

## Who Gives the Orders in the New Russian Military?

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### KEY POINTS

- The process of transformation of the Russian military, under way since 2008, is intended to turn the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation from the atrophied remnant of the Soviet Armed Forces into a usable military tool for the 21st century. This includes radical reform of command and control systems at all levels up to the supreme command.
- Previous conclusions on the nature of post-Soviet Russian military command and control systems may therefore no longer be valid. This is significant for Russia's overseas partners who wish to understand the nature of a potential Russian reaction to any challenge which can be interpreted as a military threat.
- In particular, understanding of the division of responsibilities between the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff needs to be updated following the dramatic contraction of both bodies and redistribution of their functions.
- The emergence of the Security Council of the Russian Federation as an additional body exerting control over the military also needs to be considered, when examining how decisions affecting the Armed Forces are made at the highest level.
- Lower down the chain of command, the creation of the new Joint Strategic Commands also bears directly on the nature of decision-making on employment of forces, in ways which appear still debatable even within Russia but which are of critical importance for close neighbours of Russia.
- The example of the early stages of armed conflict in Georgia in August 2008 could suggest that the Joint Strategic Commands are in part intended to ensure closer control over small units, in order to reduce the potential for independent and uncontrolled activity.
- This paper seeks to introduce the new landscape of military decision-making in Russia, in order to raise key questions over the nature of the new command and control systems which are critical for a full understanding of how, when and in what manner Russia's Armed Forces may be used in the future.



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## INTRODUCTION

The theory of supreme command of the Russian Armed Forces is set out in the Constitution of the Russian Federation and in published Federal Laws. Decision-making in practice involves the presidency, the government, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the General Staff, and the Security Council of the Russian Federation. During and after Soviet times, the relationship between these bodies, and by extension how and where decisions were taken, was understood better than it is today - in general terms, the General Staff took important decisions and dealt with planning, while the MoD implemented them, for example dealing with training and logistics. But the fundamental reforms embarked upon in the Russian Armed Forces after August 2008, and changes to Federal Laws which also followed the armed conflict at that time, have shifted these relationships in ways which are not yet fully understood outside Russia, and in some cases within Russia as well. The result is that military decision-making in Russia is now less predictable.

The Russian Armed Forces are notionally under the ultimate control of the president, whose permission is required for deployment. Yet at the same time it has been suggested that the powers of the commanders of the new Joint Strategic Commands are to include authority for independent action "under certain circumstances".<sup>2</sup> What criteria could be applied, and when could a subordinate commander take military action inside or outside Russia without reference to Moscow?

At the time of writing, a drastic contraction and reorganisation of the General Staff is still under way, with some powers formerly held by the General Staff apparently now absorbed into the largely civilianised highest echelon of the Ministry of Defence. Where is this process eventually leading, and could a civilian appointee of Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov ultimately be responsible for directing activities which currently take place within key General Staff departments like the Main Mobilisation Directorate?

This paper raises a number of questions. What is the new chain of command in practice? Within this, what is the new relationship between the Ministry of Defence and General Staff? Does the Security Council now have a more significant role in determining military issues? What autonomy are the leaders of the new Joint Strategic Commands likely to have in practice? And can the changes now under way be said to be leading towards true civilian control of the Russian military? The paper seeks to address these issues on the basis of open-source reporting from Russia and abroad, and private interviews with Russian servicemen, officials and journalists. Recognising that it would be greatly to the benefit of mutual confidence between Russia and NATO if a shared understanding of these issues could be achieved, official commentary from Russian military sources was invited, but not received.

## MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND GENERAL STAFF

Contrary to the scenario sometimes suggested in Western commentary of Russia being led by a unified bloc of siloviki, or individuals wielding control over the "power ministries", the balance of power between the Russian Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of the Armed Forces has shifted and adjusted repeatedly during the post-Soviet period, at times degenerating into almost open competition.<sup>3</sup>

But until the beginning of the current reform process, there had been little formal change to the structure or responsibilities of either body, so in essence they were recognisable as the same organisations that were the subject of intense foreign study during the Soviet period. Since 2008, however, the General Staff in particular has been subjected to the same degree of unprecedented reorganisation and cutbacks as the rest of the Armed Forces, while the MoD has undergone a radical acceleration of civilianisation as part of an overall "reorganisation and reduction of the central military command entities, including the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff, with a significant reduction in the role of the commands of the branches and arms of service".<sup>4</sup>

The boundaries of responsibilities between the two have adjusted - for example, following the truncation of the Directorate of the General Staff responsible for foreign military relations, a similar organisation has arisen within the MoD led by a civilian expert - Anatoliy Antonov, brought in as Deputy Defence Minister from a post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Security and Disarmament Issues Department. When appointing Antonov, President Medvedev suggested that his background in treaty negotiation, including the successful process leading to the new START treaty, would enable him to carry out his new duties "with maximum effectiveness".<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps as a reflection of the ongoing changes, the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, in effect a statement of national military policy, in its 2000 version laid out the respective roles of the MoD and the General Staff (broadly speaking, saying that the MoD plans and procures, and the General Staff organises and coordinates) - but this section was deleted from the 2010 version.<sup>6</sup>

Determining where precisely responsibility for a given function should lie under the new arrangements is important for understanding how decisions are made and implemented within these structures governing the Russian military, since this understanding would in turn foster additional mutual security between Russia and its overseas partners, through mutual comprehension and a greater degree of predictability. In theory, it should be possible to deduce the respective roles of the two organisations by reference to the legal documents governing their function, in particular to their *polozheniya* - statutes, or constitutions. But the functions of both are so closely intertwined that this presents a significant challenge. For example, the weighty-

<sup>2</sup> V. Litovkin, "V armii: Optimizatsiya oborony" (In the Army: Optimisation of Defence), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 July 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Among many other examples, see Main, S.J., "Couch for the MoD or the CGS? The Russian Ministry of Defence & The General Staff 2001-2004", Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> M. Barabanov, (ed.) "Russia's New Army", CAST, Moscow 2010. p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> "Prezident naznachil Anatoliya Antonova zamestitel'em Ministra oborony Rossii" (President Appoints Anatoliy Antonov Deputy Russian Defence Minister), Russian presidential website, available at <http://news.kremlin.ru/news/10213>, 2 February 2011.

<sup>6</sup> K. Giles, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010", NATO Defense College, Rome, February 2010.



sounding tasks of

determination of the main directions of Armed Forces organizational development; coordination of the development of plans for organizational development of other troops, military force elements [formirovaniye], and entities; and strategic and operational planning of Armed Forces employment<sup>7</sup>

feature in varying forms in the duties of both the MoD and the General Staff.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty is that the *polozheniya* describe functions but not interaction. In addition, confusion arises because of the ambiguities in the Russian word "upravlenie", which in various contexts can mean command, management, administration, direction and much more - in fact the Russian "Multitran" website for professional translators lists 257 distinct subject areas in which the word occurs with various meanings.<sup>9</sup>

In the military context, there is a clear distinction between leadership (*rukovodstvo*) of the Armed Forces, which is the task of the president as Supreme Commander-in-Chief, and their *upravlenie* which falls primarily to the Minister of Defence.<sup>10</sup> But while the Ministry of Defence is "a body of *upravlenie* of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,"<sup>11</sup> at the same time the General Staff is the "central body of military *upravlenie* and main body of operational *upravlenie* of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" - clearly in a different, but unspecified, sense to the Ministry of Defence.<sup>12</sup>

This is not the only apparent significant overlap in the statutory duties of the two bodies. For instance, despite the fact that the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) is a Deputy Chief of the General Staff,<sup>13</sup> there is no indication in the Statutes of where military intelligence activities are notionally organised, since this duty is assigned to both bodies in almost identical wording. For this reason among others the primary Russian constitutional documents and military charters are of limited use to the outside world in defining the precise relationship between the various actors. But if there is a theme that emerges from those divergences that do exist, it is that the General Staff proposes and the Ministry disposes - so, for example, in the field of information security, the

General Staff "plans and organises work" and "develops measures" on protecting state secrets, while the Ministry "organises activity" to carry them out.<sup>14</sup>

The General Staff develops proposals "on main issues affecting the country's preparation for defence, the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, the structures, components, complement, deployment and tasks of the Armed Forces" - as well as on conscription numbers, relative strength of the various forces, and more.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Chief of the General Staff can make proposals on military treaties on military issues<sup>16</sup> - while the Ministry of Defence can not only propose, but also negotiate and conclude treaties.<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere, there is a division of responsibilities according to principles which are at times difficult to fathom - for example, no Russian serviceman interviewed for this paper was able (or even attempted) to explain why the Military Orchestra Service and the Military Topographical Directorate are subordinate to the General Staff, while the Missile Fuel and Automobile and Roads Directorates are central directorates of the Ministry of Defence.<sup>18</sup>

Ambiguities over the legal basis of control of the military have been noted by Russian commentators, including notably by leading expert M.F. Gatsko.<sup>19</sup> But, crucially, it is established beyond doubt that the Chief of the General Staff is subordinate to the Minister of Defence, in the post of First Deputy Minister, and issues orders in the Minister's name.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the military tandem of Defence Minister Serdyukov and CGS Nikolai Makarov, this leads to a particularly close working relationship and a unified front based on an apparent shared understanding of the problems which faced the Russian Armed Forces before the start of the current transformation process, and the need to resolve them by means of "surgery - without anaesthetic".<sup>21</sup>

The successful prosecution of fundamental transformation against deep-seated and powerful opposition depended on the arrival of Serdyukov, brought in from the Federal Tax Service in February 2007 with an explicit brief to grasp organisational and budgetary issues within the military, and Makarov, appointed CGS in June 2008 and leading a coterie of similarly reform-minded generals with a history of modernisation and experimentation in Siberian

<sup>7</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda* (the main newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defence), 19 February 2011.

<sup>8</sup> A senior Russian military representative was approached in October 2011 to comment on or clarify this and other issues raised in this paper officially and on the record, but he noted that the process of receiving permission from Moscow to do so would take longer than the time available for production of the paper.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.multitran.ru/c/m.exe?l1=1&l2=2&s=%F3%EF%F0%E0%E2%EB%E5%ED%E8%E5>

<sup>10</sup> Federal Law FZ-61 "On Defence", available (in a slightly out-of-date version) at Russian Ministry of Defence website, <http://www.mil.ru> - Section IV.13.

<sup>11</sup> "Polozhenie 'O Ministerstve oborony RF'" (Statute "On the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation"), clause I.1.

<sup>12</sup> "Polozhenie 'O Generalnom shtabe VS RF'" (Statute "On the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation"), clause I.1.

<sup>13</sup> For the most recent appointment at the time of writing, see <http://military-press.livejournal.com/422728.html>

<sup>14</sup> Statute on General Staff III.6.32; Statute on Ministry of Defence II.7.27.

<sup>15</sup> Statute on General Staff II.9 and subsequent clauses.

<sup>16</sup> Statute on General Staff IV.12.5.

<sup>17</sup> Statute on Ministry of Defence III.10.46.

<sup>18</sup> "Struktura Ministerstva oborony RF" (Structure of the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence), MoD website, <http://www.mil.ru>

<sup>19</sup> M. F. Gatsko, "Pravovoe obespechenie stroitelstva Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii" (The Legal Basis for the Organisational Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation), Moscow, Nauka, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Statute on General Staff IV.8 and IV.10.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandr Golts, cited in Thomas, T.L. "Recasting the Red Star", Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011., p. 347.



Military District. According to veteran scholar of the Russian military Jake Kipp, Makarov "has acted more as an agent of his civilian boss... than as an autonomous actor representing the views of the Russian military elite".<sup>22</sup> Compared to the previous infighting and open confrontation between the two bodies referred to above, this highlights the role of individual personalities and relationships, rather than institutional or theoretical hierarchies, in ensuring the smooth running of Russian elite affairs.

## CIVILIANISATION OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

In his ex officio post as First Deputy Minister of Defence, CGS Makarov is one of only two uniformed servicemen in Deputy Minister posts out of a total of eight at the time of writing.<sup>23</sup>

The reserved place at the table for the CGS means that under the current system there will never be an entirely civilianised top echelon of the Ministry. But while this situation looks only slightly changed since the early stages of transformation in 2008-9, at lower levels change continues apace. The most visible difference is the four-fold reduction in headcount at the MoD, from over 50,000 before 2008 to 13,400 in 2011. This reduction was achieved largely thanks to the redistribution of functions of the "bodies of military administration of the MoD" (organy voyennogo upravleniya MO RF) and the "military units supporting the central staff of the MoD" (voinskiye chasty obespecheniya i obsluzhivaniya TsA MO RF). The former now shows a headcount of zero, while the latter has been reduced from 29,500 to 2,900. Meanwhile, the complement of the central staff of the MoD (Tsentralnyy apparat MO RF) in theory remains at its statutory level of 10,523.<sup>24</sup>

Contraction has been running in parallel with civilianisation of the remaining departments. According to one estimate in September 2011, of the just over 10,500 central staff, only 3,500 were still servicemen, with all the other posts now occupied by civilians. Direct numerical comparisons with NATO countries are generally unhelpful because of the widely differing structures and functions of the analogous departments, but this is much closer in terms of proportion to the civilian-military split that might be found within NATO than was the case for Russia's former Soviet-inherited structure.

According to Russian MoD staffers, the new civilian employees are being recruited "as with any commercial firm". At higher levels, the example of Anatoliy Antonov given above illustrates the process whereby civilians have been brought in for their specific expertise in the subject area, rather than their rank or length of service, or (to some extent) patronage. At times this can be admirably progressive: the culture shock for longer-serving Russian servicemen can be imagined when, for example, in July 2011 the top job at the Directorate of Housing was occupied by the 27-year-old Olga

Kharchenko.<sup>25</sup> The overhaul and simplification of this scandal-prone directorate<sup>26</sup> was singled out for particular attention by CGS Makarov in his presentation to the Public Chamber in November 2011. The arrival there of Kharchenko, formerly in a far more junior post in the Directorate of Property Relations, prompted a fresh wave of wry comment on the high-flying "Serdyukov babes" but also a sense of optimism that after a rapid succession of changes of leadership, her appointment might see some improvement.<sup>27</sup>

This pattern of appointments reflects an attitude and culture imported by Serdyukov from his previous post at the Federal Tax Service, a much younger organisation than the Armed Forces, one interacting directly with the private sector, and therefore, it has been argued, one which is more of a meritocracy and less conservative or clannish. At the same time it creates a disconnect between the military clan and the newly-arrived "consultants", which does not aid communication in an environment both concerned with secrecy and prone to the not unusual Russian political syndrome of there being only a limited number of colleagues to whom you can actually tell the truth.

## THE SECURITY COUNCIL

While the MoD and the General Staff are the implements by which the Minister of Defence passes orders to the military, there is another actor exercising top-level control and providing additional levers to direct the "power ministries".

Developments in the role and powers of the Security Council of the Russian Federation (SCRF) are important for an understanding of the nature of power in Russia, and of the ways in which the Putin-Medvedev team exercise that power. Previously, during the Yeltsin years, the SCRF had limited powers, and was sometimes seen as merely providing sinecures for superannuated personnel - it was once described as a "Kremlin sump". This started to change with Vladimir Putin's brief tenure as Secretary of the SCRF in 1999. According to one perceptive analysis written in June 2000 after Putin's arrival in power:

Judging from the makeup of the government that Vladimir Putin formed, it is unlikely that it will undertake to perform political tasks. The president's trusted people, having become part of the Kremlin administration, will not begin to play a key role in it immediately. Then whom will the new president rely on? Only the Security Council remains.<sup>28</sup>

This prediction slowly came true over the subsequent 10 years, with a recent acceleration; the SCRF's role expanding to cover all areas of life, and increased powers acquired in each of them.

The SCRF was initially designed as a consultative body, described

<sup>22</sup> Jake Kipp in S. Blank, (ed.) "Russian Military Politics and Russia's 2010 Defense Doctrine", USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle 2011, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> Russian Ministry of Defence website, "Zamestiteli ministra" (Deputy Ministers), correct as at 20 October 2011.

<sup>24</sup> All figures in this paragraph are drawn from the PowerPoint presentation given by CGS Makarov to the Public Chamber on 17 November 2011.

<sup>25</sup> RIA Novosti, 27 July 2011.

<sup>26</sup> The "Mutual Legal Assistance for Servicemen" forum at <http://voensud.ru/house-f8/izveshcheniya-djo-t1424-5480.html> gives an intense flavour of the difficulties faced by ordinary Russian servicemen when dealing with the Directorate of Housing.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://blog.kp.ru/users/3834816/post134079334/> for a tongue-in-cheek selection of Serdyukov pin-ups.

<sup>28</sup> OSC: Bulavinov, I., "Security Council Role in Putin Administration Viewed", *Kommersant-Vlast* 13 June 2000 pp. 14-17.



by leading British researcher Andrew Monaghan as Russia's "main forum for forging consensus and disseminating plans".<sup>29</sup> It brings together representatives of federal bodies involved in security in order to arrive at agreed recommendations on how to deal with security challenges. A senior Russian general, speaking anonymously in late 2010, described how this translates into decisions affecting the military:

The Security Council, with representation from the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Emergencies Ministry and more, passes recommendations to the President via the Presidential Administration. The President then has the option of approving the recommendation, or requesting more information.

(Interestingly, the option of rejecting the recommendation outright was not mentioned).

In the case of a recommendation affecting the military, which the president approves, there are two possible options for the subsequent chain of command. Orders can be issued directly to forces subordinate to the President.<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, for all other forces, decisions pass through the Minister of Defence, who tasks the General Staff, which is responsible for implementing the presidential decision.

Among the draft decisions which the SCRF draws up for the president are those affecting "military development, military security, other security at the state level" – including decisions on use of the armed forces, at which point the SCRF's role includes giving "consultations on threshold and proportionality" – a point of critical importance for overseas partners seeking to understand Russia's likely reaction to military challenges or problems.

Another Russian general commented that "it's a very democratic process, really", explaining that after "expert organisations prepare proposals for the President", the leaders of ministries or other bodies represent their organisation's views in the SCRF, following which the president selects from them and then submits the respective proposal to the Federation Council for approval; the SCRF is thus "a mechanism for evaluation by the organs". But a mid-ranking Russian officer with experience of drafting proposals for consideration by the SCRF shared the impression that far from the process being democratic, "everything is decided beforehand". When asked where that decision might have been taken, this officer declined to venture an opinion.

A trend towards greater Security Council involvement in taking decisions rather than simply advising was described in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of July 2008, which showed that the SCRF was to take a "dominant position... in articulating, not just coordinating, national

security policy".<sup>31</sup> Russia's current National Security Strategy, issued in 2009 and covering the period to 2020, went further and endowed the SCRF with a broader and more proactive "coordinating and monitoring" role, including in areas which by Western definitions would be considered tangential at best to "security".<sup>32</sup> And in 2011, the new *polozhenie* for the SCRF approved on 6 May assigned a further range of additional powers. As well as "forecasting and assessing threats... providing for implementation of policy", in a well-hidden provision deep in the *polozhenie* it is made clear that the Council now "forms the main directions of state domestic and foreign policy".<sup>33</sup> So from a purely consultative body harvesting expert advice from across government, the SCRF has transformed into a policy-forming forum.

At this point it is worth considering the composition of the SCRF, particularly in the light of the 2000 citation above regarding Vladimir Putin's relationship with it. Notionally, it represents all power ministries, with ministers attached as permanent members *ex officio* - so in theory the intelligence agencies have only two seats, one for the Federal Security Service (FSB), and one for the External Intelligence Service (SVR). In practice, however, due to the permeation of the top level of the power ministries by former KGB officers, at the time of writing a minimum of five<sup>34</sup> of the 11 permanent members of the SCRF are serving or former intelligence officers or directors of intelligence agencies. This includes Secretary of the SCRF Nikolai Patrushev - but in addition to the five mentioned above, the profession of three out of four of his Deputy Secretaries was also in the KGB. This is stated as a "minimum", since it counts only the avowed former serving officers, so the real total may in fact be higher. And many of these members worked closely together at earlier stages of their careers in the KGB of the USSR.

So it can be argued that SCRF control in fact means security services control, whether its representatives are retired or not - in the much-quoted words of Vladimir Putin, "we are that kind of people, we never retire". This slow development of the SCRF from a consultative body to an instrument of control and direction for Putin is perhaps imperfectly understood outside Russia, but is significant owing to the manner in which it establishes firmer control over areas of Russian life which were not previously in the direct remit of Putin associates - including the military.

Oversight of the military by the SCRF is explicit. Secretary Patrushev "conducts monitoring of the implementation of decisions taken by the Security Council, as well as monitoring of the activities of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, other forces, military units and bodies, including with the involvement of state monitoring and supervisory bodies". Despite the notional role of Defence Minister Serdyukov in introducing tighter budgetary control, this SCRF monitoring includes financial oversight: the new *polozhenie*

<sup>29</sup> A. Monaghan, "The Russian Vertikal: the Tandem, Power and the Elections", Chatham House Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper REP 2011/01, June 2011. Available at [http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/19412\\_0511ppmonaghan.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/19412_0511ppmonaghan.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> At the time of writing, it is not entirely clear how the creation of the new Aerospace Defence Command will affect the composition of these "presidential" forces, but it is likely they will still include the components of Russia's nuclear deterrent and missile defence forces.

<sup>31</sup> Blank, S. (ed.), "Russian Military Politics and Russia's 2010 Defense Doctrine", USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle 2011, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> K. Giles, "Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020", NATO Defense College, Rome, June 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Decree No 590 of the President of the Russian Federation of 6 May 2011 "On Matters Concerning the Security Council of the Russian Federation", which approves the attached Statute on the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Available at <http://news.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d370fdbae3715c861a.pdf> (accessed 16 May 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Bortnikov, Nurgaliyev, Patrushev, Putin, Fradkov.



provides for "organising monitoring of the correct expenditure of budget appropriations set out in the federal budget for the relevant year for the funding of expenditure relating to the provision of national defence, national security and law-enforcement activities".<sup>35</sup> At the same time, this is a function of, for example, the Audit Chamber, whose head, Sergey Stepashin, like Patrushev, was at one time director of the FSB, and it is also a function of the presidential monitoring directorate, which Patrushev also previously ran.

The production of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, the overall statement of national military policy and official definition of hard security threats to Russia, provides an interesting case study for considering direction of the Armed Forces. At one time, the role of the SCRF in drafting the Military Doctrine was not entirely clear from open sources - although a senior Russian general did joke in 2010, when discussing the state of the Doctrine, that "when they make me Secretary of the Security Council, then we'll get it sorted out".

Yet a historical progression can be discerned by looking at the drafting of successive versions of the Doctrine. In 1993, "the Security Council took no leading role in its formulation because it lacked any apparatus to support such oversight" - the Scientific Council and its supporting staff and organisation were only formed in late 1993.<sup>36</sup> According to Dutch commentator Marcel de Haas, the Security Council was also omitted from the chain of command in the 2000 Military Doctrine, this time as part of a "power play" by the military - a process reversed by the arrival in power of Vladimir Putin.<sup>37</sup>

The current Doctrine was drafted in 2006-8 while Army Gen Yuriy Baluyevskiy was Chief of General Staff - and, at the time, actively promoting the role of the General Staff in forming defence and security policy.<sup>38</sup> Baluyevskiy moved on to be deputy Secretary of the SCRF, and the Doctrine was duly issued in February 2010 largely unchanged and therefore showing no reflection of the new situation in the Russian Armed Forces which had arisen over the previous 18 months; instead it described the mobilisation army favoured by Baluyevskiy but which had already disappeared into the past.<sup>39</sup>

A similar example arises with the military ambition of developing specialised troops to prosecute information warfare, which in the Russian definition includes what we would call cyber operations, based on the experience of the armed conflict in Georgia in 2008. As soon as this idea was voiced publicly by senior Russian serving

officers, it drew a hostile public reaction from the FSB who warned that allocating responsibility for this kind of operation was the preserve of the Security Council - strictly correct, but suggesting a foregone conclusion by referring the issue to a body hardly likely to be unsympathetic to the FSB view.<sup>40</sup>

The roots and motivations of the increased dominance of the military by elements and actors descended from the KGB of the USSR may derive from the situation inherited by President Putin as a result of his predecessor Boris Yeltsin's relative lack of interest in, or competency to deal with, the Armed Forces.<sup>41</sup> The sinking of the submarine Kursk in August 2000 caused Putin, early in his presidency, to realise fully the extent to which the military high command was prepared to attempt to deceive the civilian authorities - now that he was in power, he was on the receiving end of what Steven Blank calls the "consistent and clearly deliberate disinformation of the Russian government by its military and intelligence agencies". In Blank's view, this willingness to deceive higher authority "is a fundamental outgrowth of the failure to control these agencies after 1991 by civilian and democratic means"<sup>42</sup> - a failure which may in some respects now be being addressed, although not perhaps in the "civilian and democratic" manner which Stephen Blank had in mind.

Overall, then, the increased role of the SCRF seems to exemplify the extension of control by the broad coalition of former KGB officers led by Vladimir Putin over all levers of power, including over the military. In late February 2011, this process spilled over into public acrimony between the Kremlin and the SCRF over who was actually directing the process of military transformation. Media reporting in Russia of the intensifying role of the SCRF led to a neuralgic reaction from Dmitriy Medvedev's press secretary, who said that only two people were responsible for this - Medvedev and Serdyukov.<sup>43</sup> Even if this had at some point been true, the issue was very soon resolved in favour of the SCRF, with Medvedev shortly afterwards instructing Serdyukov to report to the Security Council (on which he sits as a permanent member) on the development of military education,<sup>44</sup> and Serdyukov making it clear that manpower planning was also now in the hands of the SCRF.<sup>45</sup>

Citing this and lower-level examples of intelligence service control over the military, Russian commentator Andrei Soldatov suggested in October 2011 that "people close to Serdyukov have already started to get openly angry at the special services' interference in the Armed Forces' affairs".<sup>46</sup> But if, as seems possible, the more systematic

<sup>35</sup> Decree No. 590, op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> Jake Kipp in Blank, S. (ed.) "Russian Military Politics and Russia's 2010 Defense Doctrine", USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle 2011, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Blank, "Russian Military Politics", op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Blank, "Russian Military Politics", op. cit., p.116.

<sup>39</sup> K. Giles, "Military Doctrine", op. cit.; Barabanov "New Army", op.cit., pp. 106 and 114.

<sup>40</sup> K. Giles, "Information Troops - A Russian Cyber Command?", Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), Tallinn, June 2011.

<sup>41</sup> D. Herspring, "The Kremlin and the High Command: Presidential Impact on the Russian Military from Gorbachev to Putin", Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> S. Blank, "Civil-Military Relations and Russian Security". Paper presented at the SSI Conference on Russian Security, 25-26 January 2010, Washington D.C.

<sup>43</sup> Interfax, 25 February 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Russian presidential website. "Rasshirennoye zasedanie kollegii Ministerstva oborony Rossii" (Expanded session of the Board of the Russian Ministry of Defence), 18 March 2011, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/10677>

<sup>45</sup> BBCM: V. Mukhin, "On the question of the military education of civil servants. It is high time employees of the presidential staff received a basic legal education", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 February 2011.

<sup>46</sup> A. Soldatov, "Tretiy srok i spetssluzhby" (A Third Term and the Special Services), *Yezhednevnyy zhurnal*, 03 October 2011, available at <http://www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=11374> ù



submission of military organisational planning to Security Council scrutiny has brought about a more structured approach and introduced greater foresight to the transformation process, this will provide a degree of relief to more junior servicemen who have been buffeted by a continuous process of apparently unpredictable change, and have ridden a career prospects rollercoaster, since late 2008.

It could be argued that direction of military reform was the province of the General Staff - but a key early stage of the process was dramatic manpower cuts there, which eliminated a potential source of opposition to change, but at the same time compromised the planning process and perhaps contributed to some of the more striking miscalculations that have emerged:<sup>47</sup> to take just one example, the failure to reconcile numbers enrolled at military academies with the number of junior officer graduates required later, leading to (as at March 2011) a serious over-supply of junior lieutenants, and 7,000 officer graduates assigned to NCO posts.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, an optimistic view from General Staff officers, when asked how the General Staff copes now while attempting to carry out broadly similar functions with much-reduced personnel, is that efficiency has increased and duplication (for example the shadowing of the work of other sections within each Directorate) has been reduced. In addition, the "General Staff standard" for documentation has been relaxed, so instead of giving a two-page reasoned answer citing implications, background and precedent, it is now sometimes permissible to simply answer "yes" or "no".

## JOINT STRATEGIC COMMANDS

At one level down the chain of command, the nature of the new Joint Strategic Commands (Obyedinennye Strategicheskiye Komandovaniya, OSKs) raises interesting questions of control of units and formations. Again, understanding the issues involved is of critical importance for NATO and for Russia's immediate neighbours, since they have a direct bearing on how and under what circumstances Russia might be prepared in future to resort to military force.

The genesis and formation of the OSKs has been amply described elsewhere<sup>49</sup> but, briefly, it is intended that the commanders of the new, larger Military Districts would when necessary become commanders of an activated OSK exerting control over all units assigned to the District - in other words a switch from administrative to operational control.<sup>50</sup> This would take place during a "special period", described by one expert report as "the emergence of a military threat".<sup>51</sup> According to one expert view,

the transition would be seamless and swift: "the time-frame we are talking about is the time it takes the guys at the Military District to move underground and man their command posts".

The Federal Law "On Defence" suggests that the criteria for declaration of a "special period" and activation of the OSK would be decided in Moscow, although this appears to remain less than explicit in this or other statutes. According to the Law, In case of hostilities or direct threat, the President

declares full or partial mobilisation; introduces a war situation on the territory of the Russian Federation or in specific areas thereof with prompt notification of the Federation Council and the State Duma; and gives an order from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on carrying out military action

- without saying to whom this order is given.<sup>52</sup>

As Timothy Thomas points out,

One of the most important aspects of Russian military science is its tradition of predicting the nature of future war. Future war predictions help determine the organization of Russia's armed forces and the types of weapons the organization will require.<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, CGS Makarov specified that the current military transformation and procurement plans were arrived at after "we looked into the nature of armed conflicts that could potentially break out in the 2020 to 2030 time frame" - a term view which should be compared with Russia's other strategic and doctrinal documents, including the Military Doctrine, which set 2020 as their relatively close planning horizon.<sup>54</sup>

But the OSK, as well as being intended to correct specific problems identified during operations in Chechnya and Georgia, is a manifestation of the understanding that the nature of command and control changes as the nature of future war changes. Some decisions no longer need to be centralised in the MoD and General Staff, since this is not the Cold War, and escalation to strategic nuclear level (which needs rigid central coordination) is not envisaged. Instead, local wars are; for which the OSK commander will have better feel and local awareness. In fact, one leading Western analyst goes so far as to argue that the OSK is a defensive structure - a command post for managing conduct of local or regional war actually on Russian territory, and that unlike the analogous Soviet "Theatres of Military Operations" (TVDs), for the first time in a long

<sup>47</sup> Barabanov, "New Army", op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>48</sup> OSC: "Russian Security Council Suspends This Year's 30% Command-Staff Position Cuts", *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* 09 March 2011

<sup>49</sup> As, for instance, Giles, K., "Russian operations in Georgia: lessons identified versus lessons learned", in B. Nygren, (ed.), *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*, Routledge, October 2011.

<sup>50</sup> According to a Russian military academic speaking in late 2011, the General Staff would provide operational direction to the OSK, while the Ministry of Defence would continue to work through the Military District structure and commands of individual services to run "administrative functions" like training, logistics and procurement.

<sup>51</sup> Barabanov, "New Army", op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> Federal Law FZ-61 "On Defence", Section II.4.4

<sup>53</sup> T. L. Thomas, "Recasting the Red Star" Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011., p. 185.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Makarov in Security Index No. 4 (93), October 2010.



time Russia is now preparing for defensive operations and war on its own territory - hence an OSK is required in wartime instead of a Military District, since it will not only be providing logistics for offensive operations abroad but also managing operations on the territory of the Military District itself.

According to Lt-Gen Andrei Tretyak, formerly Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff, one main reason for creating the OSKs was to establish "powerful strategic groups capable of serving as a strategic deterrent... No longer are several strategic units operating in one theatre of war. Now one commander makes decisions for the whole theatre".<sup>55</sup> It is for this reason that OSK commanders are to have a degree of independence in determining their own force structure (in Ground Troops terms, the mix of the new "light", "medium" and "heavy" brigades), as well as influence on procurement decisions.

But one vital and incompletely understood factor is whether this independence extends to the right independently to commence operations, or commit forces, in the OSK's external operations - in other words, in Russia's neighbours. According to the level-headed and well-informed Russian journalist Viktor Litovkin, "If, God forbid, events like those of August 2008 happen again, it won't be necessary to call Moscow and wait to see what the instructions will be from there. The C-in-C will be able to make a swift decision on his own authority".<sup>56</sup>

A senior Russian military academic speaking to a NATO audience in closed session in late 2011 emphatically described this suggestion as "complete nonsense" (*polnaya chush*).<sup>57</sup> But a mid-ranking serving general earlier gave a more nuanced explanation, stating that OSK commanders will have authority to take military action "under certain conditions" - specifying that this is not a new power, since the former Military District (MD) commanders had similar authority, but it is now being made more precise and specific because with command of all forces within the region, the OSK commanders will have much broader responsibilities than the MD commanders did. If there is indeed a degree of latitude, or command devolution, provided to OSK commanders, this has obvious implications for understanding the nature of command and control of those forces situated in direct proximity to NATO member states, and under what circumstances use might be made of those forces.

If this suggestion is accurate, the issue raises particularly alarming questions when seen in the light of post-Soviet Russia's history of units taking independent action and/or ignoring civilian commanders - from the divided loyalties of the 1991 coup, through the 1999 "dash to Pristina", to August 2009, when Airborne Assault Forces commander General Vladimir Shamanov despatched troops

under his command to intervene in an investigation being carried out at a commercial firm in which his children have an interest.<sup>58</sup> The mid-ranking general cited above also pointed out that one rationale for creation of the OSKs was to provide tighter control over small units - with specific reference to uncontrolled activity during the early stages of combat operations in South Ossetia in August 2008.

## CASE STUDY: CONFLICT IN GEORGIA

The precise chronology of operations in Georgia in August 2008, and in particular of the preparations for war by both sides, quickly gave rise to an extraordinary number of widely-accepted myths.<sup>59</sup> But it is clear that command and control failures on the Russian side suffered from problems that have been noted time and again since the First Chechen War, arising from the fact that the "command system for the Armed Forces was too huge, and intended primarily for commanding and mobilising a 10-million-strong army".<sup>60</sup>

As has been pointed out by CGS Makarov when explaining the rationale for "collapsing the chain of command from 11 levels to three" during transformation, some higher command echelons were largely irrelevant to operations. The General Staff, North Caucasus Military District (NCMD) Staff, and 58th Army staff were all part of the chain of command, but according to one expert view, the headquarters of the NCMD and 58th Army "were not directing operations, but were in fact intermediaries serving only to transmit information... to and from the General Staff and the MoD".<sup>61</sup> This in turn led to "battalion groups acting independently since orders took too long to pass through the chain of command".<sup>62</sup>

At no time was this a more serious or dangerous problem than in the initial stages of intensified fighting on the approaches to Tskhinvali on 6-7-8 August. Russia and the world woke up to war on the morning of 8 August, but close study of events leading up to that point provides a number of indicators that suggest additional Russian troops were moving into South Ossetia significantly earlier - crucially, without necessarily having explicit authority to do so from the supreme command.

In early August 2008, numerous Russian troops were still in place north of the Roki Pass and Roki Tunnel linking North and South Ossetia following exercise Kavkaz, the third in a series of annual practice runs for the invasion. These included a battalion each of the 135th and 693rd Motor-Rifle Regiment (MRR) of the 19th Motor-Rifle Division (MRD), which remained in the vicinity since they "traditionally provided assurance for the Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia during periods of increased tension in Russian-Georgian relations".<sup>63</sup> Distinguished British analyst Lt-Col (rtd) Charles Blandy, in his 2009 analysis of the campaign, considered

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Thomas, "Red Star", op. cit., p. 348.

<sup>56</sup> V. Litovkin, "V armii.: Optimizatsiya oborony" (In the Army: Optimisation of Defence), Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 19 July 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Russian General Staff Academy Mobile Education and Training Team (METT) visit to NATO Defense College, Rome, November 2011.

<sup>58</sup> R. Anin, *Novaya Gazeta*, 21 September 2009; Felgengauer, P., Eurasia Daily Monitor, 24 September 2009.

<sup>59</sup> See K. Giles, "Understanding the Georgia Conflict, Two Years On", Parts 1 and 2, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2010, available at <http://conflictstudies.academia.edu/KeirGiles/Papers>

<sup>60</sup> Barabanov, "New Army", op.cit., p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Barabanov, "New Army", op. cit., p.16.

<sup>62</sup> Barabanov, "New Army", op.cit., p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Barabanov, M. and others, "Tanki avgusta". CAST, Moscow 2010. p. 56. For more detail on this important contribution to understanding the course of the armed conflict in Georgia, see Giles, "Understanding the Georgia Conflict", op.cit.





the specific position of 135 MRR, which provided the Russian battalion of the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) in South Ossetia, on rotation from the regiment's base in Prokhladnyy in Kabarda-Balkaria. Blandy suggested the possibility of independent action - following procedure rather than direction from above - by the regiment in response to developments south of Tskhinvali:

With a battalion of 500 men from 135 MRR forming the Russian contribution to the peacemaking force based in Tskhinvali, it is likely that the parent regiment would have a contingency plan for reinforcement should matters go badly wrong. The escalation in exchanges of fire from 1-6 August may well have triggered this procedure to reinforce the beleaguered battalion. The critical day was 7 August.<sup>64</sup>

The notion of a small Russian unit crossing an international border without authorisation runs counter to numerous received ideas about the nature of post-Soviet command and control, in particular regarding the unwillingness to devolve initiative. Yet other highly respected experts concur with Charles Blandy in pointing to the specific circumstances of 135 MRR as making this idea less inconceivable. According to Jake Kipp:

I suspect [Blandy is] right about the battalion from 135 MRR moving in response to [the] tactical situation since one suspects that the MRR commander did not look on the Russian-South-Ossetian border as in any way limiting his tactical freedom of action in response to developments on the Georgian-South-Ossetian border. The second battalion would have been moving up to support and not attack, maintain LOCs, and ensure rear-area stability. Military-civilian chain of command would have been informed of the tactical action, but this would not have been part of larger operational response, which would require coordinated movement of many units and formations.... I do not expect units in operational deployments with periodic combat as part of their situation to be robbed of complete tactical freedom within an existing operational context.<sup>65</sup>

Jake Kipp observes that the chain of command would have been informed of the move, as opposed to authorisation being sought. Given the situation in Moscow at the time, it appears possible that this notification would have taken some time to permeate to the supreme command. The locations of key decision-makers have been established in previous studies: President Medvedev was on holiday; Prime Minister Putin, who was not formally part of the

chain of command but could reasonably be expected to take an active interest in events, was in Beijing at the Olympic Games; and, crucially, key elements of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff were in the middle of an office move and had not yet had their new phones connected. Russian analysts "concluded that the Russian political and military leadership experienced indescribable panic and confusion" on realising that an armed conflict was under way.<sup>66</sup> It is possible that the reported 1 a.m. telephone call from Defence Minister Serdyukov to Medvedev to inform him of the beginning of hostilities actually presented him with a *fait accompli* of unauthorised Russian troops already within South Ossetia.

David J. Smith, of the Georgian Security Analysis Centre, considers the overall context of preparation for conflict in early August to be important in considering the possibility of independent action by Russian commanders:

When examined in full context, that is, including Abkhazia, it is certain that Moscow was preparing for war - buildup of peacekeepers with artillery, SAMs, river-crossing equipment, railroad troops, preparation of naval infantry, etc. If there were smaller unit movements not specifically authorised, they were made in that context.

Thus any decision by officers of 135 MRR

is far more likely to have been in combination with clearly ordered preparations for war. That is, in the context of orders from the top, local commanders may have made decisions that they believed were consistent with and even contributing to the orders from the top.<sup>67</sup>

It is not the intention here to rehash the chronologies of events in the early stages of the fighting; a number of detailed deconstructions of the sequence of action and counter-action are available, varying widely in reliability and objectivity.<sup>68</sup> But those who have studied them closely may consider that if the Russian move into Georgia began without the civilian or military authorities in Moscow being fully aware, this would explain a number of key discrepancies - for example between the first observed and reported movements of Russian armour through the Roki Tunnel and the later order to move described in the Russian submission to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (the "Tagliavini report").<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> C. W. Blandy, "Provocation, Deception, Entrapment - The Russo-Georgian Five Day War", Defence Academy of the UK, Shrivenham, March 2009, p.7.

<sup>65</sup> Private e-mail correspondence with author, December 2011.

<sup>66</sup> OSC: "Russia: Institute Board Evaluates War Information, Censures Director Delyagin", FORUM/Moscow/Russia, 19 August 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Private e-mail correspondence with author, December 2011.v

<sup>68</sup> For chronologies which attempt objectivity and reliance on verifiable sources, see Barabanov, "*Tanki avgusta*", op. cit., Giles, "*Understanding the Georgian War*", op. cit. In addition, the full version of the "Report by the Government of Georgia on The aggression by the Russian Federation against Georgia" [sic], regardless of the necessarily Georgian interpretation of ambiguous material, provided an extremely useful archive of largely original source material from Georgia, Russia and beyond which was not universally supportive of the Georgian case. Previously to be found at <http://www.report.smr.gov.ge/content-eng.html>, the source archive appears to be no longer available at the time of writing.

<sup>69</sup> "On 8 August at 14.30 units of the 693rd and 135th Motorised Rifle Regiments of the 19th Motorised Rifle Division charged with the task of carrying out the peacekeeping mission entrusted to the Russian Federation and protecting Russian citizens were deployed from the territory of the Russian Federation to the territory of South Ossetia through the Roki tunnel and began to move into South Ossetia." Russian official statement to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, available at <http://www.ceig.ch/Report.html>, p. 215.



Thus the suggestion quoted above that the OSKs may paradoxically be intended to provide tighter control over subordinate units, at the same time as providing for a limited degree of devolution of command authority from Moscow, may be a reaction to the extremely dangerous lack of control that arose overnight in South Ossetia. There are few if any other Russian units exposed to the same set of unique circumstances as 135 MRR in early August 2008: but the pattern of lack of control over small units may lie behind the widespread Russian asseveration that “not a single platoon moves without an order from the President” - so insistently repeated by senior officers, despite being patently untrue, that it must belie a source of concern within the system at the current state of affairs.

The suggestion of presidential micro-control can be measured against the statutory documents. The law “On Defence” states that the movement and deployment of “formations” (*soyedineniya*) or larger groupings only is subject to presidential decision.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the Minister of Defence has similar authority down to regimental level. Hence at battalion level or below, decisions on deployment take place at a lower level<sup>71</sup> - circumstantial detail which gives further useful background to the notion of automatic reinforcement of the JPKF battalion on 7 August 2008.

If part of the aim of establishing the new OSKs is to ensure that activity by lower-level Russian units in sensitive positions is more closely regulated, this could be construed as a paradoxical benefit by neighbours of Russia, particularly those currently experiencing a resurgence in hard security concerns as a result of trends in Russian military development. If the new mechanisms are designed to ensure closer control of small units, this carries the benefit of predictability; the likelihood of unintended incidents arising from the presence of a large military force limitrophe to the relative military vacuum of Northern Europe and the Baltic States, for example, is much reduced if that force is well-disciplined and under more effective command and control.<sup>72</sup> This, too, is an area of uncertainty in the new command and control arrangements which could usefully be resolved by Russia in discussions with NATO for the benefit of mutual confidence and security.

## THE MILITARY AND THE LAW

Russian military spokesmen stress the new emphasis on observance of law, including international law and law of armed conflict, which is included in the training of officers; but it seems likely that Russian servicemen have a long way to go before the decision-making environment at all levels is so permeated with considerations of legality as for example the US or British military - and still further to the situation of junior servicemen taking action with half an eye on how that action could be justified, several years

later, to a hostile prosecutor.

There is formal observance of legislative niceties - even if retrospectively, as with the 2009 adjustments to the Federal Law “On Defence” and others, which not only increased presidential powers to direct the military without oversight, but also corrected the unfortunate circumstance of operations in Georgia being illegal under Russian law as it stood at the time. According to the version of the law current at the time of writing, the Federation Council still “decides on the possibility of the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation outside the bounds of the territory of the Russian Federation” - but there is no requirement for the document recording this decision to be produced in advance of deployment rather than retrospectively.<sup>73</sup> Unwieldy subjection to democratic control clearly needed to be bypassed in the fast-moving situation of August 2008 - especially if by the time legal procedure was considered, unauthorised Russian troops were already on the territory of a neighbouring state.<sup>74</sup>

The effect of the subsequent amendments to the Law to prevent similar occurrences in future was to cede the limited degree of parliamentary power which did exist back to the executive. According to a Council of Europe legal analysis,

although this does not, as such, conflict with international standards, it represents a step backwards in terms of democratic control of the armed forces and the Venice Commission would strongly advise the Russian Federation to look again at this issue.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, another section of the Law “On Defence” which strikes a discordant note when measured against academic criteria of civilian control of the military arises from the legislative provision, subject to presidential approval, for “use of the Armed Forces for carrying out tasks, with use of weapons, which are not in accordance with their intended use” - presumably including a reference to internal security since there are no other “tasks not in accordance” for which “use of weapons” would be relevant.<sup>76</sup>

## “CIVILIAN CONTROL”

The issue of democratic, or at least parliamentary, control of the military as defined by Western criteria does not arise. The Federal Assembly approves the defence budget when it is presented. The Minister of Defence reports once a year, and the Chief of the General Staff twice a year, to the Defence Committees of the Federation Council and State Duma. According to eyewitnesses, the closed elements of these sessions can be an uncomfortable experience for both officials - but while they are present to justify their

<sup>70</sup> Federal Law FZ-61 “On Defence”, Section II.4.12.

<sup>71</sup> Statute “On Ministry of Defence” III.10.24.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, S. Forss, L. Kiianlinna, P. Inkinen, and H. Hult, “*Venäjän sotilaspoliittinen kehitys ja Suomi*” (Russian Military-Political Developments and Finland), Finnish National Defence University, Helsinki, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Federal Law FZ-61 “On Defence”, Section II.5.4 (now superseded).

<sup>74</sup> See also “The New Russian Law on Defence - Implications for Europe”, summary of seminar at UPI, Helsinki, 27 November 2009, available at <http://www.fia.fi/fi/event/245/>

<sup>75</sup> “Opinion On The Federal Law On The Amendments To The Federal Law On Defence Of The Russian Federation”, European Commission For Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) Opinion No 572 / 2010, Strasbourg, 21 December 2010, available at [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2010/CDL-AD\(2010\)052-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2010/CDL-AD(2010)052-e.asp)

<sup>76</sup> Federal Law FZ-61 “On Defence”, Section IV.10.3.



decisions, this is not the same as either parliamentary assembly actually having the power to influence those decisions. According to Steven Blank, "nineteen years after the fall of Communism, Russia has yet to create a system of civil-military relationships that provides effective control of both the government and the multiple armed forces".<sup>77</sup> And in fact, the cynical quip among Russian liberals is that democratic control of the military is a worthy ambition, but perhaps democratic control of the government would be a good first step.

In addition to widely differing political and cultural views and expectations on the role and nature of the armed forces (and, indeed, on the nature of "security" in general), mutual understanding of principles of civilian control between Russian and foreign practitioners is complicated further by linguistic traps. In addition to the difficulties presented by the ubiquitous Russian word *upravlenie* as described above, translation of "control" in the other direction is a problem - it is tempting for hurried and hard-pressed interpreters and translators to render "civilian control" directly in Russian, but *grazhdanskiy kontrol* gives an entirely different meaning, suggesting more in the way of oversight or monitoring (e.g. *nadzor*) than actual direction, and giving rise to confusion and irritation when the two sides embark on two separate conversations about two entirely different issues. Rendering "civilian control" instead as *grazhdanskoye upravlenie vooruzhennymi silami* immediately resolves this source of further mutual incomprehension.

The evolution of control over the military in Russia begs the question of why the military does not more visibly resist the process: leaving aside the heartfelt demonstrations and resignations against the transformation process, there has been very little in the way of opposition to Security Council domination visible in the public domain. This may in part be because the new system is not consciously perceived as hostile, or as opposition. Academic Bettina Renz explains the lack of inclination by the Russian military to seek greater power, which was a possibility broadly feared in the early 1990s, in part by the fact that "a clear civil-military dichotomy, whereby a conservative military institution stands in opposition to a democratically minded and elected civilian leadership, cannot be presumed within the context of contemporary Russian politics" - in other words, there is no tradition of having to work in direct opposition to the controlling authority.<sup>78</sup>

What is clear is that Vladimir Putin's re-election as president in 2012 should not be expected to have a significant effect on the military transformation process. The forcing through of reform against substantial and highly visible opposition has shown that Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov enjoys considerable support across the Putin-Medvedev team. And the new understanding reached with the Security Council in early 2011 should ensure a smoother ride as the transformation effort progresses further.

A stable *modus vivendi* appears to have been arrived at. At the time of the dismissal of First Deputy Chief of General Staff Lt-Gen

Aleksandr Burutin in November 2010, concerns were raised about how this would affect the interface between the different actors involved in making decisions about the military:

He was Putin's aide and in this regard provided very good communications between the President's staff and the Security Council and the Defense Ministry, but now this communications point no longer exists. There is now no single professional in the Defense Ministry as well as in the civilian organization, who understands the crux of the words that need to be said and can translate them from military-strategic language to political Russian. The President's staff has basically no people who understand what the Defense Ministry is saying or what the General Staff is saying, and what the Security Council wants.<sup>79</sup>

But this did not appear to impede the cession of certain decisions to the SCRF in early 2011 as described above. Overall, then, the process of the SCRF acquiring, or inventing for itself, levers of control over the military and thus providing an instrument of direct control for Vladimir Putin, when combined with contraction of the General Staff and civilianisation of the MoD, can be described as demilitarisation or the long-delayed beginning of real civilian direction of the post-Soviet military - just not as it would be defined as such in a NATO sense of democratic and accountable control.

Or indeed, it would appear, as Vladimir Putin would have defined it at an earlier stage in his career. Speaking in 1996, while serving as an official in the St Petersburg city administration, Putin described a potential future danger to Russia's political system:

However sad it may be, and however frightening it may sound, I do think that a shift towards totalitarianism for a certain period is possible in Russia. But we should not see this danger as coming from the law and order bodies, the security structures, the militia or even the army. The danger is in our mentality, in the mentality of our people, in our own mentality.

We all think, and I won't conceal it, I think this too, that if you bring in strict order with a firm hand, we will all live better, in more comfort and in more security. But in fact that comfort will pass very quickly, because that firm hand will very quickly start to crush us. We will all feel this immediately, on ourselves and on our families.

The means of countering this danger, Putin said, was real democracy: to avoid being "crushed", Russia needed

a democratic system, when officers of the law and order bodies, whatever we might call them, KGB, MVD, NKVD, whatever - when they know that tomorrow or in a year there may be a change of political power in the country, in the region, or in their town, [and] they will be asked "how did you observe the laws of the country in which you live, and what did you do for the citizens over whom you have

<sup>77</sup> Blank, "Civil-Military Relations", op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> Bettina Renz, "Civil-Military Relations and the Security Apparatus", in M. Galeotti, (ed.), *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*, Ashgate, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> OSC: Medvedev, I. "Russia: Questions Raised About Flag Officer Dismissals", BFM.Ru, 23 November 2010.



powers and authority?"<sup>80</sup>

Having thus identified change in political power as the main challenge to unfettered control by representatives of the security structures, Putin has entirely logically moved to ensure that political power in Russia remains unchanged. And the most recent expansion in the role of the Security Council, by effectively curtailing the limited degree of autonomy and immunity previously enjoyed by the Russian military, brings the military further into this orbit of control.

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<sup>80</sup> Vladimir Putin, interviewed in "Muzhskaya rabota" (Manly Work) television documentary, 1996.