



BULLETIN

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Russia's New Direction for Its Armed Forces

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In the coming years, regardless of the economic crisis, Russia will be aiming to renew its armed forces. The modernisation of its conventional forces, which have to be better prepared to respond to asymmetric threats, especially in its neighbourhood, and of its nuclear forces, which remain a pillar of the country's strategic deterrence component, will continue. According to the latest version of the country's military doctrine, the strategic importance of the Arctic and Black seas will also increase. An increase in investment in the modernisation of the country's military-industrial complex to fulfil these upgrade plans should also be expected.

Changes in the Russian military doctrine designate a new direction in the transformation of its armed forces and are the result of its leaders' perception of the reasons for the conflict in Ukraine. In Moscow's opinion, the aggressive foreign policy of Western countries, which it believes seek to strategically encircle Russia, exclude it from the group of world powers and impose a Western model of politics and economy in the former Soviet Union countries, is responsible for the crisis. In response, Moscow wants to strengthen not only the nuclear but also the conventional dimension of its deterrence efforts, and above all, better prepare for a possible repetition of the Ukraine scenario, in which there is destabilisation in Russia's "close" neighbourhood as a result of grassroots social movements but combined with the use of force. It sees the need to prevent such a scenario through the development of special armed forces abilities as well as by new mechanisms for mobilising state power structures. At the same time, Russia's military expansion in the Arctic is designed to confirm its ability to engage in global policy in opposition to the West.

The Latest Military Doctrine. The doctrine approved on 26 December 2014, as with the previous one, focuses not only on the military dimension of Russian security but also on new types of threats (terrorism, information warfare). Compared to the 2010 version, the new challenges to Russia's security include such challenges as regional conflicts, internal threats and terrorism, and extremism. Russia believes its responses to these threats should contain non-nuclear deterrence and the development of its special forces. The main potential enemy, according to the doctrine, remains NATO, as the Alliance's involvement with or expansion to countries bordering Russia or its allies is still considered a security risk to the Russian Federation. At the same time, the authors of the new doctrine stress that Russia's relations with NATO and the European Union should be based on a dialogue of equality. In the Russian perception that means that the West should not only consider Russia to be an equal partner on the international stage but also accept that the post-Soviet region remains an area of special political, economic and security interests for Moscow.

Remaining in place is that Russia's strategic nuclear weapons can only be used in response to an attack involving a weapon of mass destruction or in the event of aggression of a conventional nature that presents a threat to the country's existence. Thus, nuclear weapons remain an essential tool of deterrence. However, due to nuclear's limited efficacy in low-intensity conflicts, the latest doctrine introduces the concept of non-nuclear deterrence, understood as maintaining high readiness among Russian conventional forces along with the development of precision weapons and air-space defence resources. The document also envisages the development of new systems to mobilise both the armed forces and civilian authorities, as well as giving more attention to the development of special forces and intelligence-gathering. All these reforms are designed not only to respond to any aggression, using both military and non-traditional tools, but above all—although only implied—to prevent destabilisation of regions strategic to Russia in its neighbourhood.

The catalogue of internal threats includes terrorism, separatism, hostile information-based activities as well as ethnic, religious, and social tensions that may arise from outside political forces or NGOs allegedly financed and/or managed from abroad. “Forced regime change” in neighbouring countries is considered detrimental to its interests and a challenge to Russia's security, which has to be read as a direct response to the events in Ukraine.

The new version of Russia's military doctrine is only the beginning of the changes in security strategy: the date for the publication of its “Defence Plan” for the period 2016-2020 was announced as December 2015. In the near future a new maritime doctrine for 2030 will also be created. It assumes that Russian maritime policy will focus on the Arctic and the Atlantic, with a special focus on the Black Sea and Crimean Peninsula. Thus, the country's military policy also includes protection of Russia's economic interests in the neighbourhood.

The Arctic—a New Strategic Direction. For several years, Russia has been trying to actively protect its interests in the Arctic, which it perceives as a valuable source of natural resources and a key region for maritime transport in the future, while at the same time being an area of potential conflict with the U.S., Norway, Denmark and Canada. The Russians are the first to give a military dimension to its actions in the region—on 1 December 2014, based on components of the Northern Fleet, the Joint Strategic Command North (JSCN) was founded as a complementary unit to Russia's existing four military districts. With high probability it can be assumed that in the future JSCN will be transformed into a fifth military district.

Besides the Northern Fleet, units previously operating within the other military districts, including a naval infantry brigade and air defence division, were included in the new command. Moreover, after 20 years absence, Russia has stationed a permanent garrison on Kotelny Island in the form of a tactical Northern Fleet group. Moreover, the completion of the formation of an Arctic mechanized brigade is planned for the near future. It is also expected that the JSCN units will be equipped with K-300 Bastion coastal missile defence systems (NATO: SSC-5), and that a regiment with S-400 missiles (NATO: SA-21 Growler) will be deployed on the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. Russia's Ministry of Defence also announced that in 2015 a training centre for Arctic units will be created.

Russia's Goals with Modernisation of its Armed Forces. The doctrine emphasizes that the ability to respond to the threats defined in the strategic documents should come from modern and well-equipped armed forces. Therefore, in 2015 the Russians will strive for further modernisation. Unannounced checks on combat readiness among the various military districts will continue and will be accompanied by testing federal and regional authorities' responses. The biggest test for the Russian military in 2015 will be the *Union Shield* exercises, which will be conducted jointly with Belarus. The completion of defensive air and space forces and further modernisation of the nuclear forces are also predicted. An important element of the changes is the planned creation of a military security system in Crimea. A new rocket-artillery regiment equipped with Khrizantema (NATO: AT-15 Springer), Msta and Tornado-G missile defence systems has already been established on the peninsula. The air forces have also been enhanced there. Moreover, the retrofitting of the Black Sea Fleet with new ships and other military equipment is also planned.

In 2015, the continuation of Russian efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in the production of weapons and military equipment and to maintain repairs and supplies of new and used equipment should also be expected. According to the plan, after 2015, modern weapons are expected to account for 32% of those used by land forces, 33% by air forces, 51% among its fleets, 57% among *strategic missile troops*, 54% by the air and space defence forces, and 40% of airborne troops. In practice, this will mean that *missile troops* should be equipped with four missile regiments (at least 50 new intercontinental ballistic missiles); the fleets should receive at least two new submarines with ballistic missiles (NATO: SSBN), and multipurpose submarines (SSN); land forces should have two brigades with Iskander-M tactical missiles, more than 700 tanks and armoured personnel carriers as well as more than 1,500 multi-purpose vehicles; while aviation wings should receive 126 new aircraft and 88 helicopters.

In the coming months, it should also be expected that Russia will further test the NATO countries through an increased number of fighter and bomber flights near their borders, not only in the Baltic and Black sea regions but also over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Also in these areas, Russian fleets can be expected to be performing additional manoeuvres. With high probability it can be assumed that, as in 2014, the Russians will respond to NATO exercises in Central Europe by organising their own manoeuvres.

Conclusions. The update of Russia's military doctrine is a demonstration of its intent to defend its interests abroad and readiness to escalate tensions in its relations with the U.S. and NATO (including military expansion in the Arctic). At the same time, it indicates that the defence of its external interests will be accompanied by measures to reduce the risk of internal destabilisation, especially from grassroots social movements. Thus, a further reduction in the right to protest and a tightening of rules regulating the activities of NGOs with a political and religious profile should be expected. Russia will probably also intensify its propaganda in media, treating it as a response to actions by the West and directed both to the public within the country and abroad.

Despite its declaration that Russia will not limit funds for its military or defence, it cannot be excluded that the economic crisis will force budget cuts in these areas as well. However, defence spending would be the last thing to be reduced. Moreover, spending on the country's military and defence industry are being treated as investments in the development of the Russian economy, which is being hit more and more by Western sanctions and dropping oil prices.