

Medvedev Approves New Russian Military Doctrine

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On February 5, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev finally signed the long-awaited new military doctrine, intended to guide defense policy over the next decade. In the presence of the senior civilian leadership of the government and legislative branches, Medvedev announced that he had signed both the military doctrine and “The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence to 2020” (Krasnaya Zvezda, February 6). The military doctrine describes the threat environment facing Russia as complex and dynamic, but not dominated by an imminent threat of war:

“In the new military doctrine, world development today is characterized by the weakening of ideological confrontation; the reduction in the level of economic, political, and military influence of certain individual states and alliances; and the rising influence of other states that seek all-embracing domination; multi-polarity; and the globalization of various processes.

Many regional conflicts remain unresolved. The tendencies toward violent solutions of these conflicts, including those bordering the Russian Federation, remains. The existing structure (system) of international security, including international legal mechanisms, does not provide for the equal security of all states.

However, despite the lowering of the probability of unleashing large-scale warfare against the Russian Federation with the employment of conventional means and nuclear weapons, in a number of directions the military dangers to the Russian Federation have increased (www.kremlin.ru, February 5).”

The document lists both internal and external threats with its primary emphasis on those posed by the actions of the United States and NATO on the periphery of Russia. But the doctrine also recognizes a sliding scale of military conflict that Russia might face. It also addresses the characteristic features of contemporary military conflict, relating to what Russian authors call sixth generation warfare and an extension of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov’s characterization, “the revolution in military affairs, involving precision-strike systems,” and “the mass employment of weapons systems and weapons technology, based upon new physical principles and approaching in effectiveness that of nuclear weapons.” On the role of nuclear weapons in Russian strategy, the doctrine refers to their use as a means of deterrence against nuclear and conventional attacks upon Russia and its allies, but does not explicitly proclaim a doctrine of preemptive attack, which

formed part of the debate on the draft military doctrine. It states: “The decision on the use of nuclear weapons is taken by the president of the Russian Federation.”

The earlier reported concept of “preemptive or defensive nuclear strike,” was absent, and may reflect a struggle within the Russian security elite over its final content. On February 5, Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Security Council, once again announced that it would be signed shortly. The same article stressed the point that the doctrine would focus on the role of nuclear weapons in defense of Russia. It did not, however, repeat reports on the inclusion of preemptive nuclear strike in the doctrine (Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie, February 5).

Indeed, the doctrine was signed at a time when the strategic situation before Russia began to clarify. Both Washington and Moscow claim significant progress on the START 2 agreement, with commentators suggesting the treaty might be signed during an April summit. Moreover, the US Department of Defense has issued its Congressionally-mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Russian commentators have stressed that the QDR does not focus on Russia as a threat to the US, and seems more focused upon current conflicts and the global struggle against terrorism than upon preparing to fight major regional wars by conventional means. They judge this to be a potential development of significance for Russian security interests. In conjunction with the newly published budget proposal for FY 2011, Russian observers see the Pentagon focused on maintaining the high quality of military personnel and on improving benefits for veterans. Comments on weapons acquisitions, especially missile defense capabilities, did not identify these developments as an explicit threat to Russia. The authors noted, however, that the US will seek to retain the capacity to intervene in all regions of the globe in defense of US interests (Krasnaya Zvezda, February 5).

In this context, Russia’s new military doctrine underscores the basic asymmetry between US and Russian doctrine as they appear to be evolving. Moscow still views the US and NATO as the source of the primary dangers confronting Russia, but not as imminent threats. Both countries now openly recognize terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and local insurgencies as sources of international instability, as they cooperate to deal with the insurgency in Afghanistan. Until very recently, comments from members of the Security Council placed first priority on the inclusion of Russia’s articulation of a posture of “preemptive nuclear first strike” to protect Russian interests, allies, and the survival of Russian statehood at the core of the new military doctrine. Patrushev explained the emphasis on preemptive strike as based upon US and NATO actions: “Continuation of NATO’s expansion, military activation of the Alliance, intensive exercises of the American strategic forces involving strategic arms deployment drills disturbs Russia.” He listed more general trends in the international situation, which were contributing to “destabilization” and affecting the formulation of Russian military doctrine. These included: “the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and germ warfare technologies, continuing production of WMD, battles for energy and other resources.” Earlier, Army-General Yuri Baluyevskiy, (retired) commented on the imminent threat from the US. Baluyevskiy, who served as the Chief of the General Staff from 2004-2008 and is now the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, highlighted the US articulation of a doctrine of “instant global strike,” which would include both conventional precision strike and nuclear weapons as a justification for Russia adopting a doctrine of preemptive nuclear first-strike (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 3).

An article in *Trud* on the same day suggested a political struggle within the walls of the Kremlin, with outside experts defending and attacking the concept of preemptive nuclear strike. In this regard, the comments of Colonel-General Viktor Esin, (retired), deserve note. Esin, the former chief of staff of the Strategic Rocket Forces and now a leading analyst of strategic issues, stated that the concept was ill-formulated: "It is impossible to forecast the moment when it is high time to be the first to attack a weapon with nuclear weapons in response just to a threat of aggression accurately." He doubted that President Medvedev would accept the doctrinal formulation of preemptive nuclear first-strike (*Trud*, February 3). While the Kremlin has published the new military doctrine, no copy of "The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence to 2020" has appeared in the press. Its content will reveal what Russian policy-makers understand nuclear deterrence to mean in the second decade of the 21st century.