

By Alex Shone

Russia is currently investing substantial efforts into a dramatic renovation of its military forces and establishment. This has taken place across all of their military branches; Army, Navy and Air Force. Within this investment some trends are discernable that allude to wider Russian military thinking towards perceived, future threats. This process of modernisation, when analysed in conjunction with approaching Russian military exercises for June (Vostok-2010), indicate gravitation towards the enhancement of individual soldier capabilities; as well mobility and effective, rapid deployment. As such, Russia is investing in new small arms, helicopters and a new generation of digitised communication systems.

The threat from China and Russia's need for military reform

China presents a considerable threat to Russia's national security, having risen in past years to dominate security debate as a new world power, with a dynamic economy that has challenged even US hegemony. China is a key threat to Russian interests on their eastern frontier; in terms of energy security but also territorial integrity. China is a growing nation with an enormous energy requirement. Chinese courtship of the Central Asian States (CAS), principally Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for energy contracts has directly undermined Russia's privileged interests in a region they continue to consider their 'near abroad'. As well as this, Chinese migration into Russia's eastern frontier has presented a threat of its own to Russia's territorial integrity. Population movements have been largely unregulated and in many regions, Chinese outnumber Russians. Coupled with Russia's present population decline and the drastic projections for its future deterioration means Russia is feeling an acute threat from territorial reduction and retreat.

China, as the primary state threat to Russia, has an army of 2.8 million personnel in their People's Liberation Army (PLA). Russia by comparison has a standing army of near 1.5 million. Russia, facing demographic deterioration now seeks to close a technological or qualitative gap between its military forces and China's. As such, Russia's classic, Stalinist military doctrine that quantity has a quality all of its own is now changing. The dominant trend that appears to emerge from analysis of their reformation is the emphasis on individual capability enhancement, mobility and rapid deployment. (Please see RS 58, Russia and Network-Centric Warfare? by Adam Dempsey and M58 Russian Military Reform available at UK Defence Forum website <http://www.ukdf.org.uk/index.asp>)

Russian military reforms and modernisation

Russia is aiming to enhance and maximise the individual capability of the Russian soldier. This objective is following a process based upon development and modernisation into special weapons and tactics. Russian leadership has placed considerable demands of its small arms industry to meet new requirements. Russia's Interior Ministry, the MVD, and their security

service, the FSB, have both trialled and purchased the new, 200 series of the Kalashnikov Russia's increasing emphasis on enhancement of individual capability and effectiveness. (Please see GR 168 available at the UK Defence Forum website <http://www.ukdf.org.uk/index.asp>) rifle. This system affords the possibility for tactical attachments from scopes, to laser and lamps. Renovations of service small arms in the Russian military are indicative of

Russian investment in their 'first-to-engage' units is also highly significant. Russia has a long tradition with Special Forces (SF) units which they are now reinvigorating. As a versatile military tool, SF can be used with considerable effect and precision. This is a key note behind Russia's move to quality enhancement of its military forces. As military elites, they provide extremely specialised tradecrafts and can be used for such enterprises as rapid response and strategic reconnaissance. Within Counter-Terrorism (CT) campaigns, SF forms a backbone behind direct, kinetic engagement. Russia's emphasis on airborne insertion is highly significant in this, as is that they have placed on an effective night-time operating system within helicopters. The two in concert together are illustrative of Russian moves to technological and tactical enhancement to combat terrorism and inter-ethnic conflict that they are facing in Chechnya and Dagestan.

For power projection, Russia has deemed two areas as key; these are the use of highly-trained and technologically advanced airborne troops, and helicopters. Russia has placed highly priority on the development of their airborne troops. Russian airborne troop Commander, Vladimir Shamanov, has reaffirmed that they shall remain a distinct and separate combat arm. The Russians are looking very specifically into enhancing sniper and all-weather operational capacity. The performance of parachutes is also receiving considerable attention. Russia has stated horizontal ranges of 20 to 30km but has admitted that they have fallen short of the Israelis who have achieved ranges of 40km. Russia is placing great interest in developing new capabilities for the insertion of airborne troops with amphibious operation being one of key interest. These forces are known as 'first-to-engage' units or batalyon pervoocherednogo primeneniya. According to Shamanov, there are five of these units in total, with four maintained at a permanent state of readiness, a fifth is kept in rotation on 45 days of leave. It should be noted that one of these units is presently based in Kyrgyzstan, the aforementioned nature and intention behind these units makes their presence in this country particularly crucial vis-a-vis China.

Russia intends to purchase several hundred new helicopters, with a new preference for light-class systems. Models of interest include the Mi-34S1, Mi-38, Ka-226T and Ka-32A11VS. Andrey Reus, Director General of United Industry Corporation, Oboronprom has predicted a 20% annual increase in helicopter production to meet this growing requirement. This can already be seen in the increase of production from 183 units in 2009 to 214 this year. Russian Defence Minister, Anatoliy Serdyukov, has expressed optimism for the purchase and construction of the Mistral-class helicopter carrier. This carrier is significantly intended for integration into Russia's Northern and Pacific fleets. Equally, the emphasis Russia has placed upon effective night attack capabilities demonstrates their recent military experience of localised conflicts in the Caucasus, against scattered enemy engagement, such as in Georgia or Chechnya. Such systems are designed to facilitate CT operations. However, this would also

be an invaluable asset to offensive SF action against a state enemy to operate behind foreign lines in strategic reconnaissance operations.

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) are also of interest to Russia which is currently engaged in negotiations with the Israelis. Israel is training the Russian military in the operation of several UAS system towards a contract that is estimated to be worth \$53 million. Israel is offering the Bird Eye 400, with a 10km range, the I-View MK150, with a 100 km range, and the Searcher MK11, with a 250km range. UAS of course have a clear CT utility in their ability to monitor, locate and now even engage with lethal force enemy activity. Russian interest in UAS is demonstrative of their anticipation of localised conflict against irregular and disparate forces; however, UAS is a constantly evolving technology and Russian investment is undoubtedly strategic.

Russia has shown considerable concern for the radical improvement of their communication infrastructure. Medvedev, during a visit to communication units in Moscow's military district, described the existing systems as outdated. Russia intends to usher in the digitisation of their communications from old analogue systems, beginning in 2011 and ending they hope by 2013. Russia has developed very advanced 6th generation radios that rival international competitors. The combination of these two areas is one that would provide Russian forces with a far sharper, actionable intelligence utilisation for more effective target acquisition and engagement.

In view of the upcoming Vostok-2010 military manoeuvre, distinct trends can be discerned within Russia's military priorities and modernisation initiatives. Russia is clearly placing significant emphasis upon high mobility, rapid reaction and deployment, as well aiming to enhance the capabilities of the individual soldier. This is visible from the prime areas of their modernisation in terms of new small arms, updated personal equipment, and their investment in new light-class helicopters, UAS and airborne troops. All of these avenues have a clear utility to highly mobile and kinetic CT operations in Russia's Caucasian region. Russia is keen to build a military force with highly specialised capabilities to engage and rapidly re-deploy; therefore mobility and manoeuvrability are current reform priorities.

However, Russia has demonstrated also a clear interest in developing the ability to project this power further afield than CT operations along its 'near abroad'; directed at major state opponents. China is the primary, albeit unnamed enemy to Russia's national security and is the object of their strategy. China poses an acute threat to Russia's energy security, in terms of their involvement in the CAS, but also to Russia's considerable and largely untapped eastern energy reserves in Siberia. The Chinese PLA has an already enormous quantitative advantage and a growing qualitative strength over Russia. Russia is seeking to counter and mitigate this by the advancement of an enhanced individual capability of the Russian soldier, as an element of a highly mobile and flexible military power. The kind of highly technological and mobile military force that Russia appears to be developing has clear utilities against a large state military such as the PLA. This is almost certain to be the hypothetical scenario we are to see being played out in Vostok-2010. In this exercise, Russia shall no doubt be putting the supposed permanent combat readiness of their forces to the test; as well as their ability to quickly adapt and reshape military formations to react to a situation as it develops.