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Russia's New Military Doctrine until 2020

Indecisive Compromise between Traditionalists and Reformers

Margarete Klein

On 5 February 2010, President Medvedev signed Russia's long-awaited new military doctrine. The doctrine is an attempt to square the circle, namely to ensure continuity to opponents of the army reform that has been underway since the fall of 2008, while at the same time legitimising this reform. This resulted in a compromise document, which does a poor job of concealing these profound differences of opinion. In this respect, the fact that the doctrine lists NATO and the USA as primary dangers should not be overemphasised. After all, the new document certainly opens up avenues for cooperation and makes it clear that the further development of the armed forces will not be oriented primarily towards notions of the enemy from earlier times.

The new "Russia Military Doctrine until 2020" takes the place of the previous doctrine, which had been in effect since April 2000. Since the summer of 2005, varying levels of intensity have marked the efforts to draft the new document. This work was spearheaded by one of the security council's working groups, which has been led by former Chief of Staff Yury Baluyevsky since 2008. Following several statements starting in 2007 that the doctrine was almost completed, its publication was finally announced for the fall of 2009. The delays were explained as being due to unresolved "technical details"; it appears however that the crucial issue was actually a series of deep-seated differences of opinion, which involved the threats that Russia is facing as well as the appropriate reaction to them.

The West as a Primary Danger ...

The text of the military doctrine begins with a general description of the international situation. Similar to the doctrine from 2000, it states that while a major war has become less likely, in some respects Russia's security situation has gotten worse. After that, eleven external military dangers are listed including five that are explicitly or implicitly linked to NATO and the USA. In the top position are attempts "to endow the force potential of NATO with global functions carried out in violation of the norms of international law", or more concretely, out-of-area deployments carried out without the approval of the UN Security Council, which would eliminate Russia's chance of utilising its veto power. The eastern expansion of the organisation is listed as the next most explosive danger.

Special mention is made of the “deployment of troop contingents of foreign states (group of states)” in the countries bordering Russia. This is primarily directed at the American soldiers in Bulgaria and Romania as well as plans for Poland, but could also include Western military bases that were set up in Central Asia following 11 September 2001. Other issues are meant for the USA including concerns over a strategic missile defence system, the “militarisation of space” as well as the deployment of strategic carrier systems with conventional precision weapons. Although Russia itself is active in all three areas, it lags a considerable distance behind the USA in terms of these defence technologies. This is followed by the “violation” or “noncompliance” with international arms limitation and reduction agreements, which is targeted at the USA’s withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and NATO’s refusal to ratify the adapted CFE Treaty of 1999.

With its anti-western focus, the new military doctrine is more sharply put than the National Security Strategy that the President signed on 12 May 2009. On the one hand, this shouldn’t be surprising because the National Security Strategy has a much broader focus and includes non-military risks in socio-economic spheres, while the military doctrine focuses only on the military aspects of the security policy. On the other hand, the passages related to external military dangers show that the old notions of the aggressive Western enemy are more firmly anchored in the military doctrine.

This can be interpreted in part as a concession to traditionalists surrounding the Secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, and his deputy, Yury Baluyevsky. The sharper tone can also be understood as a wake-up call: The Kremlin is showing NATO and the USA that it rejects the continent’s security system and is disappointed by the reserved reactions of western countries or their outright rejection of Moscow’s recommendations for a

contractual restructuring of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

... But There Are Opportunities for Cooperation as Well

Unlike in the security strategy, a “strategic partnership” with the USA or improved relations with NATO are not explicitly listed as goals. As with the traditional risk analysis, this will certainly not ease cooperation with western states in terms of security policy.

At the same time, one must not overlook the fact that the military doctrine also offers opportunities for cooperation. Although they are given lower priority, several dangers are also listed there, which Russia shares with western nations: “frozen conflicts” within the post-Soviet region, international terrorism, spill-over effects resulting from the fragility of states like Afghanistan, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, Moscow declares its readiness to cooperate on conventional arms control, missile defence and UN-led peacekeeping operations.

Traditionalists versus Reformers

The sharper tone addressed towards NATO and the USA is also mitigated by the new doctrine’s distinction between military dangers and military threats. Accordingly, a “military danger” has the potential to escalate to a “military threat” – i.e. to the “real possibility of the outbreak of a military conflict”. Brussels and Washington are by no means prominently listed in the latter category. Only one concern, namely that vital state and military institutions could be paralysed, is targeted at the American concept of global precision strikes. The other threats involve manoeuvres in the proximity of the Russian border and the mobilisation efforts of bordering states, i.e. the violent escalation of local and regional conflicts along Russia’s southern border – as in Georgia, Karabakh or Central Asia – as

well as the activities of non-state armed groups – as in the North Caucasus.

The distinction between dangers and threats is a trick for achieving the squaring of the circle: assuring the traditionalists among the security policy elites that there is continuity, while also legitimising the military reform they rejected. While at first glance the danger analysis seems to support the traditionalists' demand to maintain the old-style mass mobilisation army, the doctrine also specifies that the structure and make-up of the armed forces should be oriented towards the threats – not the dangers. This strengthens the position of reformers surrounding Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, who since the fall of 2008 have been working very earnestly on the most thorough modernisation of Russia's armed forces since the days of the Soviet Union. They want to reshape the ponderous mobilisation army into a smaller, but more mobile, professional and better-equipped, combat ready army, which can be deployed more effectively in local and regional conflicts as well as anti-terror operations.

While the military doctrine goes a long way to legitimising the army reform, it also opens up loopholes for opponents of the reform by using imprecise formulations that can have multiple interpretations. It is written, for example, that a "rational proportion" should be found for mobilisation units and units in a permanent state of operational readiness. This contradicts the reform's key objective of entirely replacing the mass mobilisation army with an army in a "permanent state of combat readiness". The military leadership even announced that this objective had been reached on 1 December 2009 by the disbanding of all mobilisation units that were incompletely provisioned in terms of army personnel and equipment. The military doctrine is now suggesting that portions of the mobilisation army should be retained or even re-established.

Although Defence Minister Serdyukov dismissed a number of the most important

opponents of the reform in the military and both Medvedev and Putin support the reform, the new doctrine still clearly shows that the traditionalists have by no means been marginalised. As a result, the new military doctrine does not offer a clear profile of requirements for the armed forces. Such a profile, however, would be necessary for effectively using the limited financial resources.

Nuclear Threshold Not Lowered

There were also power struggles during the formulation of the nuclear policy. In an interview on 14 October 2008, Nikolai Patrushev stated that Moscow would continue to reserve the right to employ nuclear weapons in conventional, regional and local wars. In addition, the use of these weapons would be "dependent on the probable intentions of the enemy", which would justify preventative strikes even in local conflicts.

This would have caused the trend towards a lowering of the nuclear threshold, which can be followed back to 1993, to have been continued in a dramatic fashion. Due to its conventional superiority, the Soviet Union declared in 1982 that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but it abandoned this self-commitment in the 1993 provisional military doctrine. In 2000, Russia then stated that it would use nuclear weapons in response to any attack utilising weapons of mass destruction against Russia or its allies, or in the case of a major conventional attack on its territory if this led to a "critical situation" for Russia's security.

Patrushev's preventative nuclear strike concept, however, did not find its way into the military doctrine. Instead, the doctrine adopts the language from 2000. By using a narrower definition of threats, the deployment of nuclear weapons in large conventional wars was made even more difficult. While in the past nuclear weapons could be used if Russia's security reached a "critical situation", now the "existence of the state" must be in danger. This will likely be ex-

plained in greater detail in the “Fundamentals of State Policy for Nuclear Deterrence until 2030”, an unpublished document that Medvedev also accepted on 5 February 2010.

The fact that the hardliners were unsuccessful is linked with Medvedev’s desire that neither Russia’s international reputation be endangered nor the successful conclusion of negotiations with the USA regarding a follow-up treaty for START. Secondly, it seems that the President has understood that a doctrine causing a drastic lowering of the nuclear threshold denotes military weakness rather than strength. This would be an open admission by Moscow that its conventional armed forces were no longer capable of handling even local conflicts.

Expanded Deployment Options for Armed Forces

In the military doctrine, the eventualities for deploying Russian troops abroad were considerably expanded – in accordance with legislative changes from the fall of 2009. In the past, such deployments were only possible for responding to attacks that had already been carried out, fighting off imminent attacks on Russia, or participating in peacekeeping missions under a UN mandate. The latter type of deployment is now also allowed based on resolutions from organisations like the CIS. Thus, deployments that Russia has long practiced have now been legitimised. The same applies to the wording, according to which armed forces can now be sent to protect Russian citizens abroad against armed attacks. This provided the crucial argument for the intervention in Georgia.

These new regulations will facilitate military interventions in the post-Soviet region, in particular, where the already sizable Russian Diaspora is continuously growing due to the generous doling out of Russian passports. Since there has also been no restriction issued that such armed attacks only involve state actors, a very

wide spectrum of armed intervention can be legitimised.

Aside from threatening to use its military power, Moscow is trying to expand its position of power in the post-Soviet region by using military cooperation. This can be seen in the special importance placed on joint military projects with Belarus and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Parties to this treaty include Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Overall, Russia’s military doctrine reflects the country’s pretence towards acting as a hegemonial power in the post-Soviet region and indicates its readiness to use military power to achieve this goal if necessary. It is here that the actual points of conflict with NATO arise, as was strikingly demonstrated by the war with Georgia.

Conclusion

In terms of relations with the western states, the new military doctrine does not represent a clear step forwards or backwards. Areas of cooperation with NATO are mentioned, but not given priority. At the same time, the sharp tone directed at the Atlantic alliance should not be overemphasized. Ultimately, this will not provide the orientation for the reform of Russia’s armed forces. If this reform is successfully concluded, Russia’s modernised army could prove an important partner in international peacekeeping and stabilisation missions. It could also, however, offer increased military support for Russia’s hegemonic pretensions in the post-Soviet region. This in turn could indirectly carry the potential for conflict with NATO. As in other policy fields, it will primarily come down to finding jointly agreed upon rules for cooperative conflict resolution in the region.

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