



# Russia's Security Debate in 2000: Superpower vs. Great Power

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## **Introduction**

On July 12, 2000 at a colloquium of the Russian Defense Ministry, a contentious debate burst into public view. Chief of the General Staff Anatoli Kvashnin recommended that Russia's strategic nuclear force be absorbed into one of the other branches of the armed forces and nuclear force spending be instead directed towards conventional forces. Hours later, Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev publicly blasted Kvashnin, calling his proposal a "crime against Russia and just plain madness."<sup>1</sup> Sergeyev held that the existing armed forces structure should be preserved with the Strategic Missile Forces remaining as a separate branch of the military responsible for Russia's land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Aleksandr Shaburkin, "Chem mozhet zakonchit'sya konflikt ministra oborony nachal'nikom genshtaba," *Vremya MN*, July 15, 2000, p. 1.
  - 2 David Hoffman, "Rift Deepens In Leadership of Russian Armed Forces," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2000, p. A16; A. Shaburkin, "Tol'ko prezident mozhet utikhomirit' voe-nachal'nikov," *Vremya MN*, July 15, 2000, p. 1.

Such a public conflict between the defense minister and the head of the General Staff is unprecedented in Russian military history. It reflects the serious crisis that exists in the political management of the armed forces just at the time when Vladimir Putin is beginning to define his role as head of state. Having little choice, President Putin was forced to intervene and demand that the public recriminations cease. Additionally, he placed the decision-making process for further reforms in the Russian armed forces under presidential control.

This schism, however, was considerably more significant than just an unusual public debate between two leading Russian defense officials — the future of Russian national security was at stake.<sup>3</sup> Since Russia first exploded a nuclear warhead in August 1949, its nuclear arsenal constituted less an instrument of war than a measure of self-image for Soviet Russia, which enjoyed the title of “superpower” through nuclear parity with the United States. Even in post-Soviet Russia many Russians hold a similar perspective. Therefore, the outcome of this explosive debate on the “optimal scheme of balance between the nuclear deterrence forces and combined armed forces” defines not just security policy, but nothing less than how Russia views its standing in the world arena.

Importantly, this debate foreshadows one of the key issues that will define both Putin’s presidency and Russia’s future. The way Moscow reorganizes its defense capabilities in the coming years will reflect whether Russia intends only to be a “great power” or whether it still aspires to the status of “superpower.”

Because of these implications, this conflict presents a unique context for an analysis of the impact of domestic factors on Russian security policy. The fervent debate in the military hierarchy provides an insightful, if not comprehensive, glimpse of a spectrum of domestic factors that will influence Russian security policy during the years to come. At the same time, the actors linked to this debate illustrate a microcosm of several aspects of contemporary security policy-making that drive Russia toward

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3 Andrei Piontovsky argued that the fact such a crisis occurred is a strong argument in favor of civilian management of the armed forces. A. Piontovsky, “Season of Discontent: Kvashnin and the Experts,” *The Russian Journal*, August 19-25, 2000.

a more realistic and pragmatic security policy. These actors, besides the obvious prominence of the armed forces, include the president, the Duma, the military industry complex, and the mass media.

In actuality this controversy over how much Russia should depend upon its nuclear arsenal stems from the beginning of the 1980s. Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, then chief of the General Staff, asserted that the nuclear arsenal was already doomed because of the imminent advent of energy-directed high-precision armament for hi-tech warfare. Yuri Andropov (General Secretary of the Communist Party, 1982-84) believed the same. Civilian security experts also joined the debate. One such expert, Andrei Kokoshin, emphasized, even before being selected as deputy defense minister, that rather than depending excessively upon its nuclear capabilities Russia should concentrate its limited resources on the development of general-purpose — read conventional — capabilities. Clearly, this controversial debate has been an underlying part of Soviet/Russian military thinking for at least the last two decades.

As Russia's economy continues to show a weak performance, however, the scope and cost of the Russian nuclear arsenal has come under increasing scrutiny in the security community. Kvashnin's comments only served to re-ignite this long-standing argument, albeit in a very public way. Unlike previous comments, this time Kvashnin's voice left permanent imprints on the Russian security-military policy.

To better understand this enduring impact, this paper will identify and analyze Russian domestic factors that affect the formulation of its security policy. In the context of last summer's heated debate inside the military hierarchy, I will attempt to illuminate the reasons why Russia, after years of consideration and hesitation, has no other recourse but to abandon pursuit of the "superpower" status it had achieved by means of its nuclear parity with the United States.

### **The Core Issues**

Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin's July 12 proposal called for the subordination of the missile troops to the army while slashing their strength

to one-seventh of its present size.<sup>4</sup> According to him the cuts could be made because Russia's missile arsenal had shrunk to a size that no longer required direct and independent management. Practically, Kvashnin's proposal sought to enhance the authority of the General Staff over the nuclear forces and shift resources from nuclear to conventional forces.

Defense Minister Sergeyev's rebuke was prompt and abrupt. Sergeyev, an army marshal and former head of the nuclear missile forces, made it clear that he was adamantly against the plan. Sergeyev intoned at the next day's meeting that any change in the military structure should be "approached reasonably" and that Kvashnin's proposal was a "remote" idea given the ongoing course of arms control talks with Washington.

Responding to this quarrel, outside observers could not but look to President Putin for his reaction. Only two days later, on July 14, Putin shut down the military chiefs' publicization of the issue while on a visit to an armament exhibition in Nizhny Tagil. There, he unequivocally affirmed, "There is no reorganization of strategic missile forces as such."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in a move that sent mixed signals, on July 31, President Putin fired six top generals that weakened Defense Minister Sergeyev's position, since among those terminated was procurement chief Anatoli Sitnov, who reportedly had opposed the Kvashnin plan and had been allied with Sergeyev.<sup>6</sup>

Less than a month later, on August 11, the Security Council met to discuss the future of the armed forces through 2016. According to the resolutions approved by the Security Council, the Strategic Missile Forces will remain an independent branch of the armed forces until at least 2006. However, the Council projected that the number of nuclear warheads the Russian Strategic Missile Forces will possess by 2010 will not exceed 800,

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4 Kvashnin proposed eliminating 16-17 missile troop divisions and firing 3,000 rocket specialists. He also proposed drastically reducing the production rate of the single-warhead Topol-M missile from the current ten per year to two per year. As a result, the nuclear forces' share of the military budget would be reduced from 18 percent to 15 percent.

5 "Putin zayavlyaet, chto reorganizatsii RVSN kak takovoi net," *Interfax*, Nizhnii Tagil, July 14, 2000.

6 Igor Davydov, "Nyneshnij konflikt v rukovodstve Minoborony RF mozhet privesti v kreslo voennogo ministra grazhdanskoe lito," *Interfax*, August 1, 2000.

while an additional 700 warheads will be deployed with strategic aviation and naval forces. Additionally, the overall number of the Strategic Missile Force divisions will be reduced. It is planned that production of the Topol-M missiles will continue, but the major part of acquisition funds for the strategic component of the armed forces will be spent on the development of “new technology” weapons, cruise missiles for the air force and navy, and a new generation of naval ballistic missiles. However, the Council stressed that projects for the so-called general-purpose forces will also be developed and financed, meaning that priority of funding will no longer be given to strategic nuclear forces.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, the main cash flows will be directed towards enhancing the combat potential of the general-purpose forces.

The resolutions made by the Security Council seem, at first glance, to be measures for balancing the nuclear and conventional capabilities of Russia. But this first-phase decision bodes much more for the future orientation of Russian security policy.

This decision disappointed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry fears that Russia’s unilateral reduction of its nuclear arsenal would harm the nation’s international prestige and status. As they see it, if Russia allows the current nuclear balance to tilt in the United States’ favor, the world security order will be skewed and Russia’s standing will be degraded to the level of the United Kingdom or France. An additional fear of the ministry might be that knowledge of this internal conflict would give the United States a stronger position in negotiations and a “calling card” for deeper involvement in a variety of security issues throughout the world — circumstances not in Russia’s best interest.

Responses to the debate by the Russian private sector were clearly divided. Virtually all strategic analysts, from the ultra-patriotic newspaper *Zavtra* to the *Yabloko* liberals, almost unanimously supported Sergeyev’s point of view. Their position can be explained partly by the fact that the

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<sup>7</sup> The ratio of financing between the strategic nuclear forces and general purpose forces will be approximately 1 to 3. “Nachat novyi etap reformirovaniya armii,” *Oborona i Bezopasnost*, Vypusk No. 96, August 8, 2000; “L’arme russe perdra 350,000 hommes d’ici 2003,” *Le Monde*, September 11, 2000.

vast majority of civilian experts in the field of security have spent their entire careers working on problems of nuclear strategy and strategic stability during the Cold War. Quite expectedly, they sought solutions in that context rather than in a framework of a changing world.

Three principal criticisms against de-prioritizing nuclear deterrence emerged from Kvashnin's opponents. Firstly, opponents accused him of attacking Russia's status as a great power. For them, the number of nuclear weapons itself holds as much significance and status as the number of symbols surrounding the hut of a tribal chieftain. Therefore, they argue it's necessary to maintain Russian strategic weapons at a level commensurate with the current balance while upgrading C4I and early warning systems. What they view as most important is the creation of a uniform system of operative management of all nuclear forces in Russia, abolishing all redundant structures while enhancing efficiency and response.<sup>8</sup> Sergei Rogov, Director of the USA/Canada Institute in Moscow, amplifies this argument. He believes that in order to warn the United States, who he sees as actively aspiring to change the world military balance in its favor, Russia must take rapid measures for preserving the strategic balance such as announcing the testing of "Topol-M" systems armed with multiple individually targeted warheads.<sup>9</sup> Kvashnin's opponents' second and more concrete argument is that his plan "undermines Russia's ability to maintain a nuclear balance and allows the Pentagon to plan a pre-emptive counter-force strike, thus avoiding a nuclear missile retribution."<sup>10</sup> In short, they believe his plan disarms Russia and places it at the United States' mercy.

Finally, in keeping with the deterrence mindset, the third argument subscribes to the theory that the Russian Federation's dependence on nuclear weapons is not only a means of preventing a nuclear strike but also a way to prevent aggression from adversaries who have conventional forces more

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8 Last year, Sergeyev proposed establishment of a general command to unify the control structure of all nuclear forces. This plan, if implemented, would have reduced the influence of the General Staff over nuclear weapons.

9 Sergei Rogov, "Strategicheskiy Kapitulyatsiya: 'Plan Kvashnina' i yadernaya politika Rossii," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 26, p. 1.

10 Vladimir Yakovlev: Sud'bu raketnykh voina opredelit politicheskoe reshenie," *Izvestiya*, July 5, 2000, p. 1.

powerful than Russia does. Sergeyev and his entourage tried to give these positions relevance by developing a doctrine that emphasizes maintenance of the nuclear arsenal to maintain international influence during periods of domestic vulnerability. Sergeyev's strategy, however, was significantly undermined by NATO's air campaign in Kosovo and Russia's war in Chechnya that demonstrated the importance of maintaining conventional military forces.

For their part, Kvashnin and his supporters argue for a great power strategy rather than a superpower strategy. Instead of projecting power globally, they seek the ability to project power regionally. A great power can defend itself from all neighbors and project power along its frontiers and even, to some extent, beyond, as Germany and China can.<sup>11</sup>

In taking this position, Kvashnin's faction also argues that nuclear weapons are irrelevant to the actual correlation of forces. The ability to launch a first strike against the United States is devoid of meaning, since there is no foreseeable political circumstance under which such a strike would be contemplated. Moreover, if nuclear deterrence must be maintained, it does not require massive capability. A much smaller force, on the scale of France or Israel, is sufficient.<sup>12</sup>

Under Russian doctrine, one of the roles of nuclear weapons is to repel an overwhelming conventional attack which might necessitate first use. But Kvashnin's supporters argue that the threat of attack from the West can be deterred at a much lower level. The failure of the military phase of the Kosovo operation, and the NATO countries' lack of readiness to deploy ground forces, showed once again that for these countries, "unacceptable damage" amounts to losing just a few tens of soldiers. Furthermore, the nature of the threats on Russia's southern borders is such that they simply cannot be deterred or dealt with by nuclear weapons. From their perspective, relying on nuclear weapons even in a potential conflict with China is both illusory and irresponsible.

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11 "Superpower vs. Great Power: Inside the Russian Defense Debate," *Stratfor.com*, July 17, 2000.

12 Andrei Piontovsky, "Season of discontent: Kvashnin and the experts," *The Russian Journal*, August 19-25, 2000; "Superpower vs. Great Power: Inside the Russian Defense Debate," *op. cit.*

The modifications made to the military reforms plan by the Security Council on August 11 betrayed the illusion of Russia’s “superpower” status and telegraphed the reality that Putin’s Russia has stepped down to “great power” standing. This realistic approach could have been taken only after the Security Council recognized, despite great reluctance, that the conventional forces were rapidly deteriorating due to extremely limited financing even while the military threats that should be parried by these troops were increasing.

While the Security Council stepped forward with these recommendations, they did not do so in a vacuum. Rather, these reform initiatives represent the confluence of actors that shape Russia’s security policy. To understand this process we must define the Russian Federation’s main players in the national security policy-making process and examine the influences of Russian domestic politics on security policy formulation.

### **Major Actors in the National Security Policy-Making**

Today, the Russian Federation, like any other country in the world, cannot formulate its own security policy without being conditioned by domestic factors. Governmental and non-governmental forces are particularly relevant to policy formulation, whether it remains a superpower or not. These include the president, the Duma, the military-industry complex (VPK), and the civilian security experts linked with the mass media. It goes without saying that although non-governmental forces have the potential to affect policy, they share a common handicap in the sense that they have no formal policy-making authority. Thus, to influence policy, they must work through official actors, such as the president, the Duma, and the military.

#### **President of the Russian Federation**

For the first time in Russian history, power was transferred from one head-of-state to another by a legitimate democratic process. This partly explains

why the President is more powerful than any other institution in Russia today. Putin has already exercised his role as Supreme Commander in Chief by exerting his will over the military's on security policy. Soon after having been officially inaugurated as president, he declared, "Defense capability should be a priority of our state."<sup>13</sup> His statement is noteworthy in light of the fact that post-Soviet Russia has not yet had a coherent national security policy. Former president Boris Yeltsin neglected national security on the premise that rebuilding the national economy took priority. Investment in national security was deemed counter-productive and anachronistic.

In contrast, President Putin called for the modernization of the armed forces to become a key government priority, saying it was necessary to ensure stability in Russia. He stressed that the Russian military needed to be prepared to handle domestic threats, such as rebels in Chechnya, and external ones, such as international terrorism or the perceived threat from the West.

One of the first things Putin did when he became acting head of state was to meet with the heads of the security ministries every Monday. This was in response to the situation in the North Caucasus. Nevertheless, President Putin's response to the public quarrel between the highest-ranking generals last July was quick and clear. It is important to note that the president shut down the debate after Sergeyev went public, not immediately after Kvashnin's comments. Moreover, the world has had a ringside seat to a Putin-led historic revision of the future direction of military reforms. Like all of Putin's undertakings connected with the country's political and social reconstruction, military reform in all likelihood will be a radical one. Clearly the president is setting the stage for a "great power strategy."

### The Duma

The Duma has become one of the most important actors in the formulation of national security-military policy. The Duma is not a single institution; one can examine the Duma through many lenses: parties, committees,

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13 Anna Dolgov, "Military factor 'vital' for Russia, Putin says," *The Associated Press*, [http://www.russiajournal.com/start/defense/article\\_72\\_3321.htm](http://www.russiajournal.com/start/defense/article_72_3321.htm).

leadership, and individual members. Of all these, it seems that the most powerful administrative unit related to national security policy is the Defense Committee.

For example, Igor Sergeyev has achieved much more in his office as defense minister than simply a numerical reduction of the armed forces because of his working relationship with the Duma's Defense Committee. By accomplishing the first-stage tasks of military reform, he has tried to optimize all of Russia's security forces, including non-MOD services, to achieve greater efficiency and a considerable reduction in expenses. These efforts were supported by the Defense Committee. In addition, Sergeyev has actively supported efforts by the Duma to move toward greater civilian control of the military and increased transparency in the defense budgeting process. Here it is important to note several significant changes in the Duma Defense Committee that took place over the last few years. With the participation of retired General Eduard Vorobyev, Aleksei Arbatov, and others, the Duma Defense Committee achieved greater transparency in the defense budget, established a good working relationship with the defense minister and the MOD in general, and passed important legislation on military reform. Importantly, the law on budget allocations requires the government to present a very detailed budget plan for approval by the Duma. Consequently, the Duma now has a very strong voice even in shaping certain military programs where that opportunity was previously denied.<sup>14</sup>

In short, civilian control of the military is minimal but a growing priority in Russia. Today the Russian military is under presidential, not civilian, control. Attainment of full civilian control of the military is still in its infancy and controlling civilian legislation remains "very raw," according to retired General E. Vorobyev, a Duma Defense Committee member. Importantly, however, the notion of civilian control of the military is now widely accepted in the Communist-dominated Duma and

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14 Walter Parchomenko, "The State of Russia's Armed Forces and Military Reform," *Parameters*, Winter 1999-2000, pp. 98-110.

among political leaders in general. The fact that the major Duma parties advocate the boosting of military expenditure provides proof of this.<sup>15</sup>

### **Military Industry Complex (VPK)**

Russia is home to an emerging collection of special interest groups. Still, lobbyists and lobbying groups have a very limited capacity in affecting the odds of whether a policy will be defined and adopted. This is not to say that groups have little influence on politics. They obviously have considerable clout and this is particularly true in regards to the military industry complex. Although the latter's influence may be exaggerated in the press and by analysts, the fact remains that virtually every decision made in Russian security policy affects armament manufacturers. Increasingly, this affected group is becoming cognizant of the complex machinations inherent in important governmental decisions and is endeavoring to involve itself in the process. Furthermore, Russia's VPK deepened and extended its influence in recent years, since arms sales are one of the new Federation's best industries for earning hard currency.

Although Russia's defense industry, along with other sectors of the economy, plummeted following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, it is slowly building its way back to influential levels. By one estimate, defense exports plunged from a value of \$31.2 billion in 1987 to \$2.8 billion in 1992. The figure for 1999 is known to be \$3.4 billion, while the

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15 As the Russian government crafts a budget for 2001, citing not only the Kursk incident but also Putin's own promise to strengthen the armed forces, politicians are taking on the fight usually waged by military leaders. Members from the three most powerful parliamentary groups, as well as the Duma Defense Committee, have called for defense spending higher than the \$7 billion (2.6 percent of GDP) currently planned for 2001. General Andrei Nikolayev, chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, is leading the rally, asking to increase the draft budget to approximately \$9 billion. The Communist Party, led by Gennadi Zyuganov, wants to see at least 3 percent of the GDP spent on defense. And Fatherland-All Russia, as well as the pro-Kremlin Unity bloc, also agree that the defense budget needs a boost. "Russia: Military Quiet as Leaders Wrangle over Balanced Budget," *Strafor.com*, September 19, 2000.

figure for 2000 is \$4.3 billion, with Asia accounting for about half of these deliveries.<sup>16</sup>

The defense sector comprises some 1,700 enterprises including manufacturers, design bureaus, and research institutes. Russian planners have argued that these should be reduced to 600 under a rationalization program aimed to improve efficiency. However, funding shortages aggravated by limited domestic procurement hampers reform in this sector. Within this environment, President Putin is viewed as the first Russian leader in years to treat defense sales and the health of the defense industry seriously. Rebuilding Russia's national strength is linked to reforms in the defense industry sector and to the development of a new generation of major equipment and technologically advanced systems. In order to institute an optimally effective policy for the promotion of the VPK, it is necessary for the Russian military to depend more on selling conventional armaments than nuclear defense systems, which are essentially prohibited from earning hard currency.

### **The Mass Media and Security-Military Experts**

Much of what most Russians learn about the world and their national security policy is disseminated by the mass media. In Russian society today, with its longing for openness and transparency, the mass media plays important roles that can influence the conduct of Russia's security policy. Although President Putin declared in his July 14 press conference that "such decisions (on the reorganization of the Strategic Missile Forces) cannot be made privately, but they cannot be put for nation-wide discussion, either," this issue has been open to public scrutiny from the civilian strategic experts to the ultra-patriotic newspaper *Zavtra* and *Yabloko* liberals.

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16 The former Soviet Union used arms transfers and military assistance as a political instrument against NATO and other Western forces during the Cold War. This meant that its 1990 defense exports of \$16 billion generated only \$900 million in cash. With the political imperative of favoring countries of military support now gone, Russia's defense industry is struggling to find its way in a global market. Damian Kemp, "Russian industry hunts out a future for itself," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 29, 2000.

It is true that the influence of the media is not likely to be the same in all circumstances. It tends to be greatest when the domestic political dimensions of a security-related issue become a major concern of the public. In this context, the debate over the future of the strategic military forces was unusual enough to focus the public's attention on national security policy.

It is also worth giving attention to what has been written by security and military experts on reform. In numerous articles and columns, they shaped and constructed the arguments and logic upon which both Sergeyev and Kvashnins' supporters based their views. This conceptual confrontation between civilian security experts, then, serves to illuminate and define policy positions.

For example, Rogov insists that only the reinforcing threat of a rapid increase in Russia's strategic nuclear forces will fortify its position in negotiations with the United States on the START-III and ABM treaties.<sup>17</sup> In counterpoint to this conservative view, expert Andrei Piontkovky is joined by Peter Felgenhauer, senior defense columnist, who defines Russia's armed forces today as, at best, a militia. They explain that instead of spending scarce rubles on more new ICBMs, Russia should spend more on modern conventional weapons such as night ground-attack aircraft and helicopters with thermal imaging equipment to deal with regional threats in the Caucasus and elsewhere, and also on the social safety net for downsized and active military personnel.<sup>18</sup>

## **National Security Policy and Domestic Factors**

**National economic performance.** After more than a decade of virtually uninterrupted decline, the gross domestic product (GDP) grew 3.2 percent in 1999. This recovery was primarily attributable to the import substitution effect after the devaluation of August 1998, the increase in unit value

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17 Sergei Rogov, "Strategicheskiye Kapitulyatsiya: 'Plan Kvashnina' i yadernaya politika Rossii," *op. cit.*

18 Parchomenko's interview with P. Felgengauer, see W. Parchomenko, "The State of Russia's Armed Forces and Military Reform," *op. cit.*

of Russia's oil exports, and some industrial and financial restructuring. The GDP is expected to grow by 4-5 percent in 2000, and by an average of 3-4 percent in 2001-2005, spurred by increased investment and an upturn in consumption.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, for recovery of its international status, Russia's lack of funds is still the most difficult weakness to be overcome.

Because of this fundamental economic weakness, the defense budget remains wholly inadequate given the army's size and needs. The total 1999 defense budget was only about \$4 billion and provided six times less than the minimum funding needed for adequate combat training.<sup>20</sup> The current defense budget also does not tackle the military's outstanding debt problem, which is massive (close to the total defense budget) and still growing. Such a debt significantly undermines the general health of the country's economy and further damages the military's prestige. According to the General Staff, the debt to the military is more than 60 million rubles. Furthermore, over the past three years, only individual weapons purchases have been made, with most of the funds allocated being wholly consumed to pay for wages, food, and uniforms. A situation has arisen in which whole branches of the military have been starved of funding. The army is so catastrophically short of operational equipment and funds that to execute operations in the North Caucasus requires a combined funding effort from all regions and fleets.<sup>21</sup> This serious lack of funds exposes the contradictory nature of the recent Russian doctrine that relied on the threat of nuclear weapons to compensate for a weak army.

The troops need to support themselves and their families long ago surpassed the importance of loyalty and minimized sense of nationalism.

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19 Jeff Thomas, "The Russian Economy in July 2000," *Russian and Eurasian Program*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), July 17, 2000; Sun-sup Park, Kyong-wook Shim et al, "Trend of Military Capabilities Development in the North-East Asian Powers: 2000-2020," Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), Research Paper to be published in December 2000.

20 *Izvestiya*, February 9, 1999; W. Parchomenko, "The State of Russia's Armed Forces and Military Reform," *op. cit.*

21 Vladimir Mukhin, "Public row over, but what's in store?" *The Russia Journal*, July 29-August 4, 2000.

According to numerous reports, soldiers steal, bribe, and engage in extortion to fund themselves. Sporadic corruption would not be crippling, but when it occurs en masse and consistently as it does in Russia, it undermines morale and saps the military of what little resources it holds. The corruption plaguing the ranks of the Russian military stems from the pervasive feeling among Russian troops that they are being cheated. Soldiers earn an average of about US\$50 a month, and have not yet received the substantial raises they were promised. Often, troops are not paid nor rationed food. In January 2001, servicemen expected a 10 percent raise, less than the country's projected annual inflation rate.

Given this environment, Putin's new orientation of national security policy must be rooted in economics. Russian spending power is exceptionally limited. Decision makers must thus choose a singular strategy focused on regional — not global — influence. This strategy clearly demands an emphasis on conventional forces. Concurrently, spending money modernizing a conventional force would involve development of new technologies in fields such as communications, computing, and logistics, all of which would have a major stimulating effect on the Russian economy. Concomitantly, the development of a more technologically advanced force will allow the Russians to reduce the military to a more manageable and affordable size that would in turn free funds for much-needed training and modern conventional weaponry.

**Social consciousness on national security.** Recent international events such as NATO intervention in Kosovo gave greater public emphasis to Russia's "spiritual renewal" and "moral values, traditions of patriotism" as well as the social consciousness on national security. This process of the recovery of national identity stems from the Russians' humiliation by NATO's expansion, the chronic economic crisis, the Kosovo conflict, the West's interference in the Chechen war, and the United States' attempt to revise the ABM treaty. All were interpreted as direct threats to future Russian sovereignty and regional influence. All served as stern reminders to the Russian people that the Russian nation must move forward under the new president to revive the notion of national identity.

The awareness that Russia is faced by external as well as internal threats is conspicuous to Russians. This renewed interest in national security issues provides the general officers on the General Staff with the opportunity to plunge towards a more realistic approach. Moreover, their desired initiatives to modernize and develop an effective modern conventional force is narrowly linked to the latent and unusual security threats mentioned hereafter.

**Demographic decrease.** Recent State Statistics Committee's monthly reports on Russia's socio-economic situation state that Russia's death rate is almost twice as high as its birth rate. At the current rate of decline, Russia's population shrinks by about 2,500 every day. If Russia's birth and death rates stabilize at current levels, Russia's population in 2050 will be a mere 116 million.

Russia simply lacks the basic health infrastructure to maintain its population. Diseases, such as tuberculosis and syphilis, are increasing. Russia's suicide rate is now 40 per 100,000, one of the highest in the world. The number of reported alcoholics in Russia has doubled since 1992 to reach 2.2 million. More than 110,000 of these alcoholics are aged 12-16. Even the most basic social unit — the family — is in decline. From January 1999 to January 2000 the number of marriages decreased by 5 percent and the number of divorces increased by 23 percent. About 70 percent of all pregnancies since 1994 ended in abortions. Partly because of this high abortion rate, one in five Russian couples are now infertile. Clearly the country must adjust to having fewer people and cannot view population as a resource.

Demographic collapse will exacerbate nearly every other problem Russia faces. But Russia's greatest challenge remains strategic. Already Russian commanders are voicing concerns about difficulty in manning Russia's army. Sergei Ivanov, the secretary of the Security Council, states that "in 18 years' time the number of people due for military service will drop in half, from 850,000 to 450,000."<sup>22</sup> As the 21st century progresses,

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22 "Russia's Dwindling Population Ensures Rigid Foreign Policy," *Stratfor.com*, April 13, 2000.

Russia's traditional strategy, based on numerically superior manpower, will be less and less feasible.

During the latest conscription cycle, 33.4 percent of all potential conscripts were ruled out from the start on health grounds.<sup>23</sup> More than half the conscripts sent to the army today suffer from various kinds of illness that limit their capacity for military service, and with every year, the number of unfit conscripts is increasing. Over the last three years, the number of conscripts deemed fit for military service has dropped by 4.8 percent. In such conditions, since 1997, the number of conscripts exempted from service has increased steadily and now surpasses the number of those actually sent to serve.<sup>24</sup>

**Secessionist tendencies.** Putin was right when he implied more than once that the most important external threat is that coming from the South: Islamic extremism threatening Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> These areas are the only regions experiencing a “demographic explosion” while showing disdain for and often rejection of Moscow’s governance.

Lacking manpower, a prudent course for Russia is to attempt to offset quantity with quality. However, as discussed above, Russia lacks the money to fund the technology for such a transition. And, as explained, Russia simply does not have the population to defend itself against expanding neighbors while thwarting separatist movements. Specifically, Russia fears an expanding NATO to the West; hence Russia’s belligerent statements against the inclusion of the Baltics in NATO. Russia also faces growing Islamic radicalism to the South; hence its desire to lash the Central Asian states together in a pro-Russian grouping. Another threat seems to be Chinese migration (and growing influence) into the Russian Far East. Russia’s desire for a political alliance barely eclipses the security

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23 Even in Russia's wealthiest city, almost one-third of Muscovites of draft age have been deemed ineligible for the draft for health reasons.

24 Vladislav Komarov, “Russia’s Army still mired in conscript crisis,” *The Russia Journal*, Issue 58, June 2000.

25 Francois Bonnet, “Vladimir Poutine veut engager une forme radicale des forces armées,” *Le Monde*, aot 15, 2000, p. 1.

fears caused by large numbers of Chinese migrants, who account for a majority of the population in some sections of the region.<sup>26</sup>

This sense of being besieged is keen. It is no wonder that Russia is seeking to make an example of Chechnya. The operation is instructive; future internal threats will be dealt with as harshly. To successfully counter these threats with a shrinking reservoir of personnel, Russian security policy must become even more unyielding. This manifestly constitutes the salient reason why Russia has revised its security policy, depending more upon the non-nuclear guarantors of territorial integrity.

Russia's threat of a nuclear strike is effective in bolstering Russian nationalism, forcing the West to consider its actions, and reminding Russia's neighbors of their relative strategic military inferiority. This capability, however, does not work against regional terrorists and domestic separatist groups. Nor does it enable Russia to deploy peacekeepers or wield any practical regional influence or control in an emergency.

## **Conclusion**

Within this complex security milieu, the finalization of the “to be or not to be a superpower” debate will be constrained by the political propensity of the young president. It is necessary to note that breaking the last link with greatness would expose Putin to the charge of having finally turned Russia into a Third World nation, as Gorbachev did in a different way. In office only a few months, Putin initially found himself in a tough position in this debate — open to nationalist allegations that he was catering to the United States’ interests. Instead, he rapidly adopted the regional great power strategy and did so only by placing himself at political risk. In this controversial and strategically important debate he showed the world and

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26 Some high-ranking officials including Yuri Baturin and Valeri Manilov, are warning that a Chinese population invasion has already started. Colonel-General V. Manilov, “National Aims of Russia and Threats to Its Security,” *Military News Bulletin*, No. 10, October 1996, p. 16; Valrie Niquet, “La Russie et l’Asie,” *Defense nationale*, October 1996, pp. 45-60.

Russians alike that he could be a decisive, pragmatic-minded, and result-oriented leader.

Putin seems prepared to begin directing the administration's efforts toward a modernized conventional military. His recent orders have called for the marginalization of Russia's once powerful nuclear forces in favor of a more professional conventional force. For the moment, Putin can use the Soviet nuclear cache as a security umbrella for the next few years until Russia's conventional force has received its desperately needed refurbishment. By then the START III treaty could be in effect, putting Russia on equal nuclear terms with the United States, with each country allowed between 1,500 and 2,500 warheads.

However, in adopting a more realistic policy, presidential control is not the preferred end. Comprehensive and organized support from the Duma has been and continues to be singly important in paving the way for support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military. Putin could not have pursued his policy initiatives without extensive cultivation of the mass media and an accompanying public relations campaign prosecuted by like-thinking civilian security-military experts. This new security policy was thus formulated with the influence of all these actors, and the same will be true of its future course.

The above considerations give us insight for predicting the changes that may take place in Russia's security policy in the next two decades. First, Russia is ready to abandon its attachment to superpower status in order to maintain a position as a great Eurasian power. This points us to a second important consideration — the recovery of a feeling of security guaranteed by military potency. This is demanded by Russia's inherent paranoia about being besieged by neighbors. In the West, NATO continues to expand into the former Soviet sphere beginning with the Baltic. Also, elements operating in the East include the potential regional hegemony of China awakening from a centennial slumber and Japan's rearmament, while in the south secessionist trends in the Caucasus and fundamentalism in Central Asia and Middle Asia continue to pose challenges for Russia.

As Putin argues, Russia's most immediate security threat may very well be within or adjacent to Russia's borders, not from the West or across

oceans. To ensure its security, the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation must remain within Moscow's control. This means secessionist tendencies, both current and projected, in places like Chechnya and the Far East must be suppressed. Russia must also be in a position to defend its frontiers and territorial waters. Russia must create a force capable of this charge within the constraints of the Russian economy, placing limits on what Russia can do in the immediate future. These security challenges can only be achieved by pursuing a strategy such as Putin's regional great power doctrine. By modernizing and boosting the capability of its conventional forces, Russia can gain enhanced economic benefit through conventional arms sales and minimize its demographic crisis. This is the course that best preserves Russia's limited influence and maximizes its limited resources without compromising internal security. There is no doubt that this is the policy Putin has chosen to proffer and garner support from key actors for. Whether it comes to fruition remains to be seen.