



**Dr S J Main**

**Russia's Military  
Doctrine**

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# Russia's Military Doctrine

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Russia's military doctrine was signed by Russia's newly-elected head of state, V Putin, and passed into law on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2000.<sup>1</sup> There are a number of differences between the Doctrine as passed in April 2000 and the draft which appeared in October 1999<sup>2</sup>, both in content and in the layout of the text. This brief paper will set out to highlight the changes between the two documents, as well as providing an analysis of what these changes could mean in terms of Russia's future military-strategic stance. As usual, time will probably reveal the real importance of the measures described below. For convenience, the contents of the two versions are summarised in an Annex to this paper.

From the opening words of the April 2000 officially approved doctrine, there is already apparent an important difference between this and the October 1999 draft: in the latter, the opening preamble described the nature of the world's security system being caught between the establishment of a multi-polar system (where the security concerns of one state are not allowed to dominate the security concerns of the other states of the world) and a uni-polar system (where the security concerns of a single state are allowed to dominate those of the rest). In the 2000 April doctrine, there is no mention of this.

After the preamble, the opening section, "military-political principles: the military-political situation" in both versions is virtually the same, with the exception of the addition of the phrase, "on the high seas" in the April 2000 doctrine, in the section concerning "main threats to military security", sub-section on "attacks (armed provocations)".

In the section listing the main "internal threats" to the Russian Federation, nothing has been altered.

In the section entitled, "safeguarding military security", in the October 1999 draft there is a description of Russia abiding by the provisions of the UN Charter, the 1975 and 1992 Helsinki Agreements, and the 1990 Paris Charter. There is no mention of any of these documents in this section in the April 2000 document.

The April 2000 doctrine also makes specific mention of the "joint defence policy" with the Republic of Belarus', taking into account the continuing developing military relationship with Belarus', as well as the Union Treaty signed between the two states in December 1999. The growing military alliance between the two countries is further attested to recently by the Belarussian President Lukashenko's announcement that a revamped Western Group of Forces, primarily involving the Armed Forces of Belarus' and Moscow Military District, could number as much as 300,000 troops. A

report issued by Russian Military News Agency (*Agenstvo Voennykh Novostey*) on 10 April 2000 spoke of a meeting held in Minsk, involving experts from both countries' ministries of defence, specifically aimed at "the elaboration of a unified military doctrine"<sup>3</sup>. This may be a partial explanation as to why both the draft and the approved versions of the Russian military doctrine state that this is a document "for the transitional period". This phrase "transitional period" (*perekhodnyy period*) is one that has appeared in both draft and earlier formal versions of Russia's military doctrine. Its regular appearance implies that Russia is viewed as still undergoing a period of political and socio-economic change, arguably similar in its scale and scope to a previous "transitional period", that of the 1920s-1930s, the transition from capitalism to socialism.

The exclusion of the phrase "the Russian Federation...will not be the first to launch an offensive against a country (group of countries or coalition) if it (its allies) is not subjected to an armed aggression" from the formal version of the doctrine implies a more aggressive stance being adopted by Russia concerning armed aggression. Given the fact that it appeared in the October 1999 draft, but not the April 2000 version, has Russia reserved itself the right to plan for a pre-emptive first strike? One should be careful in drawing this conclusion automatically, as it is based on omission, not declared intent. However, it is an important omission and worthy of comment.

The section "ensuring military security" also describes the set of circumstances when Russia would be prepared to use nuclear weapons:

"The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies, as well as in response to large-scale aggression using conventional weapons *in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation* [emphasis - SJM].

The Russian Federation will not use nuclear weapons against states party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty that do not possess nuclear weapons, except in the event of an attack on the Russian Federation, the Russian Federation armed forces or other troops, its allies or a state to which it has security commitments that are carried out, or supported by, a state without nuclear weapons jointly or in the context of allied commitments with a state with nuclear weapons."

A number of points should be made here: in the first place this is the same unclear wording concerning Russia's use of nuclear weapons as in the October 1999 draft, but the order of the paragraphs has been reversed. The positioning of the section is interesting, as well: in the 1999 version, this description of Russia's use of nuclear weapons is to be found in the section entitled "the state's military organisation"; by April 2000, it had been moved to the section entitled "ensuring military security." Given the content of

those sections, it would appear that logic has been used to dictate where this element of Russia's military policy should be described. After all, it makes more sense that a description of how and under what circumstances Russia would use its nuclear arsenal should come under the overall heading of ensuring the state's security, rather than appearing in the section describing the state's military organisation.

In this particular context, it should be noted that in a recent statement Colonel-General V Manilov, the man credited with creating Russia's new military doctrine, elaborated further on Russia's use of nuclear weapons:

"The provisions of the doctrine dealing with nuclear weapons do not meet the vital requirements of Russia only, but also correlate with the international obligations our country has assumed and the principles of nuclear strategy of, say, the US, UK and France...the absolutely clear, extremely transparent essence of this warning, which leaves no place for misunderstanding, is that nuclear weapons may be used as a response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against Russia and/or its allies, and also in response to a large-scale aggression through the use of conventional arms in situations critical to Russia's national security. It is obvious that a critical situation could emerge as the result of aggression alone, as well as its consequences raise the question concerning the further existence, or the end, of Russia. Finally, the integral formula of Russian policy in the field of nuclear weapons application may be reduced to the following: no aggression, no use of nuclear weapons."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, if the wording in the October 1999 draft seemed opaque, then there can be little doubt that this was deliberate. Russia, in effect, will let other countries stew in its nuclear juice, as they try to work out under what circumstances Russia would be prepared to use its nuclear weapons (as in the draft, so in the officially approved version, the phrase, "first-use" may be indicated, but is never actually used). Given that Russia will have to rely on its nuclear deterrent in order to forestall any military action against it, or its allies, it is not too surprising that it has deliberately left vague under what circumstances it would be prepared to use its nuclear arsenal.

In the next section, "basic content (*soderzhaniye*) [of measures] to ensure military security", the April 2000 doctrine contains a number of additional steps that the state should take in this area:

*"Support (where necessary) for political acts of the Russian Federation by means of the implementation of corresponding measures of a military nature and a naval presence; safeguarding the security of Russian Federation citizens and protecting them from military threats [emphasis - SJM]; development of a conscious attitude among the population towards safeguarding the country's military security; monitoring of the mutual fulfilment of treaties in*

the sphere of arms limitation, reduction and elimination, and the strengthening of confidence-building measures.”

A strong case can be made that the Russian Federation has extended the scope of its military doctrine considerably, especially in the sphere of protecting its citizens. No such phrase, as in the italics above, can be found in the 1999 draft. This is an obvious link between military support and Russia’s political activities and, as detailed later in the paragraph, could have very important consequences for the future. The other part of the italicised quote could easily be interpreted to imply that Russia may intervene militarily to protect its citizens elsewhere: would Russia now be prepared to use military force to protect the rights of its citizens, for instance in any of the other republics of the former USSR? There is a hint that this could be the case, but only time will help to clarify this particular point. Russia’s military and political leadership would also appear to be ready to take steps actively designed to reverse the previously negative attitude of the people to questions of military security and civil defence. Thus, the new wording in the April 2000 doctrine would appear to indicate that the Russian Federation’s Armed Forces will play a more “interventionist” role in protecting the rights of its citizens, if needs be.

In both versions, the section entitled “the war period of threat” is the same.

In the section, “the leadership of the state’s military organisation”, again there are a number of important differences between the two documents. In the 1999 draft, the paragraph concerning the role of the President simply stated:

“activity in ensuring the military security of the Russian Federation is headed by *the President of the Russian Federation – the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation* [emphasis as in the original].”

This has been significantly altered to read:

“the leadership of the construction, preparation and use of the military organisation of the state, ensuring the military security of the Russian Federation, is carried out by the President of the Russian Federation, who is the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.”

In both versions there is no doubt that the President is the Supreme Commander, but in the later version the President’s role is more defined, the president has greater responsibility in the overall organisational development and training of the state’s military organisation. In some respects – and it would be wrong to over-emphasise this point – this change in emphasis in the role of the president may be due to the fact that the present incumbent of the post, V Putin, is a physically more robust, more active political leader than Yel’tsin (still President when the draft was published in October 1999)

and can play a more effective role as Supreme Commander than simply as a figurehead. Given events in the Caucasus – and elsewhere – there is also the distinct possibility that Putin is more positively inclined towards the military as a whole, and wanted the new military doctrine to reflect this.

In examining the role of the Defence Ministry in the state's military organisation, there is evidence of a further fine tuning: in both versions, the role of the Ministry is, in general, "co-ordinating the activities of the executive federal structures which are involved with defence" but in the April 2000 doctrine, we have the additional phrase that the Ministry is also charged with "the working out of concepts for the construction and development of other troops". There has been a lot of speculation in the Russian military press that Army General Kvashnin – the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces – was pushing hard that all men in uniform should come under the control of the General Staff, a move that has been hotly attacked by most of the power ministries. Assigning this task to the Defence Ministry is an indication, perhaps, of a battle lost by the General Staff. In this overall context, it is reputed that there is no love lost between Russia's Defence Minister Marshal Sergeev and Kvashnin.

In the April 2000 doctrine, there is a further expansion on the nature of the role of the C-in-C of the various service branches, an element lacking in the October 1999 draft:

"The directorates of the commanders-in-chief (commanders) of branches (arms) of the Russian Federation Armed Forces carry out the drafting and implementation of plans for the construction and application of branches (arms) of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces (troops), their operational and mobilisational training, technical equipment, training of personnel, carrying out the command and control of the troops (forces) and their day-to-day activity, development of their basing system and infrastructure."

In the April 2000 doctrine the section which follows is that dealing with the nature of wars and armed conflicts, unlike the October 1999 draft which dealt with leadership in maintaining military security. In the April 2000 doctrine, there are a number of important changes, not least being the dropping of the phrase "world war". The term has been replaced by "large-scale war", defined in the new doctrine thus: "a large-scale war may be a result of an escalation of an armed conflict, local or regional war, involving a significant number of states from different regions of the world. A large-scale war, using only conventional weapons, will be characterised by a high probability of escalating into a nuclear war with catastrophic consequences for civilisation and the basic elements for human life and existence." In short, this is a world war by any other name and yet, slightly further on in the doctrine, the term "large-scale" is also immediately followed by the word "regional" in brackets, re-emphasising the view expressed earlier in the Doctrine that a regional war could escalate into something a lot larger,

affecting many more countries than those originally involved in the initial area of conflict.

Also in this section, dealing with the nature of future wars and armed conflicts, not surprisingly given the events of this year and last year in the Balkans and the North Caucasus, the April 2000 doctrine contains a number of additional points concerning “highly manoeuvrable operations by troops (forces) in disparate areas with the extensive use of air-mobile forces, Airborne Troops and special-purpose forces”, as well as noting “the implementation of air campaigns and operations.”

In defining the overall nature of “armed conflict”, there appears to be some confusion – possibly as a result of carelessness in publishing the military doctrine, both in electronic format and in the paper version. In both versions of the April 2000 doctrine, the relevant paragraph states that “armed conflict can be international in nature (involving two or several states) or *international*, internal in nature (with armed confrontation being conducted within the territory of a single state)” (emphasis – SJM). Now, as it stands this sentence does not make sense unless, of course, the authors meant “intra-national”, ie between nations located within the same state. After all the Russian Federation is a federation of republics, regions, autonomous regions, etc, and the authors could have been thinking along the lines of wars breaking out between constituent parts of the Federation, physically located within the territory of the Russian Federation. But then the Russian adjective used is *mezhdunarodnyy*, almost invariably translated as “international”, not “intra-national”. Looking at the same passage in the October 1999 draft of the military doctrine, it is almost identical, word for word, comma for comma, with one notable exception: instead of the word *mezhdunarodnyy* appearing the second time round, the word *nemezhdunarodnyy* appears in its place, ie “non-international”. The whole passage is a lot clearer and reads: “armed conflict can be international in nature (involving two or several states) or non-international and internal in nature (with armed confrontation being conducted within the territory of a single state).” The sensible conclusion is that a mistake has been made in the transmission of the text to the press. Given the importance of the document, this is a very bad mistake to have slipped through.

In the next major section of the doctrine, “principles governing the use of the Russian Federation’s Armed Forces and other troops”, again there is no mention of the concept of “world war”. Given that sections of the October 1999 draft contained a number of references to this concept, this total lack of description of what has been almost a holy of holies in past Soviet/Russian military doctrines (even the phrase is not listed), cannot but be deliberate and may signify that Russian military planners have moved away from thinking in terms of a world war in the sense previously understood. It could be that the revolution in military affairs has forced Russian strategic and military planners to accept that “world war” is no longer feasible, especially in the light of the military campaign in the Balkans, given the *political* effectiveness of weapons launched from the air,

and that significant military and political objectives could be attained without the necessity of bringing the world to the brink of wholesale destruction unleashed by a “world war.” But their description of “large-scale war”, does still contain a number of features which, to all intents and purposes, mirror what was previously described as a “world war”, or the possibility of the war turning nuclear, even if it started only with conventional weapons. But the fact that the phrase itself has been dropped from the canon of the Russian military planner’s vocabulary is significant.

In analysing the future tasks of the Armed Forces, the April 2000 military doctrine elaborates on their peace-keeping role: “in peace-keeping (*podderzhaniye*) and peace-restoration (*vosstanovleniye*) operations – to disengage the warring factions, to stabilise the situation and to ensure the conditions for a just (*spravedlivyy*) peace settlement.” The new doctrine also re-emphasises the role of the Armed Forces in “joint special operations – in internal armed conflicts” and “counter-terrorist operations – in the fight against terrorism in accordance with federal legislation.” The October 1999 draft only vaguely mentioned “basic missions in peace-keeping operations” and activities designed to combat “illegal bandit formations.” Obviously, the new emphasis on the Armed Forces’ role both in peace-keeping activities and in counteracting the terrorist threat is a further indication of trends in the future development of Russia’s military forces.

In the slightly revised section concerning safeguarding Russia’s military security, in the April 2000 doctrine, there is the additional point of “the development of the air defence of the Russian Federation as an integrated system based on centralised command and control of all air defence forces and resources”, as well as that “the performance of missions in defence of the Russian Federation’s national interests on the high seas takes place in accordance with the Fundamentals of Russian Federation policy in the area of naval activity.” A number of points should be made here: first, as a result of NATO’s campaign in the Balkans, as well as the reintegration of the Belarussian air defence system and the continuing centralisation of that of the CIS, there can be little doubt that the Russian/CIS air defence system will continue to receive the attention of the country’s senior political and military leadership: further efforts will be made to ensure that the air space of the Russian Federation will be adequately protected from outside attack. Secondly, sadly lacking in the 1999 draft was any real mention of the role of the country’s Naval forces. This was immediately seized upon by many as being one of the main defects in the original draft and the April 2000 doctrine has given added weight to the role of the Navy in maintaining Russia’s security. The publication of “the fundamental principles of naval policy to 2010” on 17 April is further testament to the increasing importance attached by the present Head of State to the role of the Navy in maintaining Russia’s security in the future. Combining all these points clearly shows that Russia’s new military doctrine has taken on board developments in the past 6 months, as well as some of the public criticism levelled at the draft.

The final section of the doctrine, “military-economic principles”, is the same as that published in October 1999.

## **Conclusion**

As in October 1999's draft, the threats to Russia's security, both internal and external, are varied. The approved Doctrine has, in the light of events in the Balkans, the North Caucasus, as well as the changing political situation within Russia itself, potentially created a blueprint for the appearance of a much more assertive, even more interventionist (“support where necessary for political acts of the Russian Federation by means of the implementation of corresponding measures of a military nature”) role for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Of course, the Doctrine does not dwell on questions of capability but, as a declared intent, it is important in attempting to assess the future direction of the Russian Armed Forces. Only time and the economy will show whether the Russian Armed Forces will play a greater role within the RF or on the world stage.

There is no direct mention of NATO or the US, (as well as still no clear definition of the term “ally”, although “partner” is defined) but, given its overall tone, with a renewed emphasis on the future role of the Navy, the joint and increasing military cooperation with Belarus', the continuing development of the integrated joint CIS air defence system etc, there can be little doubt that the new Doctrine continues to reflect the concern of Russia's military and political leadership at the overall direction of NATO's policy towards Russia.

One other very important feature of the new Doctrine is the lack of mention of the concept of “world war” – the phrase itself is striking by its non-appearance. This could represent a significant break from the past, part of the trend towards accepting how much has changed since the collapse of the USSR and the time when the world was trapped between two very different ideological systems. But, as previously pointed out, it would be wise to exercise a degree of caution at this point, not least because the term “large-scale (regional) war” does seem to carry a lot of features previously associated with the earlier phrase.

The section concerning Russia's use of nuclear weapons has already been commented on, but it would appear that the earlier choice of words – which caused the alarm bells to ring in the West and also raised a few eyebrows in Russia itself – was deliberate in its vagueness and should be seen less as being constructed on Russia's own lack of clarity and more on its deliberate policy of keeping “the enemy” in the dark, so to speak, concerning the precise conditions of use of its nuclear arsenal.

The Doctrine strengthens the hand of the president in the overall direction and control of the country's Armed Forces. This could be a reflection firstly, of the fact that the present incumbent is physically a much fitter man and

can play a much greater role in military affairs, should he choose to do so, and secondly that he wants to play a greater role in military affairs. Looking back at his relationship with the military since he became Prime Minister in August 1999, there is every indication that the military do have a strong ally in the figure of the president. It is not a question of the military having the president in their pocket, however, it is more that Putin looks set to embark on a process which restores the Russian Armed Forces to the position that they formerly enjoyed when the USSR existed, as one of the pillars of society. The potential use of the military to support the political acts of the Russian Federation is also a further hint at the way Putin may use the Armed Forces in a much more direct way to defend, if not promote, Russia's interests internally, as well as possibly externally.

The Doctrine would also appear to provide evidence that in the struggle for an ever greater share of the power in the military sphere between the Defence Ministry and the General Staff, the latter has lost out, not least in not obtaining control over the forces of the other power ministries. The MoD has now been formally charged with drafting "blueprints" for the future development of all other troops, a clear blow to Kvashnin. Add to this the fact that Marshal Sergeyev's contract at the MoD has been extended for another year, and it is safe to assume that Kvashnin's bid to become the next Defence Minister has suffered a setback, but one from which, no doubt, he will recover.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequently published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 April 2000. For an analysis of the October 1999 draft, see C J Dick "Russia's Draft Military Doctrine", CSRC Occasional Brief No 72, November 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 October 1999.

<sup>3</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), 13 April 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 25 April 2000.

**Annex****Russian Military Doctrine  
Contents****October 1999 draft****1. MILITARY-POLITICAL  
PRINCIPLES**

- 1.1 Preamble
- 1.2 Basic features of military-political situation
- 1.3 Basic destabilising factors

**Basic threats to military security**

- 1.4 Threat of direct military aggression
- 1.5 Fundamental external threats
- 1.6 Fundamental internal threats

**Safeguarding military security**

- 1.7 Safeguarding military security
- 1.8 Military security is safeguarded by the sum total of...
- 1.9 Fundamental principles in safeguarding...
- 1.10 Basic tasks in safeguarding...
- 1.11 Qualitative improvement in the means...

**LEADERSHIP IN SAFEGUARDING  
MILITARY SECURITY**

- 1.12 Activity in safeguarding military security

**April 2000 approved****1. MILITARY-POLITICAL  
PRINCIPLES**

Military-political situation

- 1. Present position and future development
- 2. Military-political situation is characterised by...
- 3. Destabilising factors

Basic threats to military security

- 4. Threat of direct military aggression
- 5. Fundamental external threats
- 6. Fundamental internal threats

**Safeguarding military security**

- 7. Safeguarding military security
- 8. Military security is safeguarded by the sum total of...
- Fundamental principles in safe-guarding...
- 10. Basic content in safeguarding...
  - a) in peace time
  - b) in a period of threat and the opening period of war (armed conflict)

**MILITARY ORGANISATION  
OF THE STATE**

- 11. Aims
- 12. Military organisation of

(RF)	the state
1.13 Government of the Russian Federation (RF)	13. Main aims in the development of the military organisation of the state
1.14 Other Federal organs	14. Fundamental principles of the military organisation of the state
1.15 Directorates of the Armed Forces	15. Main priorities in the development of the military organisation of the state
1.16 Ministry of Defence	16. Basic directions in the development of the military organisation of the state
1.17 General Staff	17. Comprehensive military reform
1.18 Directorates of the Military districts	
1.19 Coalition forces	LEADERSHIP OF THE MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE STATE
1.20 Centralised control	
1.21 Order of organisation of the leadership safeguarding military security	18. Leadership...President of the Russian Federation
MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE STATE	19. Government of the RF
1.22 Military organisation is...	20. Federal organs
1.23 The "nucleus" of the above is..	21. Federal organs (more detail)
1.24 Nuclear weapons possession	22. Ministry of Defence
THE CONSTRUCTION AND PREPARATION OF THE MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE STATE	
1.25 Main aim	23. Coalition forces
1.26 Basic principles	24. Centralised leadership and unified strategic and operational planning
1.27 Main priorities	25. Organisation of leadership in a period of threat
1.28 Basic directions	
1.29 Radical changes	

2. MILITARY-STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES. NATURE OF WAR AND ARMED CONFLICTS

2.1 Russian Federation maintains...

2.2 Nature of modern war

2.3 Fundamental general features

2.4 World war

2.5 Regional war

2.6 Aims of World (regional) war

2.7 Conventional World (regional) war

2.8 Local war

2.9 Local war is characterised...

2.10 Armed conflict

2.11 Armed conflict is characterised...

PRINCIPLES IN THE USE OF THE ARMED FORCES AND OTHER TROOPS

2.12 RF considers it legal...

2.13 Unified strategic planning

2.14 Aims of the use of the Armed Forces

2.15 Basic forms of the use...

2.16 Armed Forces must be ready to repel aggression

TASKS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND OTHER TROOPS

2.17 Basic tasks to ensure military security

MILITARY-STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

Nature of war and armed conflicts

1. Maintaining readiness to conduct war

2. Nature of modern war

3. Basic common features of modern war

4. Armed conflict may arise in the form of an armed incident

5. Armed conflict is characterised...

6. Internal armed conflict

7. Local war

8. Regional war

9. Large-scale war

10. Threat period in a large-scale (regional) war

11. Opening period of a large-scale (regional) war

12. RF and international guarantees to prevent the spread of armed conflict

13. RF considers it legal to use the Armed Forces...

14. Aims in the use of Armed Forces

15. Fundamentals in the use of the Armed Forces...

16. Armed Forces of the RF must be ready to repel an attack...

17. Basic tasks of the Armed Forces of the RF

a) safeguarding military security;

b) repelling armed aggression

c) internal armed conflict

d) peace-keeping and peace-support operations

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2.18 Basic tasks in repelling armed attack   | 18. Aid to the civilian power   |
| 2.19 Basic tasks in operations to support peace                                      | 19. Groups of Forces  |
| 2.20 Basic tasks in internal armed conflicts   | 20. Deploying Armed Forces of RF elsewhere                                    |
| 2.21 Assistance to local civil power   | 21. Mixed CIS Groups of Forces  |
| 2.22 Groups of Forces  | 22. Military infrastructure of the state                                      |
| 2.23 Use outside of the territory of RF  | 23. Reserves  |
| 2.24 Mixed CIS military formations   | 24. Planning the training of the civilians                                    |
| 2.25 Military infrastructure   | 25. Territorial and civil defence   |
| 2.26 Material reserves   |   |
| 2.27 Planning the training of the civilians  |   |
| 2.28 Territorial and civil defence   |   |
| <br>   |   |
| 3. MILITARY-ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES. Military-economic safeguarding of military security | 3. MILITARY-ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES   |
| <br>   |   |
| 3.1 Main aim   | 1. Main aim   |
| 3.2 Basic features   | 2. Fundamental tasks  |
| 3.3 Priority tasks   | 3. Priority tasks   |
| 3.4 Basic principles   | 4. Basic principles   |
| 3.5 Basic directions   | 5. Basic directions   |
| 3.6 Basic directions in mobilising the population                                    | 6. RF and international military-technical cooperation                        |
| 3.7 International military and military-technical cooperation                        | 7. Cooperation on the basis of foreign policy and economic expediency         |
| 3.8 RF and international military-technical cooperation                              | 8. Priority importance of the RF to developing military-technical cooperation |
| 3.9 RF and international military-technical cooperation based on foreign policy      |   |
| 3.10 Priority significance   |   |
| 3.11 Basic directions of international military-technical cooperation                |   |
| <br>   |   |
| Conclusion   |   |

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