to small-scale conflicts, to fight non-state actors and to counter non-military threats in cooperation with internal security and police forces, and to be integrated into international military deployments, has met strong resistance within the military leadership.

Another consequence of these circumstances is that the civil authorities have never succeeded in imposing on the military their conception of the hierarchy of international threats to the security of the Russian Federation. To be fair, it is necessary to remark that this matter is still not the subject of a complete consensus within Russian political and intellectual elites. Nevertheless, certain predominant ideas can be identified. Since the end of the 1980s, the majority of Russian leaders contend that it is not possible to consider that the potential threat from the West and East has completely vanished; however, they consider that this potential threat can be softened or removed by a strategy of “political containment”: cooperation, dialogue and confidence-building measures should be used to postpone as long as possible any materialisation of these potential threats. The perception that these may persist in the medium- or long-term does indeed have implications at the level

of military planning, for example the resources that Russia continues to devote to its nuclear arsenal, “*the absolute guarantee of security*”,⁹ and, on the level of doctrine, the lowering of the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, it is widely considered that management of the threat from the West and the East should take place principally at the level of political action,¹⁰ and that military policy and restructuring of the army should be driven primarily by the need to respond efficiently to the main challenges to security – i.e. security threats of a local nature, both military and non-military, that are situated mainly in the area of the country’s southern border, as well as problems relating to domestic order.

Although these approaches can be found in the basic documents that describe the Russian state’s prospects on security and defence policy,¹¹ they exist alongside old concepts over which they have never really achieved ascendancy. This is because they do not correspond to the preferences of the majority of senior military leaders, who have remained faithful to the primacy of the “threat from the West” or of a major war, which a professional army of limited size would be unable to meet.¹² In order to maintain the military status quo inherited from the Soviet Union, together with the traditional major lines of strategic planning, the Russian generals need to justify their idea that there is an enduring threat of a major conflict with solid arguments, which they try to do as frequently as possible.¹³ This has been the basic motivation for justifying the maintenance of the structure of the armed forces, which are in fact a reduced and deteriorated version of the Soviet armed forces, and the rejection of a radical restructuring of the military. The growing emphasis placed by the civil authorities on the “nuclear factor” has aroused the mistrust of many members of the high command, who are wary of the implications of its theoretical corollary, i.e. the possibility that the size and, in the present state of health of the national budget, the resources devoted to the conventional forces might be reduced to a minimum. Clearly, the General Staff is well aware that establishing “new threats” as a priority factor in defining military policy does not go hand in hand with maintaining the Russian military machine in its traditional forms.

In the initial period of his term of office, Vladimir Putin did not seem to be willing to be an exception to the implicit rule that the civil authorities should not challenge the freedom of the military to manage its own affairs. As a product of the Russian security apparatus, Putin was considered, at least in Western analytical circles, as being naturally in favour of traditional notions of security and therefore not very inclined to become the architect of an in-depth reform of the army. Furthermore, he was assumed to be indebted to the generals for their *de facto* support for his rise to power in late 1999 (the Chechen war), another reason, according to observers, for the new Head of State not to impose the reform of the military which the latter has carefully kept in check since the late 1980s. And yet, since 2001, Vladimir Putin has disproved these predictions, and has given the impression that he is willing to put an end to the “deal” struck in the 1990s by the army and the civil authorities, the latter “buying the General Staff’s loyalty by renouncing radical military reform”.¹⁴ Vladimir Putin, visibly eager to strengthen the control of the political authorities over the military, has appeared not only to understand, at least to a certain extent, the structural factors of repeated failures of military reform, but also to be determined to overcome them.

Vladimir Putin & the Army: Strengthening the Control of the Political Authorities & Resetting Attitudes

On 29 March 2001, Vladimir Putin appointed Sergey Ivanov to head the Defence Ministry. With this decision, Putin indicated that he wanted to limit the room for manoeuvre of military leaders. Indeed, Ivanov is not only one of Putin's closest political allies and most loyal supporters, he is also an outsider vis-à-vis the military, having spent most of his career in the state security service, the former KGB. Strikingly enough, this appointment broke with the Russian/Soviet military tradition according to which the Defence Minister came systematically from the ranks of the military. Also, the decision had been taken in late 2000 to conduct the elaboration of concepts and plans for the professionalisation of the army within an intra-governmental format of discussions, rather than confine the process to within the Defence Ministry. It was also decided to involve non-military experts in this debate, including people with a liberal reputation belonging to Yabloko and the SPS (Union of Rightist Forces). In making these choices, Vladimir Putin seemed to express his conviction that one of the keys to real progress in the process of military reform was to open up the military to outside influences and experience and in parallel to strengthen the control of the political authorities over internal processes within the army.

In his address to the Federal Assembly on 26 May 2004, President Putin, talking about the resources allocated to defence, emphasised that “the scale of defence spending, the interests of the national defence capability, as well as the important social parameters of reform, make it necessary that there is civil control over the efficiency of transformations taking place in the army”. He added that “in order to successfully modernise the military organisation of the State, we need to know precisely how the money allocated to it, not insignificant, is spent, including as concerns housing for officers, military medical care, and education”.¹⁵ One of the signs of Putin's willingness to give the civil authorities tighter control over military affairs can be found in the efforts to make the defence budget more transparent; a budget, as it has already been stressed in this paper, that is used quite freely by military leaders in accordance with what they judge to be the right priorities.¹⁶ The appointment at the end of March 2001 of Lyubov Kudelina, former Deputy Minister of Finance, to the post of Deputy Defence Minister with responsibility for budget matters was the initial signal for this approach by the Kremlin, and was accompanied by growing pressure for the declassification of a much larger part of the Defence item in the federal budget. Indeed, the Head of State seems convinced that the funding problem of the army probably has to do not so much with inadequate state support (since 1999 the defence budget has increased steadily, as a result of high oil prices) but with their misuse by the military.¹⁷

Would the Russian President also consider a fundamental “dusting off” of the system of officer training? Some of the things he has said seem to indicate this. In autumn 2003, for example, Putin insisted that much remained to be done to transform the armed forces into an efficient instrument capable of meeting new threats, which, from local conflicts to terrorism, require a military machine that is more flexible, equipped with more modern equipment, and able to operate with the armed forces of other nations to “solve problems related to collective security and the fight against terrorism”, and to “take part in peacekeeping operations”. The Russian Head of State added that he believed this presupposes that new concepts be introduced into training of officers at all levels of the military hierarchy. At the same meeting he repeated his appeal to the army to prepare to fight the “threats of tomorrow” and not to wage the “wars of the last century”, and for the General Staff

to pay greater attention to “studying the nature and ... experience of modern armed conflicts”. According to the President, the lessons arising from this taking-stock process should be integrated into officer education and into the training of enlisted servicemen.¹⁸ Putin’s resolve with regard to this has apparently become particularly strong following the taking of hostages in the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow in October 2002, after which he demanded that the army should prepare to fight international terrorism more effectively, and called for corresponding changes to the National Security Concept. Sergey Ivanov too, at a meeting with top military leaders in 2003, urged the generals to reconsider their approach to the nature and methods of modern armed conflict and to abandon “old stereotypes”. Similarly, Ivanov has criticized military science, deploring, in substance, its working behind closed doors (*zamknutost*) and the compartmentalisation of its various branches.¹⁹ According to the minister, who characterised the insufficient attention paid to modern conflicts and wars as “unacceptable”, “much remains to be done to understand and ... predict the nature of future warfare”.²⁰

Another strong indication of President Putin’s determination to reassert the control of the civil authorities over national choices in military matters was the decision taken in spring 2004 to downgrade the institutional status of the General Staff. Operational and administrative control of the armed forces was removed from it, and it had to revert to more classical functions: threat evaluation, development of theoretical doctrinal concepts, planning, strategy, etc. Many commentators have seen this institutional reform primarily as an expression of the desire of the Head of State to re-establish order at the top of the military command by putting an end to the conflict between Sergey Ivanov and Anatoliy Kvashnin, the Chief of the General Staff, in favour of the former.²¹ This is without doubt an element in the explanation for the “downgrading” of the General Staff, which General Kvashnin had succeeded in making a very independent and politicised structure; furthermore, sceptical analyses of the impact of such administrative and institutional reforms are quite understandable, since such reforms have been legion within the army during the last few years, without any really noticeable effect. The fact remains, however, that the General Staff appears as a bastion of resistance to radical reform and as an effective defender of the conceptual and operational heritage of the Soviet era; consequently, the institutional offensive waged against it by legislative means²² could equally well be interpreted as an effort to weaken the ability of the military to hinder reforms, and to force it to become more open to the directives of the political authorities.

The replacement of the Chief of the General Staff by General Yuriy Baluyevskiy, formerly Kvashnin’s first deputy and reputed to be a staunch supporter of the Defence Minister as well as a “tame” personality, may well enable the Kremlin to impose its views more directly on the High Command,²³ notably in relation to international affairs and to the hierarchy of threats. General Baluyevskiy is first and foremost a practitioner of international cooperation;²⁴ in this capacity, he has shown firmness in negotiations with Western countries, but he has also been an efficient promoter of President Putin’s policy of rapprochement with the Euro-Atlantic community, to the extent that some commentators have talked of their “impression” that “Baluyevskiy is in agreement with the West on many points”.²⁵ The adoption of a new National Security Concept, promised for 2005, should give an indication of the scope of these institutional and personnel changes as concerns the Russian State’s ability to establish priorities corresponding to the most urgent threats. Sergey Ivanov has indicated that this document will “determine clear priorities and strategic tasks for Russia in the field of national security for the foreseeable future – 10 to 15 years”, on which it will be necessary to “concentrate

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the resources of the State". His assessment of the current version of the National Security Concept leads one to predict that there could be substantial changes: Ivanov considers that in its present version, the document "in many ways reflects the political, economic, social and military situation of the past, more than it reflects what we have today".²⁶

In his effort to "shake up" the army, President Putin has probably benefited from the fact that over the past ten to fifteen years, the "camp" of military leaders who are in favour of a structural reform of the armed forces may have become steadily larger. There may, indeed, be more and more within the military who believe that unless there is a serious attempt at a reshaping, the army could now well be on the brink of a irrevocable crisis. The ever more glaring malfunctions of the system of conscription have undoubtedly made a growing number of senior officers aware of this necessity, thus opened up the way for the recent moves towards the professionalisation of the armed forces.²⁷ Indeed, as a consequence of the numerous legal grounds for deferment allowed by the law, the army is able to call up only approximately 10% of young Russians of military age; furthermore, conscription now draws only on the most deprived and disadvantaged young Russians, in terms of health, intellectual ability and social position; finally, the demographic problems affecting Russia threaten to deprive the army in the short term of a sufficient number of potential conscripts.²⁸

The recent progress in the matter of professionalisation is thus probably an indication of the increasing number of senior officers who realise that in its current configuration, the Russian army is not only failing to foster the prestige of the state, but could also find it increasingly difficult to carry out its tasks, including in low-intensity conflicts, as witnessed by the difficulties encountered by the Russians in Chechnya. Observing the operations of American forces in Iraq, General Vladimir Dvorkin, who spent most of his career in the 4th Central Research Institute of the Defence Ministry, which he headed, said that it was difficult to imagine today's Russian conscripts being able to use modern weapons systems such as those used by American soldiers in Iraq, including new types of SALWs packed with communications systems.²⁹ So it looks reasonable to assume that more and more members of the top military are in favour of more rational use of defence budgets, and who believe that these should be allocated to a smaller army of military professionals equipped with modern equipment, instead of the waste resulting from the superficial training given to conscripts who will not stay in the army and who will only bring to it more demoralisation and other ills of contemporary Russian society. Furthermore, Christopher Donnelly has noted that one of the factors leading some Russian officers to obstruct reform is the negative memory they have of the initial military reforms of the early 1990s, which lacked coherence and were not adequately supported financially.³⁰ These officers would probably overcome their reluctance if they were confident of the success of new measures proposed.

Reports of the growing technical capability of Western armies, resulting from observation of the "Gulf wars" and NATO operations in the former Yugoslavia, as well as "Enduring Freedom", widen the gap between the various "schools of thinking" within the military. The conviction of the majority of Russian officers that the West poses a threat to Russia has been reinforced by such reports. Others feel that the inability of the Russian army to make up its technological backwardness vis-à-vis Western armies is painful principally because the Soviet General Staff was looked upon from the 1970s as a forerunner in thinking about the implications for the evolution of the nature of warfare of the growing importance of weapons with a substantial technological content into the arsenals of the armed forces.³¹ Others,

though less numerous, have concluded from the Western militaries' performance that it is time for the Russian army to equip itself with the means to fill this gap, in order to be able to cope in the event of a possible conflict with Western armies; or in view of future joint operations ...

The Army, Military Reform & International Cooperation

During Vladimir Putin's first term of office, the Kremlin promoted ideas advocating that the country's military should be a factor for Russia's integration and positive participation in international affairs. One can question the credibility of this discourse and the support the political authorities can hope to mobilise with regard to it within the military. Russian officers, indeed, prove much more enthusiastic about cooperating with CIS countries than about developing relations with the Euro-Atlantic community.

During Putin's first term, and with increasing frequency since 11 September 2001, Russian leaders have emphasized the need for Russia, which seeks authority and respectability on the international scene, to play a greater part in military operations conducted in response to new global security requirements, whether these are peacekeeping operations, crisis management operations or anti-terrorist operations carried out within the framework of coalitions set up on an ad hoc basis in response to particular needs. Russian officials have made an increasing number of declarations about Russia's urgent need to make its armed forces capable of cooperating with Western counterparts to meet common security challenges.³² In July 2003, the commander-in-chief of the ground forces, General Nikolay Kormiltsev,³³ repeated the intention of the Defence Ministry to create permanent peacekeeping units. This project is not new; since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has consistently reiterated that as a permanent member of the Security Council it has a duty to participate on a concrete basis in international peacekeeping operations (a major component of the post-Cold War security environment), but has not succeeded in establishing the specific military tools to enable it to do so.³⁴ What was more interesting in the General's declaration was that he linked this project of the Defence Ministry to the recent rapprochement between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community – NATO, the EU/ESDP ...³⁵ General Baluyevskiy, for whom “no State poses a direct physical threat to Russia”, asserted that the Russian authorities had been “forced, before other States, to begin to train the army for special missions, in particular for the fight against terrorism”. He added that this orientation was the right one, and that his country was determined to carry out with the Atlantic Alliance “a great deal of work with a view to achieving operational compatibility between Russian forces and those of other States”.³⁶ It is also interesting to note that some Russian experts and officers have concluded from their observation of the performance of the American army in Iraq that there is a pressing need for the Russians to think more thoroughly on how the national army should be reorganised if it wishes to be able to cooperate effectively with Western forces; the answer given being: flexible forces capable of being deployed rapidly, i.e. the project that Russian military leaders have so far obstructed... (however, it is difficult to describe such approaches as the prevailing thinking within the Russian security apparatus).

Crisis management, peacekeeping and counter-terrorist operations are now central subjects of the discussions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community on the prospects for cooperation in security matters – within the NATO-Russia Council,³⁷ and as part of the defence and security dialogue between Russia and the

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EU, which was reinforced following the attacks of 11 September 2001.³⁸ The issue is also considered in relations with the United States, which were redefined after this event.³⁹ There are a number of developments that can be considered as positive as concerns the future prospects for military cooperation between Russia and members of the Euro-Atlantic community. For instance, the NATO-Russian Council working group on peacekeeping has found an agreement on the political aspects of a generic concept for joint NATO-Russian peacekeeping operations (September 2002). At the end of September 2004, a three-day “procedure exercise” took place which simulated an international crisis to which NATO-Russian joint peacekeeping units had to respond, and which was aimed at testing these principles.⁴⁰ A number of things have also been achieved with regard to security relations between the EU and Russia, although they are of a more limited character. They include Russian participation, albeit symbolic, in the EU police mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (initiated in January 2003); the modalities of possible contributions by Russia to future EU/ESDP operations were defined by the EU in Seville in June 2002. One should also add to the progress already made the development of bilateral military cooperation between Russia and several NATO and EU members.

The emphasis that Russian officials have put on this “function” of the armed forces has been developed in parallel with Vladimir Putin’s efforts aimed at strengthening relations with the West. A notable proportion of these efforts has been reserved for the theme of the joint struggle against the so-called “new threats”. These approaches are in keeping with the desire of the Russian President, at least during his first term, to fashion the image of a Russia that is more active and plays more of a valuable role in global politics. Are these approaches aimed only at increasing Russia’s influence and improving its international reputation, or do the Russian civil authorities conceive of this security cooperation as being *also* a stimulus to the opening up of the Russian military to new concepts? In any event, closer military relations between Russia and Western countries, notably by means of exchanges of junior officers, could, by familiarizing these officers with alternative concepts and models for the organisation of armed forces, encourage the emergence of a new generation of officers and strategists that may logically join the still small group of people in the Russian military who see the radical modernisation of the army as necessary.

It is difficult to interpret the real nature of the intentions of the Russian political authorities when they call on the army to get prepared to develop cooperation with Western counterparts.⁴¹ It is, however, much easier to measure the degree of interest of the military in closer and more systematic cooperation with other armies. Cooperating with foreign military personnel, outside the CIS, still equates, in the opinion of many Russian officers, to a potential risk to national security, resulting from the exposure of conceptual approaches, procedures, military equipment ... A Russian officer who has worked together with Western counterparts in the framework of the Partnership for Peace or in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans does not always find it easy to achieve internal promotion within the Russian military back home, rather the contrary is true.⁴² The debates reported in the Russian military press do not lead one to believe that searching inspiration and intellectual stimulation in foreign models is a natural instinct on the part of Russian officers, especially as far as adapting the principles of educating military personnel is concerned. In this context, cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community could remain limited not only because of the poor state of the Russian army or because Russia-Western relations have become tense again, but also for reasons of deep cultural differences.⁴³

Conclusions

During his first term, Vladimir Putin gave the impression of wanting to push ahead with the reform of the armed forces by tackling the structural causes of the delays that have dogged it since the demise of the Soviet Union. This approach was in accordance with his determination to put some order into the Russian state and to put an end to its most glaring malfunctions, one of which being the considerable autonomy of the military in relation to the political authorities. He also wished to bring attitudes in the army more into line with his foreign policy project, one of the major axes of which was a significant rapprochement with the Euro-Atlantic community.

The President's approach has met with numerous setbacks. This is an indication of the ability to resist of an army which for centuries has been accustomed to being a central pillar of the Russian state and to being rewarded with a large measure of institutional autonomy which it has extensively used since the end of the Soviet Union to maintain a status quo favourable to its interests. The army has tried, fairly effectively, to call into question the recent measures to make the armed forces professional, supporting their case with calculations, the data for which has been largely outside the control of the civil authorities; the programme of partial professionalisation of the armed forces is behind schedule. The Kremlin's efforts to establish tighter control over the use of the allocation of defence credits have failed so far to produce convincing results, as have calls for greater transparency in the defence budget.⁴⁴ The military is resisting. It has secured a law on alternative service the terms of which are so stringent that it will certainly discourage potential candidates. It is also working to put the system of universal conscription on a sounder footing by trying to limit grounds for deferment of military service ... Vladimir Putin has made a robust response to these setbacks, in particular by reducing the institutional weight of the General Staff.

The attempts by the Kremlin to eliminate the most deeply entrenched causes of the deadlock of military reform have been compromised by another structural obstacle – the absence of pressure from Russian society. For Dmitri Trenin, “any attempt to radically reform Russia's military organisation cuts to the core of the nation's identity”;⁴⁵ Alexander Golts and Tonya Putnam, for their part, refer to the “hierarchy of social values rooted in militarism” and to the still perceptible implications of “centuries of political and structural favouritism” from which the army has benefited.⁴⁶ These scholars thus mean that, because of the centrality of military instruments in the history of the Russian state, there has been no decisive impetus in favour of military reform from Russian society and political class, contrarily to what happened in Western countries, where the demise of the Soviet threat has led to a significant redefinition of the tasks and organisation of the armed forces. Many Russians adhere more or less consciously to the belief of many Russian military and civilian leaders that a radical reform of the army would present a serious risk to national security, and that this is the case in spite of the obvious deterioration in the military's capability, the reason for which is precisely the absence of real reform. Furthermore, although, in Russia as elsewhere, there has been a redefinition of the respective importance of the political, economic and military components in the hierarchy of factors contributing to the power and security of the state, this re-balancing, in Russia, has taken place in a strained manner, as it has been forced by the crisis in the military, rather than as a result of a real and sincere belief that the country's security environment has become benign. Besides, some international developments have not helped Vladimir Putin in his efforts to break the deadlock in military reform – the integration of the Baltic

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States into NATO, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty, the war in Iraq, etc, have directly sustained the argument of the Russian generals that the traditional threat from the West is still alive.

Nevertheless, one must also question the strength of the determination of Putin himself in his relations with the army. During his first term, the Head of State tried to redefine or “normalise” the weight of the military because he felt it to oppose, in many ways, the implementation of his personal political project aimed primarily at strengthening of the authority and credibility of the Russian state on the domestic and international stages. Today, post-Beslan, Putin’s resolve to impose a much larger degree of involvement by the civil authorities in military affairs could be questioned. The priorities of the President seem to lie elsewhere: in the reform of political and institutional life, in the strengthening of the “vertical of power”, etc. In this context, military reform seems less pressing in the Kremlin’s preoccupations. This is all the more so that the public opinion shows no real interest in the issue, except for its rejection of the system of conscription. In his address to the Federal Assembly on 26 May 2004, Putin mentioned the need to impose civil control over military affairs. Nevertheless, the Russian President during his first term showed above all that he is interested in strengthening his *personal* control over the military. Civil control goes well beyond the authority of the Head of State. It is also unlikely that the reappearance, over the past several months, of statements by the President about the assumed intention of certain countries to make Russia weaker will encourage the most conservative Russian generals to revise their vision of the world in a more realistic direction, as he has called on them to do.

The growing interest of the Euro-Atlantic community in solving the security problems in the former Soviet area does not do anything to contribute to a more modern appreciation of the world within the top military command. It rekindles within Russian elites, particularly military ones, the perception that the West is hostile and tries to encircle Russia, and to undermine its international positions. The hardening in Moscow’s tone with regard to this matter has deteriorated the climate of the “new relations” between Russia and its Western partners. This is true in particular of the dialogue on military cooperation: worried about the prospect of seeing NATO and the European Union tempted to carry out future crisis management or peacekeeping operations in the former Soviet Union, the Kremlin energetically claims it should get, if it takes part in such operations, equal access to strategic decision-making, planning and command, which the two organisations have been reluctant to accept. Furthermore, the way in which the Russian authorities handled the taking of hostages in Beslan has made Western experts and decision-makers question the compatibility of the security cultures and practices of Russia and the West – a subject on which they had already serious doubts. It is unlikely that in such a political atmosphere, the Russian military will become more open to cooperation with Western armed forces and, *a fortiori*, that such cooperation will be an important factor in advancing the reform of the Russian military.

ENDNOTES

¹ Vladimir Putin. Opening speech at a meeting with the command personnel of the Russian Armed Forces, 2 October 2003 (text available on the Russian presidential website: www.kremlin.ru).

² For an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see the excellent study by Alexander M Golts & Tonya L Putnam, “State Militarism and its Legacies – Why Military Reform has Failed in Russia”, *International Security*, Vol 29, No 2, Fall 2004, pp121-158. See also

Isabelle Facon “The Russian Military Factor in International Relations”, *Slavica Occitania*, No 11, 2000, pp95-129 (in French).

³ Golts & Putnam, p138.

⁴ Ibid, p123.

⁵ Dmitri Trenin, “Gold Eagle, Red Star”, in Steven E Miller & Dmitri Trenin (eds), *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*, AAAS, 2004, p220.

⁶ Another problem from this point of view can be found in the fact that Russian youth no longer finds a career in the military attractive, and that officers are tending to leave the armed forces before the age of thirty in order to pursue a career in the private sector.

⁷ For developments on these questions, see Christopher Donnelly, “Reshaping Russia’s Armed Forces: Security Requirements and Institutional Responses”, in Anne C Aldis & Roger N McDermott (eds), *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002*, Frank Cass, 2003, pp296-321. It should be borne in mind also that Sergey Ivanov, the Defence Minister, has expressed concern about a recent trend, according to which military science and the training system of the armed forces have singled out Russia’s experience in Chechnya as the referent for conceptualising modern warfare and have downplayed the experience of other countries or organisations – the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Operation “Enduring Freedom”, operations in the former Yugoslavia, the Iraq wars... (“Speech of the Russian Defence Minister S V Ivanov at a meeting of the Academy of Military Science”, 24 January 2004, available in Russian on the Russian Defence Ministry website - www.mil.ru).

⁸ Golts & Putnam, p155. In fact, “the range of expertise among Russia’s military elite is largely limited to the ability to train mass conscripts for deployment against Western-type forces”, skills “which will not be required in the Russian military organisation envisioned by the reformers”, as it is summed up by Golts and Putnam. Add to this the fact that adapting to civilian life constitutes a very difficult undertaking for demobilised Russian officers.

⁹ To use the terms of the political scientist Vyacheslav Nikonov in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 22 December 2004.

¹⁰ It is in this way that Russia has developed confidence-building measures and measures to demilitarise its joint border with China, and settled the main points of its territorial disagreements with China. Vladimir Putin was using the same logic when, deploring NATO’s decision to continue its expansion (spring 2004), he added that the potential for negative consequences from this expansion could be balanced by the “new quality” of the relations that Russia has established with the United States and the Atlantic Alliance.

¹¹ See the National Security Concept (10 January 2000), the Military doctrine (21 April 2000), and the “White Paper” of the Defence Ministry (October 2003).

¹² For the record, Russian generals disapproved of the decision taken by Vladimir Putin in 2002 to close the bases maintained by Russia in Cuba (Lourdes) and in Vietnam (Cam Rahn Bay), a symbolic decision which indicated that the Kremlin was abandoning its illusory quest for military-strategic equivalence – or image of it – with Washington. From the same standpoint, the moderate reaction of the Russian authorities to the decision of the United States to withdraw from the ABM Treaty (December 2001) or to the new wave of NATO expansion was met with grumbling on the part of the high command, who saw it as an expression of excessive complacency towards the enduring “Western threat”.

¹³ The Gulf War, NATO operations in the Balkans and, more recently, the military campaign in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq have all been mobilised by the Russian military authorities for their argument in support of their prospect that Western countries, above all the United States, still have hostile intentions with regard to Russia.

¹⁴ Dmitri Trenin, “Gold Eagle, Red Star”, op cit, p222.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, Address to the Federal Assembly, 26 May 2004, Moscow (text available on the Russian presidential website: www.kremlin.ru).

¹⁶ As Aleksey Arbatov emphasises, the military is all the more determined to seek to maintain the status quo on this front that “Monopoly on information guarantees monopoly on decision making, including on strategic matters of reforming the army”. He adds that according to his own estimates, “90% of our military budget goes into the training and maintenance of those forces that are intended for a big war with NATO”, (Aleksey Arbatov, “Why Keep the Military Budget Secret?”, *Moscow News*, No 49, 2004. A. Arbatov, a specialist of strategic and military problems, is the head of the International Security Center at the IMEMO, Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of

Sciences; before the 2003 parliamentary elections, he was the deputy head of the defence committee in the Duma, where he represented the Yabloko party).

¹⁷ Another motivation for the Kremlin in this context can be found in the fact that the lack of transparency in the management of the defence budget has favoured corruption within the military, a problem which the Kremlin seems determined to deal with as well.

¹⁸ Vladimir Putin, Opening speech at a meeting with the command personnel of the Russian Armed Forces, 2 October 2003; Vladimir Putin, Speech at the meeting for assessment of the results of the combat training of the Russian Armed Forces in 2003, 18 November 2003, Ministry of Defence (texts available on the Russian presidential website, www.kremlin.ru).

¹⁹ Speech of the Defence Minister of the Russian Federation, S V Ivanov, at a meeting of the Academy of Military Science, on 24 January 2004 (available on the website of the Russian Defence Ministry – www.mil.ru).

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ On this subject, see the study by Steven J Main, “Couch for the MoD or the CGS? The Russian Ministry of Defence and the General Staff 2001-2004”, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Russian Series, 04/09, April 2004, 24p.

²² The change in the institutional status of the General Staff took the form of amendments to the Law on Defence. Among the most important changes, “The General Staff will no longer have the right to develop proposals on Russia’s military doctrine, to devise the plan for the structuring [stroitel’stvo] of the armed forces, and to play the co-ordinating role with other force structures in the country” (“The Defence Ministry and General Staff Embark on Different Paths”), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 21 May 2004.

²³ The official reason given for the departure of General Kvashnin is the mediocre performance of the Russian security apparatus in response to raids by Chechen fighters into Ingushetia, in June 2004 (“The Programmed Departure of the Chief of the General Staff”, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 2 July 2004); on the reasons for the Kvashnin-Baluyevskiy succession, see also “Colonel-General Baluyevskiy Has Taken Up His Post”, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 23 July 2004.

²⁴ Besides, he is criticised within the army for having only very limited operational experience.

²⁵ “Colonel-General Baluyevskiy Has Taken Up His Post”, op cit. General Baluyevskiy was a leading player in the negotiation of the Russian-American disarmament agreement signed in May 2002 in Moscow, an agreement which is supposed to symbolise the new strategic relationship between Washington and Moscow. The new Chief of the General Staff was also one of the main players on the Russian side to the talks that have led to the creation of the new NATO-Russia Council (May 2002), which is seen by a number of Russian generals as a “stratagem” used by Western countries to make Moscow swallow the bitter pill of NATO expansion.

²⁶ Interfax-AVN, 3 November 2004.

²⁷ Cf the 2003 Programme. At the end of 2004 the 76th airborne division in Pskov and the 42nd motor-rifle division deployed in Chechnya consisted entirely of soldiers serving on contracts.

²⁸ See Speech of the Defence Minister of the Russian Federation, S V Ivanov, at a meeting with representatives of the military-diplomatic personnel on the subject: the Armed Forces of Russia – their current state, prospects for development and ability to answer modern threats and challenges, Moscow, VAGSh VS, 10 December 2004.

²⁹ “Urgent and Pressing Affairs”, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4 April 2003.

³⁰ Christopher Donnelly, op cit, p304.

³¹ On this subject, see in particular the research work of Mary C Fitzgerald, of the Hudson Institute. General Dvorkin is thus not the only one to consider it an urgent matter to put an end to the “dangerously growing technology gap between the armed forces of Russia and the West in terms of possessing modern weapons systems ... and precision-guided weapons” (“Urgent and Pressing Affairs”, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4 April 2003).

³² Similar ambitions have been developed, in a much more active manner, within the framework of the CIS Collective Security Treaty, which was transformed into an organisation in April 2003. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation initiated the setting up of rapid-

reaction forces for Central Asia, and in August 2004 adopted a law on peacekeeping operations.

³³ General Kormiltsev was replaced in November 2004 by General Aleksey Maslov, chief of staff of the North Caucasus Military District since April 2003.

³⁴ At the end of 2004, the Russian government announced the formation, planned for February 2005, of a brigade based on a motor-rifle unit of the Volga-Ural Military District. The brigade is to consist of professional soldiers (2,000 men) and is specifically designed for peacekeeping operations. It is important to remember that this project has recurred on a regular basis in the priorities of the Russian Government since 1996, without being implemented. It is also of note that personnel from the brigade will take part in the NATO-Russian programme to improve interoperability between NATO and Russian forces (Speech of the Defence Minister of the Russian Federation, S V Ivanov, at a meeting with representatives of the military-diplomatic personnel on the subject: the Armed Forces of Russia – their current state, prospects for development and ability to answer modern threats and challenges, Moscow, VAGSh VS, 10 December 2004).

³⁵ Interfax-AVN, 30 July 2003.

³⁶ “Colonel-General Baluyevskiy Has Taken Up His Post”, op cit.

³⁷ The working group on peacekeeping and crisis management is among the most active fora of the NATO-Russia Council.

³⁸ At the EU-Russia summit in October 2001, it was decided that “in addition to existing consultations, one-off meetings will be organised in response to events between the EU Political and Security Committee (or its Chairman) and Russia, including at Ambassador level. In addition, monthly meetings will be held between the EU Political and Security Committee Troika and Russia in order to take stock of consultations on crisis prevention and management”. One of the four “common spaces” which are supposed to structure the future relations between the EU and Russia deals with “external security”, which includes crisis management.

³⁹ In an article in *Izvestiya* in June 2004, the American ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow, and Nicholas Burns, the United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (before being appointed the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Department of State’s third ranking official, in March 2005), indicated that Washington was encouraging Russia to consider the project of forming a joint peacekeeping brigade with NATO forces.

⁴⁰ The exercise, which took place from 28 to 30 September 2004, involved not armed forces, but civilian and military representatives of member-states of the NATO-Russia Council. It should be noted also that a programme has been put in place to improve the interoperability of NATO and Russian peacekeeping forces. Russia has a military liaison office in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and NATO has a military mission in Moscow.

⁴¹ For the time being the concrete means that the Russian armed forces have for such cooperation are limited, precisely because there has been no serious structural reform. They have a limited rapid force-projection capability. There are only a small number of permanent readiness units; most Russian formations cannot be deployed rapidly as they require a period of mobilisation and training before they are deployable.

⁴² Discussions in Moscow, November 2003.

⁴³ For example, the prospect of introducing greater decision-making autonomy for commanders of Russian units in operations continues to be a “taboo” in the Russian military. Yet, the latter has had the opportunity to observe, in assessing the major military operations of the 1990s, the benefits that such autonomy can bring in terms of operational flexibility in fluid combat environments. The constraints created by this difference in the modes of operation of the Russian and American armies were illustrated during joint operations in the Balkans.

⁴⁴ For fuller details, see in particular Aleksey Arbatov, “Why Keep the Military Budget Secret?”, op cit

⁴⁵ Dmitri Trenin, “Gold Eagle, Red Star”, op cit, p218.

⁴⁶ Golts & Putnam, op cit, p124, p123.

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Anne C Aldis & Roger N McDermott, (eds), *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002*, Frank Cass, 2003

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