

Article by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Ivanov published in «The Wall Street Journal» on 11 January 2006

MOSCOW -- National security is a crucial task for Russia, a country so greatly endowed with territory and natural resources. Our military strategy is, therefore, focused on creating the ability to respond to the external, internal and cross-border challenges of the 21st century.

We have seen a steady trend pointing at a broader scope of use of military force recently, not least because more challenges to national security have emerged. Chief among them is interference in Russia's internal affairs by foreign states -- either directly or through structures that they support -- and the attempts of some countries, coalitions and extremist terrorist organizations to develop or gain access to weapons of mass destruction. We must also be prepared for the possibility of a violent assault on the constitutional order of some post-Soviet states and the border instability that might ensue from that. Arms and drugs trafficking and other kinds of cross-border criminal activity must be closely watched.

None of these threats shows any sign of abating. Everyone knows that when it comes to war and conflict-prevention, Russia always goes first for political, diplomatic, economic and other nonmilitary means. But maintaining a robust military capability is clearly in our national interests.

The primary task for the armed forces is to prevent conventional and nuclear aggression against Russia. Hence our firm commitment to the principle of pre-emption. We define pre-emption not only as a capability to deliver strikes on terrorist groups but as other measures designed to prevent a threat from emerging

long before there is a need to confront it. This is the guiding principle of the profound and comprehensive modernization of our armed forces. The actual level of combat readiness and effectiveness hinges on how successful this upgrade will be.

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Russia is not itching for a future war. War is never by choice. Right now, there is no conflict or dispute outside the country that could be seen as a direct military threat. However, to ignore the future is irresponsible. We need to look several moves ahead -- on all levels, from future military planning to a strategic vision of the future of armed conflict. We need to consider the implications of the so-called "uncertainty factor" as well as of the high level of existing threats. By uncertainty we mean a political or military-political conflict or process that has a potential to pose a direct threat to Russia's security, or to change the geopolitical reality in a region of Russia's strategic interest. Our top concern is the internal situation in some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the club of former Soviet republics, and the regions around them.

What would a modern fighting force look like? Our best option is a mobile force in which the air, and probably space, component will be a decisive factor in success. What is also clear is that the winner in a future war will be capable of forming an integrated, real-time intelligence picture and be able to adjust plans for the use of military power in real time in accordance with a rapidly changing environment. In short, Russia needs a military ready to deal with an armed conflict of any conceivable kind and prevent any aggression or power play against us and our allies. We understand that solving all problems related to the modernization of the armed forces will take time. The Military Development Plan for 2006-2010 is being devised right now, but the top priorities are already clear.

- The first is to maintain and develop a strategic deterrent capability minimally sufficient for guaranteed repulsion of contemporary and future military threats. At the end of last year, we deployed another strategic missile regiment armed with silo-based Topol-M (SS-27) systems; more road mobile Topol-Ms (SS-X-27), currently unmatched by world rivals, this year; and the Project 955 Borei Yury Dolgoruky strategic nuclear-powered submarine armed with the Bulava-30 (SS-NX-30) sea-launched ballistic missiles within several years. And this is just the top of the list. Needless to say, these are not aimed at any particular target. We have always honored our commitments and will do so in the future, including those made in line with treaties and agreements made with the U.S. on reductions and limitations of strategic offensive weapons, which stipulate a reduction of our nuclear capability to 1,700-2,200 warheads.

At the same time, Russia does not intend to give up its nuclear capability as it is still a key deterrent and a crucial instrument in protecting our national interests and achieving certain political objectives.

- The second priority is the development of conventional forces -- high-alert units in the army, air force, navy and airborne force, manned only by professional soldiers, that will form the backbone of deployable task forces. These are being upgraded with airlift capabilities. All this explains the need for rearmament, new military acquisitions, support for R&D projects, and the optimization of the national defense industry to find a balance between a commitment to arm the Russian military and an opportunity to export arms to countries not subject to U.N. sanctions.

- The third priority is the development of combat training. In the Russian armed forces, the number and level of large-scale exercises has grown to more than 50 this year. The most significant were tactical and theater-level exercises in the

Russian Far East, Central Asia, China and India that enabled our military to network with foreign counterparts in simulating counterterrorist and other peacetime operations. We will continue to hold joint exercises with countries interested in global stability, including partners from the Atlantic Alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We are also ready to run peacekeeping operations mandated by the UN or CIS.

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We are not saber-rattlers. Russia's political and military leaders perceive the use of force as a last resort, to be used only when and if all other channels are hopelessly congested. Cooperation with international institutions helps promote a foreign policy agenda, though unfortunately it does not provide absolute security guarantees. For those, a state needs a highly effective military capability. Russia deserves a fighting force of the 21st century, a force that will look into the future but will at the same time continue its glorious military tradition.

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