

Security Issues in a Global Age and Future Course of the Transformation of the Military: Russian View

Dr. Alexander G. Saveliev
Head of Department of Strategic Studies
Institute of World Economy and International Relations
Russian Academy of Sciences

During the last 10 years Russia tried to conduct a military reform in order to adjust its military structure to the new strategic environment and to the security challenges of a post-confrontational period. For a number of reasons this reform is moving very slow and produce more questions and answers.

First of all I'd like to note, that military reform is quite a complex problem – much wider then the reform of the armed forces. It includes political, economic, legal and other measures aimed at qualitative modernization of Russian Armed Forces, other forces, military infrastructure, defense industry and all the connected structures of the state in order to provide necessary level of defense capability and security under the limited funds (or within the reasonable financial spending).

It means that the main principles of military reform should include the following provisions:

- the reform is covering not only the Armed Forces of Russia, but also all the other spheres connected with military activities of the state;
- military system must be based on the unified command, control, procurement, education and etc. structure;
- the proposed measures should correspond to economic capabilities of the state.

Among the wide spectrum of the measures of military reform in Russia those aimed at modernization of military capabilities are the most important. Here we had and still have two different approaches. The first one declares that since Russia have weakened conventional capabilities, the only way to provide security of the country is to rely on nuclear weapons. Another one calls for following the main directions of the modernization of conventional forces, proposed by the most developed countries – first of all the United States and NATO.

In practice these two directions are combined in the contemporary Russian security

policy. On the one hand – nuclear weapons are considered as a very important element of Russian military structure. On the other hand – the main attention is paid to the improvement of the conventional capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces. Having in mind the lack of financial funds, all the directions of military reform are moving relatively slow which gives food for critiques from the right and from the left and for general dissatisfaction with the speed of the reform.

One of the points of such critiques is a poor implementation of the idea of transforming the armed forces from draft to contract system, which is called in Russia a “professional army”. According to the current plan, by 2007 half of the Army will be on contract. At the same time the number of uniformed men will be reduced to 1 million.

At the same time President of Russia V.Putin put forward a demand that the Army must be ready to meet all the existing threats. Moreover, in November 2003 he spoke about the “threats of to-morrow” calling for adaptation of the Armed Forces to the most modern trends as well as for “flexibility and self-development”.

It is not quite clear what kind of threat is considered by Russian military to be more actual. In official documents one can find such threats as the deployment of foreign forces aimed at the attack against Russia and its allies; territorial claims to Russia and the threat of political or military tearing away of the parts of its territory; implementation of the programs of the weapons of mass destruction by the states, organizations and movements. But the level of probability of such threats remains uncertain and the demand for Russian Armed Forces is to be ready to participate in military conflicts of any known type.

It is clear, that the task to define the potential enemy, the level of threat, the character of future military conflicts and the demands to the Armed Forces is extremely difficult to-day in comparison with the cold war period, but without it real military reform will remain only on paper, or the limited resources will be just wasted.

In spite of the increase of military budget of Russia, it is very unlikely that in the foreseeable future Russian Armed Forces will be transformed into a qualitatively new military organization. Anyhow, the leadership of Russia started to pay more attention to military organization, trying to improve the situation in this sphere. Thus, several important documents was approved, including the “State Program on Armaments to the Year 2010”; “Basic Provisions of the Policy of Russian Federation of the Development of Defense Industrial Complex up to the Year 2010 and on Further perspective”, and some other. These documents define the aims and goals of military reform in the part of military research, development, production and procurement for the current decade.

At the same time it is a well-known fact, that Russian defense industry is suffering by the lack of contracts. For example, the annual rate of production of helicopters is about 40 units, civil airplanes – less then 10, military aircraft – slightly more then 20 in comparison with nearly 700 helicopters, 150 civil airplanes and more then military aircraft in the end

of 1980s.

In the sphere of Russian strategic forces one can foresee continuing decline during the following decade. This decline is "compensating" by more active nuclear strategy, presented in official documents and statements of Russian political and military leaders. To some extent it can be described as a sort of Russian reaction on the US Nuclear Posture Review as well as on serious critique of low level of financing of Russian strategic programs. The main goal is to prove to wide public and the experts that Russian security can be reliably preserved even under the conditions of deep reductions of strategic offensive forces.

Among these documents and statements the most important one is the report of Russian Defense Minister S.Ivanov made in November 2003. Of course, it was not a "Russian NPR" since the document is more comprehensive and covered practically all the aspects of Russian military build-up. But in its "nuclear part" one can find an attempt to give an answer to the US document at least from the point of general nuclear philosophy.

First of all, Russian Defense Minister expressed his skepticism on the "attempts to return nuclear weapons into the category of permissible military instruments" at the expense of break-through technologies which transfer nuclear weapons into a relatively "clean" systems from the point of the consequences of their use. Such attempts, having place in "some countries" were called as a factor, capable to undermine both: global and regional stability. These developments, according to S.Ivanov, will demand from Russia a "reconstruction of command system" and the development of the approaches to the deterrence against the threats of different levels.

Among these threats the authors of the mentioned report called:

- the deployment of foreign forces aimed at the attack against Russia and its allies;
- territorial claims to Russia and the treat of political or military tearing away of the parts of its territory;
- implementation of the programs of the weapons of mass destruction by the states, organizations and movements;
- some other threats.

One should mention that this list of possible external threats to Russian security is very uncertain, and it is practically impossible to analyze the real meaning of specific provisions of this or that point. For example, what the authors had in mind while mentioning the possibility of the development of weapons of mass destruction by "organizations and movements"? How to define the purpose of the deployment of forces by this or that state or organization? Did they have in mind NATO in this connection, and etc.

The same kind of uncertainty exists in the part, devoted to the description of possible military conflicts. The authors accept the high level of unpredictability in this field, but at the same time put forward the task for Russian Armed Forces to be ready to participate in military conflicts “of any known type”¹. From the point of strategic forces the most straight-forward statements were made in connection with the possible military conflict at “Western strategic direction”.

The authors of the Report predict that the main characteristics of the conflict with the West will be a comprehensive aerospace, naval and ground operations of a very high intensity. In the course of such a conflict not only armed forces and military infrastructure will be a subject of attack of the enemy, but also the economy of the country and all its infrastructure, civil population and “practically all the territory”². In this connection the task of Russian Armed Forces will be to obtain a strategic initiative during the course of the conflict since “passive warfare” will only bring to lose of control and finally – to the defeat.

All these characteristics of possible large-scale conflict³ bring the authors to quite a surprising conclusion. The practically claim that Russia must be prepared to win a large-scale nuclear war in “traditional” meaning of “victory”. They state, that Russian military planning, “based on realistic understanding of contemporary resources and capabilities of Russia” provides that Russian Armed Forces together with other forces⁴ must be prepared to “repulse” the enemy’s attack and to defeat the aggressor under any conditions of war, including the massive use by the enemy of modern and perspective weapon systems, including all kinds of weapons of mass destruction⁵.

To implement such a task the Report put forward the following priorities of the modernization of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation:

- the capabilities to implement the strategic deterrence;
- high military and mobilization readiness;
- strategic mobility;
- high level of strength and the professionalism of the military staff;
- high level of technical equipment of the Armed Forces.

¹ The Report of Russian Defense Minister was published by Russian MoD under the title “Actual Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation” in the end of November 2003 without the names of the authors and even without the year and month of the publication. Here we quote page 25 of this document.

² “Actual Tasks ...”, p. 29.

³ We should mention that the authors of the Report did not give their vision of the possibility of such a conflict – they just give a general description of its characteristics.

⁴ According to present official definition “the other forces” of Russian Federation include the interior troops (MVD), border guard, armed forces of the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS), Federal Security Service (FSB) and the forces of some other Agencies of Russian Federation.

⁵ “Actual Tasks ...”, p. 39.

The main goal of strategic deterrence, according to the Report, is to reject the "power pressure" and aggression against Russia and its allies during the time of peace, and to de-escalate the aggression during the war by the threat to deliver against him an "given damage" or to deliver the strikes of different scale by conventional or nuclear weapons.

To our view, all the mentioned above statements, contained in the Report as well as in other official documents of Russian Federation (like National Security Concept and Military Doctrine of Russian Federation adopted in 2000) may be of interest mostly from propagandistic point of view. But after a close look at them there are more questions than answers on the practical possibility to implement such a strategy into real life if it proves to be necessary.

First of all we should stress, that there exist different approaches and estimates of the level of threat to the security of Russia at present and in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless even these threats are considered to be of a very probability, the leadership of the country, following the policy of deterrence, must be able to use all the instruments they poses and clearly understand the consequences of these or that actions, which can be taken during the course of the implementation of such a policy.

This problem continues to be very actual since Russia (like the USSR) has no traditions to make open official statements presenting the details of its strategy. Russian public and majority of experts do not have clear understanding of the mechanism of implementation of nuclear deterrence during peace and war time, what kind of measures are taken to preserve the control over nuclear arsenal in the hands of political leadership to avoid escalation and unauthorized use of these weapons.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of a bi-polar model of international relations made the problem of preserving security more comprehensive for Russia. On the one hand the end of confrontation with the United States and NATO dramatically reduced the probability of a global conflict with the use of nuclear weapons and opened the way for further deep reductions of nuclear arsenals. But on the other hand the world community faced a number of new threats, which demand an adequate reaction of all the structures to provide peaceful life of people. And nuclear weapons in the majority of cases can not contribute to the salvation of the security problems of a new century.

In this connection, to our view, Russia and the United States could openly accept (in a joint declaration or some other official document) that nuclear weapons are not a universal mean of preserving security. At least Russia could do it unilaterally in such a document as the mentioned above Report of the Defense Minister. The use of nuclear weapons should be declared as a very low probability action since the large-scale aggression against Russia, which could bring to the situation when such a decision became real and necessary, is also of a very low probability.

Nevertheless, to my view, Russia must not completely ignore such extremely negative variants of the development of international situation. That is why for the foreseeable future Russia will maintain and modernize its nuclear deterrence potential trying to adopt it to the new world environment and existing economic capabilities and the priorities of military build-up.

Politically Russia can declare, that its armed forces would implement a task of a non-aggressive deterrence against any possible threat. Russia itself does not treat any of the states as its potential enemy. Russian nuclear forces will not target any country, and Russian Federation will use its military potential only in case of a critical situation to its security. That is why Russia preserves its right to use nuclear weapons first, but the main goal of this use will be de-escalation of a conflict under the conditions favorable for Russia.

To my view, such an approach to security and military reform with includes unilateral and multilateral measures of preserving and strengthening stability could be more positive and constructive response of Russia to the new threats and challenges. In any case multilateral dialog on security issues, on the role of nuclear weapons, is necessary since the problem far exceeds the framework of US-Russian and NATO-Russian relations.