

Russian EMERCOM: Participation in Internal and External Conflict Resolution

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A transformation of global security processes began when the Cold War and the confrontation between the two super-powers, the USA and USSR ended. Alongside military defense and security, the protection of the population and territory from non-military threats has become increasingly important for national security. Ethnic conflicts, acts of terrorism, the spread of infectious diseases, disasters, damage to the environment, etc. are now considered as non-military threats to national security.

In drafting its national security policy, Russia paid particular attention to these new non-military security threats. Therefore, in January 1994 a new agency was created within the Russian government: the Ministry on Civil Defense and Emergencies (EMERCOM), which is a rapid-reaction body, designed to deal with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters, and to be involved in humanitarian relief operations in Russia and abroad.

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia, as one of the major powers, still has an obligation to participate in international humanitarian operations. On the other hand, Russia is a developing state, whose governing bodies and political regime are still in a transitional phase. Consequently, EMERCOM's role in Russia's national security and in international conflict resolution should take into account Russia's international and national security status as that of a developing state.

EMERCOM helps to prevent and/or deal with the consequences of natural and man-made emergencies and disasters, the number of which has increased substantially due to the crisis of management, obsolete and/or worn-out hardware, lack of

financing in the public sector, and other reasons. These emergencies have been viewed by the Russian authorities as a serious threat to the national administrative and political system, as it seriously hampers the government in performing its role effectively. The necessity to prevent and to deal with the consequences of emergencies, disasters and catastrophes has become ever more apparent. However, the government agencies, in a state of internal transition, have been unable to perform their own functions, let alone any additional functions assigned to them. That is why a new agency was set up to back-up existing agencies in this period of transition and to help them deal with any technological malfunctions.

Moreover, a whole series of ethnic conflicts have emerged after the collapse of the USSR. Since 1992, EMERCOM's predecessor, the State Committee on Emergencies, has had to perform a new important function, i.e. involvement in peace support operations on Russian soil. None of the government agencies existing at that time were capable of dealing with this task. The State Committee on Emergencies was the most appropriate candidate to perform this function, and the Russian Government made it a supervisory body to co-ordinate other agencies' activities in the sphere of ethnic conflict resolution.

The State Committee on Emergencies was delegated a responsibility for the evacuation of people residing in conflicts zones and their safe relocation, as well as for the delivery of medical and humanitarian aid. As a result, peace support and humanitarian operations in ethnic conflict zones became the responsibility of the government, and EMERCOM became a key player in these peacekeeping operations.

The creation of EMERCOM as a government agency with wide-ranging administrative powers was driven by the need of the political leadership to deal with the increasing number of internal security threats in post-Soviet Russia. The need for urgent humanitarian aid in ethnic conflict zones, and the necessity of urgent political reaction to an increasing number of emergencies and disasters prompted the creation of a specialized independent agency in Russia in the early 1990s.

EMERCOM's work in the sphere of international humanitarian activities has led the agency to become increasingly well known abroad. It improved Russia's image in the rest of the world. The Russian political leadership is increasingly using EMERCOM's capabilities to meet Russia's international obligations. EMERCOM is authorized by the government to offer assistance to other states, as required by existing bilateral treaties. As the humanitarian aid and peacekeeping become more important in current international relations, integration into international humanitarian aid and peacekeeping bodies is turning into a priority in Russian foreign policy. Partnerships with these bodies and organizations help the Russian political leadership to create a positive image of Russia abroad, and to advance Russia's national interests by participating in international decision-making.

Due to political reasons, the Ministry of Defense was not in a position to be involved in humanitarian aid and/or peacekeeping actions abroad. After the collapse of the USSR the Ministry of Internal Affairs was in need of thorough modernization, and was not able to perform additional functions. As a result, EMERCOM was assigned substantial foreign policy functions. EMERCOM is helping to integrate Russia into the emerging global system of crisis management, and to maintain its status as an active player in this area of international co-operation.

When the transition and modernization of national state institutions has been accomplished, EMERCOM's role is likely to become more focused on international, rather than national (internal) activities. The priority of EMERCOM's foreign activities up until 2006 is greater integration into the global crisis and emergencies management system. EMERCOM's capabilities and/or experience of aid and peace support operations, as well as its internal political support and participation in international organizations, could make it a key-player in Russia's integration into the international security institutions.