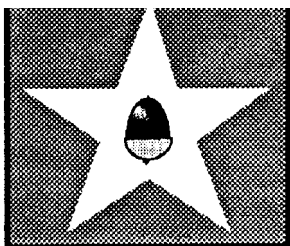


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**The Strategic Rocket Forces  
1991-2002**

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# The Strategic Rocket Forces 1991-2002

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Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, much attention has been paid to the care and maintenance of this most potent vestige of Russia as a world power. If Russia can legitimately claim still to be one of the world's leading powers, then it is largely thanks to the work of previous generations of *raketchiki* ("missile men") that this claim still holds true: for without its missile force, Russia would not be able to command the grudging respect which it does. Such a view does not rule out the possibility that, at some future date, Russia's presence in the world will be guaranteed less by its military prowess and more by its economic or political power, but at the present moment in time, Russia owes its major power status to the presence of the second largest missile fleet in the world. In terms of its geographical size, Russia is a huge world power, but its military muscle is largely now based on its nuclear missile force and not its large conventional military force. This paper examines the turbulent recent history of the Strategic Rocket Forces (in Russian, the Force is referred to either by its full name, *raketnyye voyska strategicheskogo naznacheniya*, or by its abbreviation, RVSN); analyse the perceptions of the changing role of the nation's nuclear deterrent as revealed in the 1993 and 2000 Military Doctrines and, finally, detail the life of RVSN, now no longer an independent Service arm, and speculate as to what this could mean for its future development. It will have very little to say about the technical nature of RVSN, ie number of silos, missile types etc, but rather focuses on detailing the changes in the organisational structure of RVSN, as well as the role played by its different Commanders-in-Chief over the past ten years, and the possible use of RVSN in any future conflict.

## What Are The Strategic Rocket Forces?

Before examining the impact of the military reform process of the past decade on the development of RVSN, it is a good idea to define, at the outset, what is understood by the term in Russian circles, so as to avoid confusion or misinterpretation. Most Russian analysts tend to have in mind a combination of definitions, the most accurate and contemporary of which are given below. The first is taken from the latest "Dictionary of Military Terms", by experts from the Russian General Staff:

"Service arm [*vid*] of the Armed Forces of the RF [Russian Federation], the main component of strategic nuclear forces, designed to deter an aggressor and solve strategic tasks in a nuclear war; [give] advance warning of a missile attack or an attack from space, control the space environment, [maintain] anti-missile defence of specific areas of the country and the information security of the VS [Armed Forces], through the use of orbital space apparatus. RVSN includes missile armies, the separate missile-space defence army, plants, scientific-research, scientific-experimental and military-research institutions."<sup>1</sup>

RVSN's own definition of itself, from an "encyclopaedic dictionary" compiled by experts from RVSN and published to commemorate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is more comprehensive, but does not stray too much from the general parameters of the General Staff's definition:

"The Strategic Missile Forces are a Service branch of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the central part of the strategic nuclear forces. Created in accordance with the decree of the USSR's Council of Ministers dated 17<sup>th</sup> December 1959, RVSN's pre-determined [tasks] include: to put into effect measures of nuclear deterrence during the [period of] threat of aggression, or during the course of a war using conventional weapons of destruction ... in the event of a nuclear war, to destroy strategic objects forming the basis of the enemy's military and military-economic potential; to repel an enemy's nuclear-missile and space-missile attack; to secure the actions of groups of the VS at all stages of the conduct and escalation of military conflicts. Basic means and capabilities of RVSN: enormous strike power; high combat readiness; the ability to carry out combat duties in the shortest possible time; unlimited reach [*neogranichennaya dal'nost'*] and great accuracy in striking at an enemy's targets [*ob'yekty*]; the capability to secretly prepare and launch a nuclear-missile strike under any weather ... conditions; RVSN's great survivability [*zhivuchest'*] includes the central organs of military combat and control, combat units of Space-Missile Defence ... the combat units and institutions involved in the control and launch of space apparatus, scientific-research organs and military-research establishments."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the relatively recent publication dates of both these works caveats have to be added: as of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2001, RVSN was transformed from being a Service branch of the Armed Forces (*vid*) to an arm of Service (*rod*). Before this, the Armed Forces had consisted of 4 Service branches, namely Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force and RVSN. Following the decision to restructure the Space Troops and RVSN as two separate "arms" - thereby increasing speculation about the possibility of RVSN being eventually joined with the Air Force in a three-force structure - RVSN ceased being a Service branch and simply became an arm. Tanks are an "arm", if you like, of the Ground Forces, submarines are an "arm" of the Navy. This downgrading also meant that it was no longer commanded by a Commander-in-Chief, but simply by a Commander, like the Military Districts. Space Troops and RVSN will continue to work closely together. Even so, maintaining 2/3 of Russia's missile launchers and nuclear warheads, RVSN is still the dominant force in the country's strategic nuclear triad of RVSN, naval and air platforms.<sup>3</sup>

## **From Soviet To Russian (1991-1993)**

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, RVSN was forced to undergo a whole series of radical changes which, in many ways, despite the "protection" of at least one post-Soviet Defence Minister (Marshal I Sergeyev), it is still experiencing to this day. According to one recently-published history of Russia's strategic nuclear forces, "the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 affected the RVSN more profoundly than it did any other branch of the Soviet armed forces".<sup>4</sup> Whilst this may be a slight exaggeration - after all, the Russian Army is only a shadow of its former Soviet counterpart - nevertheless Russia's nuclear forces, like all the other Service branches, have undergone very drastic changes and, given present speculation, may face more in the not too distant future.

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By 1991, RVSN had been commanded for 6 years by Colonel-General Yu Maksimov.<sup>5</sup> Appointed in July 1985, Maksimov's professional contact with RVSN prior to his appointment would appear to have been marginal at best. His immediate pre-RVSN appointment was C-in-C Southern Direction and he had seen service in Afghanistan, as a result of which he was awarded Hero of the Soviet Union, for "heroism and bravery". During the Soviet period, Maksimov saw the first missile regiment equipped with the new "Topol'-M" missile (April 1987) and the introduction into combat service of the first rail-missile complex (October 1987). In the biographical entry in RVSN's anniversary encyclopaedia, his other achievements are listed thus:

"He organised the introduction ... of the fourth generation RS-20V [SS-18 "Satan"] and the RS-12 "Topol'". He paid a lot of attention to strengthening the principles surrounding the combat use and combat duty of ground-based and rail-tracked military missile complexes. Organised the adoption of military-automated systems of command and control of men and weapons as part of the fourth generation missile complexes. Devoted much attention to supporting the non-reduction of the combat readiness of the troops and the placement of officer-cadres to divisions being re-equipped with the new missile complexes, as well as divisions undergoing reform."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, his time as C-in-C witnessed a number of important changes and developments in the Service's combat effectiveness. He must have been held in some respect whilst serving as C-in-C if, for no other reason, in that despite the imminent collapse of the USSR, on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1991, the last Soviet President, M Gorbachev, issued a decree, the heart of which was not only to create a new Service branch of the Armed Forces - the Strategic Deterrence Forces (*Strategicheskiye Sily Sderzhevaniya, SSS*) - but also appointed Maksimov as their C-in-C. According to the public version of the decree in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1991, the new Service was to consist of RVSN, the early-warning missile attack system, space control directorate, anti-missile defence, the directorate of head of space means [*upravleniye nachal'nika kosmicheskikh sredstv*] and, in an operational sense, "airforce and naval strategic nuclear forces".<sup>7</sup> In a contemporary article, Maksimov spoke about his vision for the immediate future of the new Service branch: "My opinion about the fate of the strategic nuclear forces is simple, in particular in relation to the Missile Troops: they must be unified, remain in their present grouping and [under] centralised control ... Missile Troops are too important an arm of the Armed Forces to be used in some sort of political adventure."<sup>8</sup>

Given the speed of events, there was little else that he could say of note. However, the Chief of the General Staff, General V Lobov, did expand on what he perceived the role of the new SSS to be:

"The Strategic Deterrence Forces are one of the four [sic] Service branches of the Armed Forces, vital in maintaining a guaranteed response, under all conditions, to a situation with a set effectiveness. We are planning a stage by stage organisational development, including strategic nuclear and military-space forces. Creating the military-space forces includes control systems of the space-space [environment], early-warning missile attack, anti-missile defence and the means for launching and controlling space objects, cosmodromes, etc. Then to unite the military-space forces with the Strategic Missile Forces. In the

final stage to include in the Strategic Deterrence Forces the naval and airforce strategic nuclear forces. Such a formation should, in our view, ensure the realisation of our doctrinal views on preventing war and maintaining stability."<sup>9</sup>

With the formal demise of the USSR a month later, however, all of this was to be put on hold: neither the Service branch nor the post getting off the drawing board.<sup>10</sup> Events were gathering their own momentum: the Belovezh Agreement, which brought an end to the existence of the USSR in December 1991, had massive ramifications for the USSR's Armed Forces. The RVSN now found its assets scattered amongst four of the new republics, namely Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus'. In numbers of missile launchers, Russia ended up with 1,035; Ukraine - 176; Kazakhstan - 104 and Belarus' - 72. With the financial backing of the USA and international pressure from elsewhere, a process of "de-nuclearisation" was begun of 3 of the 4 republics (Russia being the exception, of course) culminating, over the next 5 years, in the withdrawal or the destruction of all nuclear weapons from the territories of Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus'.<sup>11</sup>

On the eve of the announcement of the major reform of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, one of the experts from the General Staff's Operational-Strategic Research Centre, Colonel V Savchenko, speculated about the future role of the country's nuclear and conventional forces:

"The daily activity of strategic nuclear forces (SNF, in Russian SYaS) in maintaining combat readiness in peace time and their military use was always planned in a united system [involving] all the Armed Forces. That is why in order to increase the combat hardiness [*ustoychivost*] of SNF during conditions of a war using conventional weapons, it was always envisaged that the necessary conventional general purpose forces and means, from Ground Forces, the Navy and the Air Force, would be used. In our opinion, only the complex use of SNF and general purpose forces could ensure the demanded combat effectiveness of retaliatory actions of SNF under any conditions. Refusal [to adopt] such an approach would mean placing nuclear forces under [the threat of] a strike from a highly accurate weapon of a likely enemy."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, it was not a question of positing conventional versus nuclear forces - as was to be the case a few years ahead - but of reiterating a long standing tenet of Soviet military policy, that of seeing the country's nuclear and conventional forces as parts of a whole, the sum of the whole being greater than the individual parts. It was important to integrate conventional and nuclear forces in order to maintain the security not just of one republic, but of the whole new commonwealth. As Savchenko went on to state: "That is why the created Strategic Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS], on top of the nuclear forces, must have in their composition all the necessary structures to solve the daily tasks for maintaining combat readiness in peacetime and solving demanded military tasks in conditions of a nuclear or a conventional war."<sup>13</sup>

Maksimov himself was not happy at the prospect of the fractionalisation of the nuclear forces, writing about such a prospect just before the USSR collapsed: "It is my deeply-held belief that only a renewed, united Union and the unified Armed Forces of our country are able to maintain the real sovereignty, independence and security both of our country as a whole, as well as that of each individual republic ... Thus, my opinion about the fate of the strategic nuclear forces is simple, in

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particular the Rocket Troops: they must be united, remaining in their present grouping and [under] centralised control."<sup>14</sup>

It is likely that all these views would have been very common amongst the senior ranks of the CIS/Russian military command, especially in relation to the nuclear heritage of the fSU, ie that it had better stay more or less where it was, doing more or less what it had done in the days of the now ex-USSR. However, events gathered their own momentum and soon placed the whole question of the nuclear forces of the ex-USSR defending the "common defence space" of the CIS under serious doubt.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1992, the Soviet Ministry of Defence was reformed to become the Main Command of the Armed Forces of the CIS. The position of C-in-C RVSN was re-titled "Commander, RVSN," (at least according to two sources<sup>15</sup> though others describe the post as "Commander-in-Chief").<sup>16</sup> "On 20<sup>th</sup> March ... a decision of the leadership of the CIS Member-States, appointed Commander of Strategic Forces of the OVS [United Armed Forces] of the Commonwealth", General Yu P Maksimov.<sup>17</sup> This became a decree, issued a week later, which explains why most sources date Maksimov's appointment to 27<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>18</sup> In an interview not long after this, Maksimov outlined the composition of what he had under his command: "Units, formations, institutions, military-educational institutions of the RVSN, VVS [Air Force], VMS [Navy], PVO [Anti-Aircraft Defence], directorate of the head of Space Troops, airborne forces, strategic and operational intelligence-gathering [units], nuclear-technical units, as well as the forces, means and other military installations designed to control and maintain the strategic forces of the former USSR."<sup>19</sup>

This composition mirrors very strongly Lobov's views concerning the make-up of the SSS and this should not be too surprising, given that there was only a four-month gap between the two published decrees. The decree on the creation of the SSS was never fully implemented and the decree on the Strategic Forces (SF), either through the lack of an alternative or in an attempt to halt the continuing disintegration of the country's military infrastructure, could simply have been the old one dusted down and put into effect. The SSS simply became the SF; it was even allowed to keep the old "boss". Support for such a view can be found in an interview of Maksimov when he unashamedly called for the "unification" of the strategic triad:

"The creation of the Strategic Forces envisages the unification, under one command ... of the 'triad' of strategic nuclear forces, as well as the means and forces maintaining their combat activity ... Under these circumstances, the role of RVSN, as the core of the Strategic Forces, in the area of deterring and preventing war and possible aggressive actions towards the states of the Commonwealth ... is very significant."<sup>20</sup>

Despite the break-up of the USSR, Maksimov still obviously defined the role of the SF within the context of defending the territory of the CIS. This approach may seem at variance with the pace of events - after all, by this stage most of the republics of the fSU had created, or were heavily involved in the process of creating their own national Armed Forces. But Maksimov was insistent that the SF not be divided or fractionalised between the republics, and was keen on the idea of protecting the CIS as a "common defence space". Such a view was held not only by members of the CIS General Staff - witness Lobov's earlier comments - but also by the emerging identifiable Russian military leadership. Not long after Maksimov's appointment had been made public, the soon to be dubbed "best-ever" Russian Defence Minister, Colonel-General P Grachev, had this to say:

"The Strategic Forces today are the prerogative of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Russia, for the time being, has not set itself the task of their formation [*Rossiya poka ne stavit pered soboy zadachu ikh formirovaniya*]." <sup>21</sup>

So, at least for the time being, the CIS and Russian military leadership were singing from the same hymn sheet - the SF belonged in the domain of the CIS' unified military structure. This was further underlined in the presidential decree dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1992, on the creation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (in fact, Russia was the last of the fSU republics to decide to create its own national Armed Forces), which stated: "... in accordance with the earlier adopted decrees, to maintain the existing system of control of the Strategic Forces. The Strategic Forces on the territory of the Russian Federation will become part of the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States. To allocate corresponding forces and means from the Russian Federation to the disposal of the Main Command of the United Armed Forces." <sup>22</sup>

However, given both the preponderance and the legal position of the nuclear forces scattered all over the fSU, such a position was becoming harder to maintain. It was also true that, as one commentary put it at the time, "centrifugal tendencies" within the CIS itself, <sup>23</sup> ie the moves by all the fSU republics to create their own Armed Forces, were increasing the likelihood that Russia would soon attempt to assert full operational control over all the nuclear weapons deployed on CIS territory. The only way that this could have been avoided was if there had been a genuine desire on the part of the other republics to actively take part in the creation and maintenance of a "common defence space". Only then would the idea of the CIS retaining full and effective control of the nuclear arsenal deployed in Russia, or anywhere else for that matter, have worked. But this did not happen. A plan for the creation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, published towards the end of June 1992, clearly showed Russia's future intentions: the Russian Armed Forces were to have a five-Service structure and one of the Service branches was to be RVSN. <sup>24</sup> In July 1992, in an interview of the newly-promoted Russian Defence Minister, (now) General P Grachev, he stated that "priority attention will be devoted to the groups of strategic nuclear forces (SNF), including RVSN. At the present day, they are the most reliable factor in deterring both a global nuclear, as well as conventional, war." <sup>25</sup> Thus, by the autumn of 1992, the writing was very much on the wall: Russia would seek to gain full operational control of the nuclear forces on its territory.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1992, *Krasnaya Zvezda* published a list of senior military appointments in the new Russian Armed Forces and, amongst the Commanders-in-Chief was one for RVSN, namely Colonel-General I D Segeyev who had been deputy C-in-C Soviet RVSN for combat training. <sup>26</sup> Sergeyev's appointment to such a post was clear evidence that Russia was becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of willingness shown by the other member-states of the CIS to help maintain the collective nuclear security forces. It had taken yet another important step towards asserting direct control over the nuclear forces, forces which were crucial in ensuring the country's defence against possible aggression. The process took a further step with the passing by the Russian parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1992, of the law "On Defence". Under Article 5 of the law, the Russian president had the power "to issue the order to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to carry out military actions [including] the use of nuclear weapons and other means of mass destruction within the powers determined by the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation". <sup>27</sup> Thus, by the time of the Bishkek meeting of the CIS Heads

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of State on 9th October 1992, due to a number of factors - the ongoing process of "de-nuclearisation" of the other 3 republics; Russia's increasing attempts to exert full operational control over the nuclear forces based on its soil whilst, at the same time, ensuring that the rest were transported to Russia and destroyed; the "centrifugal forces" operating within the CIS, flying in the face of attempts to create a viable "common defence space", etc - the end of the CIS SF was in sight. Maksimov, at his "personal request" tendered his resignation, which was duly accepted. For the time being, he was replaced by the C-in-C United Armed Forces of the CIS, Marshal (Air Force) Ye Shaposhnikov.<sup>28</sup> Despite his age (68), Maksimov was put "at the disposal" of the Russian MoD until October 1992 and did not officially retire until March 1993.<sup>29</sup>

Since the formal demise of the USSR in 1991, the whole integrated defence system which had been the USSR - in which the country's nuclear forces had played a key role - had fallen victim to the "nationalisation" of the military apparatus. Maksimov's - and others' - desire to create and maintain the "common defence space", allowing the normal functioning of the country's nuclear forces (including its core component, RVSN), was lost to the centrifugal forces threatening to tear the fSU apart. From the point in time when Russia decided to appoint Sergeyev C-in-C of RVSN forces deployed in Russia, the days of the CIS controlling the SF were numbered. It can now also be seen that the whole process of "de-nuclearisation" of the republics acted as a catalyst, not only for the creation of the national Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, but also in weakening the utility of the CIS as a militarily viable organisation. This should not be taken to imply that had the other 3 republics retained control over their nuclear weapons, Russia would still not have gone on to create its own national Armed Forces, but with Russia seeking to gain operational control over the nuclear weapons on its territory, allied to the reluctance of others to back the creation of a "common defence space", it felt obliged to create Armed Forces capable of defending the physical vastness of Russia. The Lisbon Protocol, signed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1992 and granting Russia legal jurisdiction over all the nuclear weapons of the fSU, also played its role in defining the future role of the CIS as a military organisation. Russia had taken the logical path forward - after all, it had witnessed the nationalist forces unleashed in the wake of the collapse of the USSR;<sup>30</sup> the creation of numerous republican Armed Forces inside the fSU; and was feeling the effects of the economic burden of maintaining a military force designed for a super-power. The threat assessment was also changing.

In his first newspaper interview as C-in-C RVSN Russian Federation, Sergeyev spoke about the status of the Rocket Forces:

"On the purpose and status of the Strategic Rocket Forces, part of the Strategic Forces, all has been discussed in the Agreement signed and approved by the Heads of State of the Commonwealth [the agreement signed at the Minsk Summit on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1992 'on Strategic Forces' status].<sup>31</sup> Within the framework of this legal document, RVSN's tasks were constructed. In accordance with the decree of the President of the Russian Federation, they were transferred to the operational control of the Main Command of the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth. Direct leadership [*neposredstvennoye rukovodstvo*] of the forces is placed on the C-in-C RVSN, who is subordinate to the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation and bears personal responsibility for the state of the Rocket Forces, their combat readiness, their all-round training, leading combat alert duties, maintaining guaranteed nuclear security."<sup>32</sup>



From this it is clear that Russia still saw a need to maintain the line that the SF were under the operational control of the United Armed Forces of the CIS whilst, at the same time, emphasising that at least in relation to the forces deployed in Russia, they were under the direct control of the Russian military. Yet the framework was confused. The journalist conducting the interview even started his series of questions by dubbing Sergeyev the "seventh C-in-C of RVSN", making no distinction between the post which existed in the time of the USSR, and the one at the time of the interview, and yet this was clearly wrong: Sergeyev's appointment was unique, he was the first C-in-C of RVSN, Russian Federation.

Formally speaking, at this time - September 1992 - the C-in-C of United Armed Forces of the CIS, Marshal (Air Force) Ye Shaposhnikov had under his command the SF and the CIS Peacekeeping Forces, nothing else. Needless to say, as the power and desire of the Russian MoD grew, this had an adverse effect on the position of the United Armed Forces, especially as it became increasingly obvious that, although *de jure* control of the nuclear arsenal may have resided with Shaposhnikov, in real terms the actual control lay very much in the hands of the Russian MoD. It should be remembered that the nuclear "black briefcase" was passed over to Yeltsin when Gorbachev relinquished power formally on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1991 so, in a very real sense, the Russian political and military leadership had always been in charge of the fSU's nuclear arsenal.<sup>33</sup>

However, towards the end of 1992, another player appeared on the scene and threatened to muddy further the picture of who was in control of what. Despite agreements and assurances to the contrary, Ukraine began swearing its men into the strategic nuclear forces deployed in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup> This episode further highlighted where real power lay: negotiations were conducted with the Russian Federation, not with the Command of the United Armed Forces. Ukraine was looking for further compensation and, eventually, both sides came to an agreement concerning the dispatch of Ukraine's remaining nuclear arsenal back to Russia.<sup>35</sup> There was also a growing rivalry between Grachev and Shaposhnikov, as the process of forming a military structure specifically for Russia began to make the very existence of United Armed Forces of the CIS look anachronistic.

A further sign that Russia was becoming less and less interested in the workings of the United Armed Forces, especially in relation to control of the fSU's nuclear arsenal, was revealed, or not as the case may be, in a major article published by Sergeyev in April 1993, concerning the RVSN which failed even to mention the United Armed Forces of the CIS, or Shaposhnikov!<sup>36</sup> The deterioration in the relationship between the central command of the United Armed Forces of the CIS and the Russian MoD continued, especially over the delimitation of powers between the two bodies, until Yeltsin issued a presidential decree on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1993, appointing Shaposhnikov to the post of Secretary of the newly-created Russian Security Council. However, the Supreme Soviet contained many men who were not happy at Shaposhnikov's role in August 1991 and Shaposhnikov's candidacy was not ratified. In July Shaposhnikov offered his resignation, which was eventually accepted by Yeltsin in September, who decided not to appoint someone else to the post, but to liquidate it.<sup>37</sup> At a session of the CIS Heads of State in Moscow on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1993, a formal decision was taken to re-organise the High Command of the United Armed Forces of the CIS and turn it into the Headquarters for Coordinating Military Cooperation of Member-States of the Commonwealth. Shaposhnikov was released from his duties; Colonel-General Samsonov replaced him during the "reorganisation period", eventually becoming head of the new organ in December 1993. Curiously enough, Samsonov had previously been

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Shaposhnikov's Chief of Staff at the United Armed Forces, and briefly the last Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces.

Both Maksimov and Shaposhnikov had failed in their attempts to convince the other republics of the utility of maintaining a collective nuclear security force. It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that the two men's attempts to hold onto a collective security force operating for the benefit of the whole CIS was doomed from the very start - after all, Russia would appear to have been quite supportive of the idea, at least in the initial stages. From the Russian point of view, this was not surprising, given that maintaining the old Soviet defence space - if all the other republics had also favoured the idea, with everything, literally, already in place - would have been easier than having to adapt, or re-build totally from scratch. The costs (human, economic, geostrategic) of having to re-mould a new defensive structure to meet the security needs of a country as vast as Russia were and are considerable. The Russian Federation, as part of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, was in a European and global security structure which more than adequately met its security needs at home and abroad. By 1993, however, this had all but gone, with the number of states that Russia could count on as "allies" being very small. In fact, its security position had worsened - with the very real possibility that it could easily become involved in a border conflict (so many new neighbours and borders following the dissolution of the USSR), or a local, regional conflict.

Attempts to persuade the CIS to help Russia maintain a "common defence space" effectively having failed, Russia was forced to join the rest and "go it alone". Given its weakening position, both within Europe and the world at large, for the time being it would have to secure its own national interests as best it could, even if this meant over-reliance on its own nuclear deterrent to prevent possible aggression. A lot had changed in the two years since the August 1991 coup. Russia was also undergoing a massive and painful reduction in the strength of its conventional forces and, as was to be revealed towards the end of 1993, this would mean the Federation relying more than it had done in the past on its nuclear forces (particularly its core, RVSN), for keeping the potential aggressor at bay. In June 1993, Sergejev wrote what, in effect, had become a truism since 1991:

"The main means of maintaining the security of our state and the whole Commonwealth are the strategic nuclear forces. Only they are capable of solving the problems of containing aggression, securing strategic stability in the world and, in the final analysis, preventing a world war. Without question, the main role here belongs to the Strategic Rocket Forces, which forms the core part of SNF and comprises about 60% of its launchers and 65% of its warheads, solves up to 80% of its combat tasks."<sup>38</sup>

Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the failure of the CIS to take off as a viable military structure, Russia had undergone a reassessment of the security threats facing the country and, in November 1993, this took the form of adopting its first post USSR Russian Military Doctrine: the country's reliance on its SRF was to be very apparent in the new doctrine and it is to that which we now turn.

## **The Russian Military Doctrine (November 1993) & RVSN**

In terms of the use (or otherwise) of the country's nuclear forces, there had been a steady progression away from the thinking of the 1960s, which interpreted using nuclear weapons pretty much in the way of using a weapon with a massive increase in firepower, ie in a war-fighting capacity, with the ability to solve a variety of strategic tasks. By the 1980s, due both to an increase in their accuracy and number, nuclear weapons were well on the way from being viewed as weapons to be used in war to attaining a greater political role, as the concept of nuclear deterrence became more fully developed and the actual costs of fighting a nuclear war meant avoiding one if at all possible. There had been a gradual evolution in Soviet nuclear doctrine, from seeing the nuclear arsenal purely in terms of a war-fighting capacity to it becoming a deterrence force with limited practical use, except as a final "retribution" force.<sup>39</sup> In the final draft USSR Military Doctrine, there were a number of signs that the USSR had realised this: for instance, according to the Draft, the USSR committed itself to non-first use of nuclear weapons; it regarded no single state as "the enemy" and would not use its Armed Forces in a conflict which did not involve either its own defence or the defence of its allies.<sup>40</sup> Thus, a couple of years before the Russians began the process of writing a military doctrine (and three years before one saw the light of day), Soviet doctrine writers had already shown that change was most decidedly in the air and that they too had taken into account the significant changes witnessed by the fall of the Berlin Wall; the growing rapprochement between the USSR and the USA; Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, etc.

But if a week is a long time in Russian politics, then two years was an eternity at the beginning of the 1990s. Russia's geopolitical security position had deteriorated - the Warsaw Pact was no more; there were already several military conflicts within the borders of the fSU; the general weakening of the country's conventional military forces was increasingly obvious; economic production was falling - and the CIS had failed to establish and develop the "common defence space". This was confirmed by RF Defence Minister General Grachev in July 1992: "We had been in favour of preserving a single Armed Force up to the last moment. When it became clear, however, that we had failed to achieve this aim, a decision was taken to reorganise the Armed Forces of Russia."<sup>41</sup>

With this formal decision, a new chapter was entered in the history of RVSN. What was also becoming obvious was that Russia was growing ever more reliant on the country's nuclear forces, particularly RVSN, to ensure and maintain its security. As soon as the CIS became a non-runner, militarily, then Russia had no choice but to reform the units of the former Soviet Armed Forces deployed on Russian soil - as well as bringing those units from abroad which were no longer needed to carry out tasks which no longer existed. This was a huge undertaking. At the same time, work also began on the creation of a military doctrine for the Russian Federation.<sup>42</sup>

Needless to say, Russia's first-ever Military Doctrine would inevitably attract great interest at home and abroad, but arguably the interest was even greater for what it did not say, as opposed to what it did say: and controversy surrounded its non-statement concerning the non-first use of nuclear weapons. At the time, a number of Western commentators speculated about the fact that Russia had apparently withdrawn its earlier commitment to non-first use of nuclear weapons, and were worried that this was a sign of a growing shift towards a more confrontational approach with the West. However, an examination of speeches and writings by Russia's military and political leadership from mid 1992-November 1993 reveals

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that, time and time again, they had made it clear that the new Military Doctrine would do away with the non-first use of nuclear weapons policy, simply because Russia had very little choice, if it was to deter possible acts of aggression. Sergeyev's June 1993 article quoted above is a good example of this fore-warning. Looking back at Russia's immediate past and forward to its bleak future, as a military man, what could he do but admit the obvious and play the best hand he had? Russia's conventional military power was declining rapidly and the only creditable force at its disposal which friends and enemies would take seriously was its nuclear force.

At a special conference in Moscow on 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> May 1992, involving many members of Russia's senior military leadership and dedicated to analysing the future development of the Russian Armed Forces, a number of speakers made the link between the declining power of Russia's conventional forces, increasing reliance on its strategic deterrence force and the creation of the Military Doctrine. In his presentation, Colonel-General I N Rodionov, then Head of the Military Academy of the General Staff, but a future Russian Defence Minister, stated:

"Russia is ... a supporter of nuclear deterrence ... For the general purpose forces, the USA and many other potential opponents are unreachable. What we have left are the SNF, above all RVSN, but the new [draft] Doctrine once again speaks about Russia not being the first to use nuclear or any other weapons of mass destruction. Statements about 'not being the first to use YaO [nuclear weapons], 'retaliatory strikes', 'defensive character', bear witness to repeating the mistakes of past years and causing untold harm to our defence ... Nuclear weapons ... are the basic means of deterring possible aggression, in other words, preventing war ... Under no set of circumstances will we be the aggressor, but the rest [of the world] must know ... that, in the event of aggression against Russia, it will use all means at its disposal to defend its own interests."<sup>43</sup>

Another speaker - Lieutenant-General L I Volkov, head of a scientific-research institute of the RVSN - also spoke about the events of the past two years and the role of RVSN in Russia's security:

"The disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and of the Armed Forces on the former territory of the USSR, as well as the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons, strengthened the West's military superiority in general purpose forces and equipment (by more than twofold with respect to Russia). Under these conditions, the Strategic Nuclear Forces and their core, the Strategic Rocket Forces, remain the last military-political force maintaining constant combat readiness, supporting the strategic balance in the world and Russia's security and preventing its transition to the ranks of second-rate states."<sup>44</sup>

He also warned the country's political leadership against making the country's nuclear forces "voluntarily" weak, stating that to do so would be an "unforgivable mistake".<sup>45</sup> In a wider context, he expanded slightly on what was fast becoming a mantra for those defending the growing importance of the SNF in defending the country's interests: "The SNF must ensure deterrence from aggression, above all from political pressure and blackmail from countries possessing nuclear weapons".<sup>46</sup>

In other words, Russia still had identifiable enemies, including some with their own nuclear arsenals and Russia would be well advised to be careful about further reductions in its nuclear arsenal. Of course, one could hardly expect that, after decades of Soviet political and military indoctrination, the entire military leadership would cast aside their preconceived notions overnight, or even after a year, but it is worth noting that, in the work carried out for this particular paper, amongst the Russian sources such stark views were not commonly met.

Later on that year, in September 1993, whilst on an official visit to the USA, General Grachev, gave as a priority: "first of all, to prevent the outbreak of a global nuclear or conventional war by means of maintaining the Strategic Nuclear Forces in a state ensuring a retaliatory response with the necessary effectiveness and under all conditions".<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Russia's nuclear arsenal was now very much viewed as an instrument of war-prevention, not of war-fighting, even less of war-winning. If it had to unleash a nuclear strike, then it would be in the form of a retaliatory strike. Russia's senior military leadership had repeatedly clearly stated that Russia's conventional forces were not able to defend Russia properly and that, as a direct result of this, Russia would have to rely more on the deterrence value of its strategic nuclear inheritance, and for that threat to be credible in the eyes of the world - especially to those states with their own nuclear weapons - Russia could not tie one hand behind its back by repeating old Soviet-style formulaic notions concerning the non-first use of nuclear weapons. Thus, the "bombshell" of November 1993 was well advertised: there were plenty of signs that Russia was going to drop the policy a good year before the new doctrine was published.

1993 was to be a turbulent year in the history of the Russian state, primarily because of the forced dissolution of the Supreme Soviet in October. The draft Military Doctrine, caught up in events outside its control, should have been approved by the Security Council on 15<sup>th</sup> October, and was eventually passed on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1993, Yeltsin signing it into law on the same day.<sup>48</sup> The Doctrine consisted of three sections: political, military and military-technical. In general outline, it contained a number of points similar to the last draft Soviet Military Doctrine, published in 1990. Thus, it emphasised the peaceful settlement of international disputes; the non-use of its Armed Forces except as a direct response to aggression either against Russia or its allies; it did not regard any particular state as "the enemy", etc.<sup>49</sup> With particular regard to nuclear weapons, the new doctrine stated that: "**The aim of the policy of the Russian Federation in the sphere of nuclear weapons is to avert the threat of a nuclear war by precluding aggression against the Russian Federation and its allies**" [emphasis in the original].<sup>50</sup>

The doctrine also reaffirmed Russia's stance that it would not use nuclear weapons against states party to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty. In fact, there were only two listed scenarios when Russia would use nuclear weapons, namely when: "a) such a state, which has allied relations with a nuclear state, attacks the Russian Federation ... b) such a state collaborates with a nuclear power in carrying out, or supporting, an invasion or armed aggression against the Russian Federation".<sup>51</sup>

The doctrine also stated that it would be Russia's policy "to reduce nuclear forces to a minimum which would guarantee against a large-scale war and maintain strategic stability and, eventually, to ensure full elimination of nuclear weapons".<sup>52</sup> Again, the emphasis was on nuclear weapons being a force to deter war, not to fight one,

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war-prevention, not war-fighting. Whilst further on in the doctrine there is the phrase "the Russian Federation shall guarantee its military security by all means at its disposal, giving priority to political-diplomatic and other peaceful means," once again, the emphasis is on non-forceful means being employed first and foremost, although not ruling out the possibility that Russia will use *everything* at its disposal in order to maintain its security. In a state possessing nuclear weapons, the inference is clear.

Of course, regardless of such non-threatening statements, the main focus of much initial comment on the doctrine, especially in the West, was the lack of reference to "the no first use of nuclear weapons". This prompted the Russian MoD to publish a statement clarifying Russia's position. The statement was released through the MoD's Military Development and Reform Directorate - headed by Major-General G D Ivanov, former senior lecturer at the Military Academy of the General Staff, when Colonel-General Rodionov was Commandant.<sup>53</sup> In its opening paragraphs, it emphasised the "defensive nature" of Russia's Military Doctrine and explained why there was no mention of "no first use of nuclear weapons": "in the document, there is no mention of the use of nuclear weapons, either first or second. The main essence of Russia's nuclear strategy is aimed at the prevention of nuclear war itself."<sup>54</sup>

This is a logical statement to make. Nuclear weapons in the Russian strategic mind-set had shifted from being a war-fighting (never mind war-winning) weapon to the arena of politics. Their very existence, in sufficient numbers and given their increased accuracy, had elevated them to the political arena, where they were much more valuable, especially given Russia's loss of superpower status and the growing weakness of its conventional forces. This idea is stated explicitly:

"Nuclear weapons in the Army and Navy of Russia in this document [the Doctrine] are not viewed as a weapon to conduct military action and achieve victory in war, but as a political instrument to maintain Russia's security and strategic stability and remove the threat of nuclear war in the world. It is stated that the aim of the policy of the Russian Federation in the area of nuclear weapons is removing the danger of nuclear war by containing aggression unleashed against the Russian Federation and its allies ... nuclear weapons of this country serve and will serve as a reliable means of assuring security for itself and its allies and of nuclear containment."<sup>55</sup>

This was the view of the majority of Russia's senior military establishment, one born out of a sense of reality, thanks to the deterioration of the country's conventional forces. Behind these views there is a sense that were it not for the nuclear legacy of the USSR, Russia's security would be open to question. Given events since 1993, the emphasis has changed once more, hence the need for a new doctrine adopted in April 2000, but when the collapse of the USSR and the events of October 1993 were still very fresh in people's minds, for many in Russia's senior leadership it was easy to accept and argue that the main reason why Russia was not embroiled in a major external conflict - given its internal weaknesses - was its nuclear arsenal. If the arsenal could not be enhanced militarily - due to the poor financial position of the country - then it had to be strengthened in another way, and one way was, for instance, to say that "although we don't want to use them, if we have to, we will". Thus, part of the change in Russia's doctrinal stance was born out of the necessity of not just acknowledging the fact that Russia's reliance on its own nuclear arsenal would last for some time to come, but to convince others that,

if push came to shove, it would use its full arsenal (military and other resources) to avert war or, if need be, fight one. It would have been ludicrous in the new geostrategic position in which Russia now operated to have held on to the notion of "no first use" - after all, what would be the point in making the threat, if your opponent did not believe that you were in a position to carry it out? Deterrence, after all, relies on the potential adversary believing that you will carry out the threat, regardless of whether you will in practice.

Of course, nuclear weapons could play no significant role in an internal conflict, and thus RVSN was not involved in Chechnya, 1994-1996 or 1999-2002. Indeed, both wars revealed many shortcomings in the state of Russia's conventional forces. But the nuclear umbrella has proven its worth and is still of great value both to the military, in extending the time that they have to carry out meaningful reform of the military apparatus, and to Russia as a whole, in allowing a continued "breathing space" for further major internal reform.

### The Development of RVSN Under Sergeyev (1993-1997)

"[General I Sergeyev] has made a huge contribution in the development of RVSN, organising combat duty [*boyevoye dezhurstvo*] of the new missile complexes and the means of combat control and communications, in improving the system of combat duty and combat training of the troops. Under the conditions of reforming the RF Armed Forces and RVSN, he has maintained the continuation of the latter's high state of combat readiness."<sup>56</sup>

Given that he had spent virtually his entire career in RVSN and was then Minister of Defence, this biographical entry in the RVSN encyclopedia is very short on detail. In times past, this would have been a potential "signal" that Sergeyev was not popular with those elsewhere in the Service, or even higher up. Alternatively, as he was obviously still a very important player in the game, the editors may have been erring on the side of caution and opted to write platitudes, as opposed to anything more detailed, let alone criticism of reforms, or a lack of them, during his time as C-in-C. Only the passage of time and the publication of archival documents, memoirs, etc, will allow us to analyse properly his period as C-in-C RVSN.

A few months before the adoption of the new military doctrine in November 1993, Sergeyev published an article in the General Staff's journal, *Voyennaya Mysl'*, examining the current reform process and how it was affecting RVSN. In his opening couple of paragraphs, Sergeyev pointed out that whilst there had been a "significant reduction" in tension between East and West and a "reduction in the likelihood of world wars" breaking out, nevertheless there were still "potential sources of military conflict" and that, for the foreseeable future, "the military threat to Russia has scarcely disappeared".<sup>57</sup> In similar vein, he pointed out that "despite the fact that there have been a number of positive tendencies in the military-political situation on the contemporary stage, it is impossible to fully exclude the possibility of wars and military conflicts being unleashed. This forces one to draw the conclusion that **for our state, the military danger has not ceased to be a reality** [emphasis in the original]."<sup>58</sup> He further noted that the Russian Armed Forces were being developed along two main principles:

**"First.** Deterring any aggressor from unleashing a nuclear or a large-scale conventional war against Russia, by maintaining the strategic

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nuclear forces in a state guaranteeing an effective response under any conditions. **Second.** Deterring an aggressor from unleashing regional and local wars and military conflicts by means of creating and maintaining the combat potential of the groups of general purpose forces at a level guaranteeing repulsing the aggression ... Putting these principles into effect, into development, as is well-known, has to take place ... over several stages."<sup>59</sup>

The next few sentences note how the general purpose forces have been "significantly weakened" over the past couple of years. He then puts his own force into the centre spot: "The base means in maintaining the security of our state and of the entire Commonwealth remain the strategic nuclear forces (SNF). Only they are able to solve the tasks of deterring aggression, maintaining strategic stability in the world and, in the final analysis, prevent war. Without question, the fundamental role belongs to the Strategic Rocket Forces, which form the core part of SNF."<sup>60</sup>

Reminding his readership of the fact that 70% of the nuclear potential of Russia lay with the RVSN, he also stated that it played a "fundamental role" in the whole nuclear deterrence equation for a "minimum" amount of expenditure. Looking ahead, Sergeyev pointed out that the future development of RVSN would depend on a range of new factors, military, political and economic:

"Concluding agreements on reducing strategic offensive weapons; sharp reduction in monies allocated for defence; collapse in industrial co-operation for designing, experimenting and serial production of missile technology. On top of this, in terms of the future development of RVSN objectively what else has to be taken into account are the positions of the sovereign states - Ukraine, Belarus' and Kazakhstan - in relation to the nuclear weapons deployed on their territory."<sup>61</sup>

In examining the current reform process, as well as looking ahead, Sergeyev outlined there were 3 stages in the development of the RVSN: the first stage had already been completed by the end of 1992 and had "created a real basis for the future reform of RVSN". The next two stages were to take the Service up to 1995 and the third to be completed "by the end of 2000-2003". The second stage was to involve the re-staffing of the missile complexes in Kazakhstan and Ukraine; complete the relocation of units from Belarus' back to Russia and strengthen links with industry to maintain the "creation and secure use of missile weapons and the formation of a Russian corporation of enterprises". This was in part response to the loss of a number of Ukrainian firms who had been heavily involved in the production of certain types of missiles under the old Soviet system. Primarily a technical specialist - he is a Doctor of Technical Science, as well as a member of a number of Russia's most important scientific-technical Academies<sup>62</sup> - Sergeyev would have been well aware of the necessity of re-sourcing as much as possible production technology from within the Russian Federation. The third and final stage was to realise the final provisions of START-2; the creation of the RVSN grouping, incorporating stationary and mobile missile complexes. "Concrete directions [*napravelniya*] for the development of RVSN ... will be made more precise in 1995, taking into account the then existing political and economic conditions."<sup>63</sup>

Sergeyev also wrote about improving the system of "combat control"; problems associated with dismantling and destroying nuclear warheads; and improving the system of military *dezhurstvo* (combat duty) in the Service. Sergeyev closed by



stating that RVSN had three inter-related tasks to carry out in the foreseeable future. In summary form they were described as: 1) to support the necessary level of combat readiness of the existing grouping of forces, in order to maintain nuclear deterrence, strategic stability and prevent war; 2) to continue the reorganisation and improvement of RVSN grouping whilst, at the same time, reducing the number of launchers by up to a third; 3) to put into effect the provisions of the START treaties.<sup>64</sup>

Although fairly technical in places, Sergeyev pointed out how he thought RVSN would develop under his stewardship as C-in-C, taking into account the demands of the arms reduction treaties and the necessity of maintaining RVSN at a creditable operational level to deter possible aggression. However, in order to make the threat of nuclear retaliation credible, the systems had to work properly - both technical and human - and money spent on renewing and upgrading the missile complexes. This need to spend on a force which, all going well, would never actually be used was to rankle with other Service chiefs and was to become very evident when Sergeyev was appointed Defence Minister in May 1997.

By April 1996, Ukraine's and Kazakhstan's nuclear "inheritance" had been safely transported to Russia and destroyed, leaving only 18 nuclear warheads - part of the local "Topol" missile complex - in Belarus', but they too were transported to Russia and destroyed by the end of the year.<sup>65</sup> This helps to explain why, in a number of contemporary statements, Sergeyev talked about the "*creation* of RVSN grouping". It was not a question of one not already existing, but of one which was still not fully complete.

Whilst all Service branches suffered because of the economic rundown of the country, RVSN was also very badly hit by the fact that the missile systems themselves were produced partly in non-Russian republics of the USSR, for instance in Ukraine.

"Of the three leading missile factories, only one was left in Russia - in Votkinsk ... The division into sovereign states has shown that strategic weapons should not be made even by the hands of friends. On Russian territory, there remain only 60% of the defence enterprises for RVSN. Right away, we were forced to create our own Russian corporation, uniting about 200 enterprises. The "Topol'-M" from the bolt to the most complicated systems [had to be] purely Russian."<sup>66</sup>

This re-sourcing of production was also described in an interview by the head of RVSN's Procurement department, Major-General V Meleshko:

"With the collapse of the Union [USSR], a number of enterprise-suppliers remained in the near abroad. The department had to establish a corporation in order to get our orders fulfilled. The department succeeded in transferring to Russian territory the production of a number of vitally important ... lines of production. The Moscow joint-stock company, "MOVEN" mastered the production ... of special ventilators, which had been formerly manufactured by the Nikolayevsk ship-building factory ... St Petersburg AO, "Elektropul't" an electrical transfer system, which had been produced earlier by the Khar'kov Electromechanical factory [both in Ukraine]."<sup>67</sup>

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The fact that a significant proportion of the components of Russia's strategic missile force were manufactured outside Russian control must have worried the leadership. It has to be seen as one of Sergeyev's less glamorous, but nonetheless significant achievements, that he was able to re-source so much production back into Russian hands. Meleshko may have been stretching a point when he remarked that, in his opinion, Russia's RVSN force should not be seen as a "burden" but on a par with the country's "gold reserve: the latter allows Russia to conduct economic reform, the weaponry entrusted to us helps us to carry out the reforms under a peaceful sky".<sup>68</sup> It's a poetic way of linking economic reform and Russian national security. In securing internal lines of production, Sergeyev was not only throwing a lifeline to the struggling domestic defence industry, but also ensuring that Russia could rely on its own resources in maintaining its nuclear shield.

The RVSN continued to perform well, in assessments carried out by its own organs of inspection and those of the General Staff. Thus, in 1994, Sergeyev reported that "all units ... of the missile forces are combat ready and able to carry out their pre-allotted tasks". An "excellent" rating was awarded to those units specifically involved in the test-firing exercises carried out that year.<sup>69</sup> This was achieved despite the fact that RVSN only received 1/3 of monies allocated for combat training.<sup>70</sup> Similarly in 1996, in his official report to the Minister of Defence, General I N Rodionov, Sergeyev stated that 80% of RVSN units checked in the winter-training period were assessed as "good", even though, once again, RVSN received less than it should have: 56% of what had been allocated was received.<sup>71</sup> Towards the end of 1996, the main conclusion of an enlarged session of RVSN's Military Council was that, following an analysis of combat exercises held that year, "the organs of control and the troops are capable of ... fulfilling tasks facing RVSN".<sup>72</sup> The session also heard that 76% of the divisions tested were evaluated as "good" and the rest "satisfactory".<sup>73</sup> In spite of under-funding, RVSN would appear to have remained a creditable force - one of the tasks which, no doubt, Sergeyev had set himself.

His efforts were appreciated. In April 1995, the then Defence Minister, General P Grachev, visited a number of RVSN units all over the country and, in a series of press statements, emphasised the importance of the RVSN in maintaining Russia's security and improving Russia's overall standing in the world. For instance, in the middle of his tour Grachev stated that "the Strategic Rocket Forces are not only the firm guarantee of the country's security, but also the fundamental factor of deterrence in a geopolitical sense, as well". Having alluded to the possibility of future NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, Grachev reminded everyone that "Russia is a super-country, possessing super-weapons. And no one should forget that."<sup>74</sup> Earlier on, Grachev had told an audience that "RVSN remains the most important means of stabilising the political situation in the world".<sup>75</sup> And all this with a force which, according to official figures, accounted for only 9% of total personnel of the country's Armed Forces and between 6-8% of the defence budget.<sup>76</sup>

In the middle of 1996, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), General M Kolesnikov, published a major article entitled "Military reform and the construction of the Armed Forces of Russia".<sup>77</sup> Pointing out what had been achieved to date specifically in relation to Russia's strategic nuclear forces, and whilst reiterating its primary task as being "the maintenance of a guaranteed deterrent against the unleashing of world nuclear or conventional war," Kolesnikov also stated that for this objective to be achieved, SNF would "maintain their existing three-force structure: land, naval, air. Their development must be given priority."<sup>78</sup>

With such powerful support Sergeyev's RVSN was in the ascendancy. It was under-financed and experienced many of the same difficulties as all the other Service branches but RVSN was unique in that its weapons and troops were controlled by the president and Minister of Defence, respectively.<sup>79</sup> This gave the man in charge of RVSN the potential for privileged access to the political and military leadership. Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain, for instance, the number of meetings (informal and otherwise) between any two, or all three, members of this strategic nuclear triumvirate. However, it would be a reasonably safe assumption to make, given the acknowledged importance of the RVSN to Russia's security and standing within the world community that Sergeyev probably did have more meetings with Yeltsin than other Service chiefs during his time as C-in-C RVSN. This could have produced a degree of resentment in others, a feeling that RVSN had too much privileged access to top officials, a feeling that was perhaps further reinforced by the fact that money was spent on re-equipping missile regiments, but not, for instance, on supplying Ground Forces with tanks. Certainly, things were to change significantly when Colonel-General A Kvashnin became CGS in May 1997.<sup>80</sup>

In one of his final articles as C-in-C RVSN, published in December 1996, Sergeyev examined what had been achieved in the past five years, the current state of RVSN and looked ahead.

"If we take only the past five years, then the most significant [achievement] can be considered to have been the almost complete withdrawal of the RVSN groupings from the countries of the near abroad. By today, almost all the nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan have been destroyed ... In relation to the missile regiments left in Belorussia, their withdrawal ... we plan to complete in March 1997 ... The planned rearmament of the missile regiments with a new generation missile complex system has continued, even if not according to the ... necessary tempo ... and the most important thing - from February 1993, in accordance with the presidential edict ... we have begun a modernisation programme of the "Topol" missile complex system, which will form the nucleus for the future of the RVSN grouping and will maintain Russia's security into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The work is not easy, there's not enough money. Nevertheless, we have already finished the creation of the Russian corporation of producer-enterprises ... the material basis for the beginning of series production."<sup>81</sup>

Even though the tempo of re-equipping the missile regiments was not going as quickly as he would have liked - by 1996, whilst a further 3 missile regiments were put on combat duty, more than half of the force's missile complexes had passed their guaranteed operational service-life dates - nevertheless, he had a lot to be proud of. In some respects, he was helped by circumstances. Russia's weakened geostrategic position also helped raise the profile and importance of SNF in general, and RVSN in particular. War in Chechnya had also amply demonstrated how poor the country's conventional Armed Forces were. In contrast, RVSN were still operationally capable. This created the background for future conflict between the Ministry of Defence and the head of the Armed Forces' main operational organ, the General Staff. In what could have been seen as preferential treatment for RVSN, especially in the light of severe restrictions on defence spending throughout the 1990s, the seeds of the future conflict were sown.<sup>82</sup>

Sergeyev was keen to point out that RVSN "just like ten years ago [ie during the Soviet period] are ... able to carry out their allotted tasks" and that "there had been

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no reduction in the level of combat readiness".<sup>83</sup> He also mixed reassurance for the Russian readership with a thinly veiled threat for anyone else: "The might of RVSN, its ability to fulfil the tasks of nuclear deterrence, is the guarantee which maintains strategic stability in the world, cooling down the hot heads of those who suggest that Russia is not able to defend itself."<sup>84</sup>

Events away from the world of arms reduction treaties and modernisation programmes, however, were soon to have a profound impact on Sergeyev's career path. General P Grachev - who had been dismissed in June 1996 amidst rumours of sleaze, corruption and even murder - had been replaced by the former Chief of the Military Academy of the General Staff, General Rodionov. There was tension in the relationship between the C-in-C Russian Armed Forces (Yeltsin) and the newly-appointed Defence Minister who had been a career soldier and had not been noted as particularly strong ally of Yeltsin. This was evidenced in February 1997, when Rodionov publicly stated that unless more money was forthcoming for defence, Russia faced "the complete degradation of its Armed Forces".<sup>85</sup> Things did not improve and the relationship between the two men reached boiling point when, in full glare of the TV cameras, Yeltsin publicly humiliated Rodionov for a perceived failure to carry out military reform: Rodionov was dismissed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1997 and the following day newspapers carried the announcement that Sergeyev had been appointed in his place.<sup>86</sup> A new acting CGS was also appointed: the former North Caucasus Military District Commander, Colonel-General A Kvashnin.<sup>87</sup> Kvashnin often liked to refer to himself as being just "an old soldier" and, compared to a technical specialist like Sergeyev, this is fair comment. As a former District Commander - and not just any District, but the North Caucasus, centre of planning and the conduct of military operations in the Chechen War (1994-1996) - he was a man who had experience of controlling and supervising men in combat and knew what kept an army in the field. Sergeyev was a good, technical specialist and kept the most technical branch of the Armed Forces equipped and ready to perform its allotted tasks if required. However, given the threats to Russia's security revealed by the Chechen War, did Russia now have the right kit to face the right threat?

### **RVSN Russia: The Value Of Integration - Too Little, Too Late?**

There followed turbulent years for Russia in general and for RVSN in particular. Russia did not have to go far to seek its problems: economic meltdown in autumn 1998 threatened to plunge the country into deep economic, political and social turmoil; the outbreak of the Second Chechen War (1999-2002) and the consequences of NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 seemed to give further support to the argument that Russia was inadequately equipped to meet the potential military threat lurking in the wings. Russia adopted a new Military Doctrine in April 2000 and, in that same year, there was almost a state of open war between the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence concerning the future of the SNF. RVSN itself was to undergo a number of very important changes, not least a process of integration which on the surface seemed to improve still further its standing within Russia's overall defence organisation but, underneath, highlighted its basic weakness as more of a political deterrent than a "proper" military deterrent. Given the evolving security picture in and around Russia, would RVSN be able to survive intact?

Almost right away the elevation of Sergeyev to the post of Defence Minister impacted on the RVSN. On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1997, Yeltsin issued a decree on the unification of RVSN with the Military-Space Troops (VKS) and Troops of Missile-Space Defence

(RKO).<sup>88</sup> The new C-in-C of RVSN, Colonel-General V N Yakovlev, who had spent his entire career in RVSN, dubbed the unification of the three forces as "the first important step on the path of reform of the strategic nuclear forces".<sup>89</sup> The Military-Space Troops and the Missile-Defence Troops had previously been independent structures but the plan to unify RVSN with VKS and RKO was a comparatively old one:

"The decision to unify RVSN with VKS and RKO was worked out in the General Staff, in particular by the Centre for Military-Strategic Studies, no less than ten years ago, it received the approval of the Academy of Military Science and was recommended more than once by various commissions of the General Staff ... However, the stubborn resistance over the years of the leadership of PVO troops [?] and VKS did not allow the realisation of what had been planned."<sup>90</sup>

Yakovlev himself stated in an interview to the official daily newspaper of the Russian government, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*: "The thought of uniting the three structures did not arise today, but in the '80s. Unfortunately, it was not put into effect ... for subjective reasons - the unwillingness of the bureaucratic apparatus. It hurts, but we lost a lot of time needlessly."<sup>91</sup>

That the plan had been drawn up by the General Staff's own "think-tank", the Centre for Military-Strategic Studies, an important and well-respected body, made up largely of senior officers, men who have a mixture of practical experience in a wide variety of command posts and have a deep knowledge of the country's military machine<sup>92</sup> gave the decision of July 1997 added weight and, although it had been dusted down from the Soviet era, and was possibly only revived now that a RVSN man, Sergeyev, was Minister of Defence, it was still a decision which many agreed with.

The importance of uniting the three structures was commented on by Yakovlev towards the end of the year:

"The reform of the strategic nuclear forces was carried out through the integration of the means and facilities designed, above all, to carry out deterrence tasks, as well as the forces capable of maintaining the global and operational technical control of the military-strategic situation, warning of a nuclear missile attack and taking effective retaliatory action, sanctified by the military-political leadership of the country.

"Thanks to integration, we have created a fundamentally new Service of the Armed Forces: the Strategic Missile Forces consist of missile armies, military units and establishments responsible for preparing the actual launch and control of space craft, large formations and formations of missile space defence and a network of higher military schools and research institutions."<sup>93</sup>

In another article, commemorating the 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of RVSN in 1959, Yakovlev detailed part of the reasoning behind the decision to integrate the three structures: "... because of their similarity in structures, the presence of duplicating layers in the central control organs, use of a common experimental test base. The rocket troops have played a big part in mastering the cosmos with the assistance of Earth's satellites, carried into space by powerful rocket launchers ... And there's history, for example before 1982, the Main Administration of Space

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Means was part of RVSN. A further argument in favour of the unification process is that before unification, about 60% of enterprises in Russia all at the same time were working on weapons and military technology in the interests of RVSN, VKS and RKO."<sup>94</sup>

Under one roof, so to speak, a Service of the Armed Forces had been created which united all the strike, information and early-warning defence systems vital to the deterrence and retaliatory power of the state. A unified system of command and control for all three structures was designed, not only to raise combat effectiveness, but also to reduce manpower and costs.<sup>95</sup> The practical result of the integration process was the disbandment of 50 military units and establishments, resulting in a manpower loss of more than 5,000 men (more than 10% of them in December 1997).<sup>96</sup> In common with Sergeyev's policy of re-sourcing missile component production with Russian firms, RVSN now concentrated on equipping its units with one ICBM, namely "Topol'-M", as opposed to the six different types which had been the Soviet practice: according to Yakovlev, this would have the effect of reducing missile production costs by up to 2/3. By 2001 a further manpower reduction would save a further 650-680 billion rubles annually.<sup>97</sup> Following integration, there was a 32% reduction in the new Service's bureaucratic staff; three research institutes were amalgamated into one and two test ranges at Plesetsk were merged. At the end of 1997, the sum total of all these changes was impressive: "Before integration, the budgets of the RVSN, the VKS and the RKO accounted for, in total, 19.3% of the military budget but, after integration, and putting into effect the steps outlined, the integrated budget will be only 15.5%".<sup>98</sup> Such a reduction alone would save the defence budget 1 trillion 300 billion rubles!<sup>99</sup>

Making better use of the scientific-research and design bureaux attached to all three structures also played an important role in cutting back on duplicated effort. The Service would have to prioritise because behind the impressive-looking figures lurked a very real, harsh reality: every ruble had to be spent in the most effective way possible. As Yakovlev himself was forced to admit: "[in the past it] simply was not necessary to consider expenditure, but nowadays we have to count every ruble".<sup>100</sup>

In short, one of the main reasons why unification of the three structures took place in July 1997 was economic. Extra savings had to be made and one of the areas that money could be saved was in adopting the earlier Soviet force-merger plan. The merger was a further clear demonstration of the impact of the country's poor economic position on Russia's security and defence. There could also have been an important political reason for the merger: Sergeyev could also have been attempting to protect his former Service branch from being a possible target, as one which, all going well, would never actually see action. He may have thought it a wise policy to impose cuts through integration, rather than wait for harsher cuts to be imposed by someone less sympathetic to RVSN. Even so, the newly-integrated force was due to face a tough time, because of one major issue which no amount of cost-cutting could resolve: was the security that it was providing for Russia being bought at too high a price, ie to the detriment of the other Service branches? Certainly, by the middle of 2000, this was the general feeling amongst many senior military figures: General Staff statistics showed that between 50-80% of defence budget allocation for the purchase of new weapons and military technology went straight to the SNF.<sup>101</sup> Later on that year, in a session of the MOD Collegium, a general comment was reported to the effect that "it was underlined that today, when nuclear weapons, in the main, are a factor of *political* [emphasis mine - SJM] deterrence and

the threats have qualitatively changed, then the possibility has arisen to lower the level of strategic offensive weapons to a minimum".<sup>102</sup>

Whilst there could be no doubting RVSN's crushing military firepower, the actual use of that firepower, even for the writers of the Military Doctrine, was hard to imagine. After all, as had been freely admitted time and again, there was an ever-decreasing likelihood that Russia would face an all-out nuclear war and, indeed, even a large-scale conventional war looked a very distant prospect. However, various regional conflicts and the Chechen Wars showed that Russia could still very easily become involved in military conflict. In view of tight defence spending and the changing world picture since 1993, was Russian security enhanced by another successful test firing of another "Topol'-M" missile? Of course, the *raketchiki* and their supporters would undoubtedly argue that it was but, invoking Kvashnin's analogy concerning the rifle on the wall (it may look decorative but, once taken down from its mountings, it has to fire first time and without fail), then if RVSN was ever taken down and fired, would it then not have failed in its primary function: preventing large-scale war from breaking out in the first place? By extension, given the lack of money and the nature of the threat, Russia did not need rifles on the wall, it needed properly equipped, trained men in the field. The threat had changed and, as the Russian military looked around, growing numbers appear to have become increasingly worried that Russia was not ready to fight any war, except, arguably the one it wanted to avoid most: nuclear. Increasingly, despite the reorganisation of July 1997, RVSN was being made to look like belonging too much to a bygone era and, as the economy collapsed in autumn 1998 and Russia found itself embroiled in yet another war in Chechnya, the conventional nature of the real military threat to Russia was emphasised, the essence of which was reflected in the adoption of a new Military Doctrine in April 2000.

## The Changing Threat Perception & The SNF

An official ITAR-TASS announcement commemorating the second anniversary of the formal adoption of Russia's second Military Doctrine of the 1990s stated that:

"The necessity of introducing correctives in the military doctrine adopted in 1993 was brought about by events in the North Caucasus, the adoption by NATO of a new Concept, allowing the North Atlantic alliance to take military decisions without the consent of the UN Security Council. In the opinion of military experts, Russia's military doctrine reflected the concept of a peace-loving state and was a doctrine of containment. Deeply defensive in nature, the military doctrine at the same time does not exclude the use of all possible ways and means to conduct the fight [*bor'ba*], including nuclear weapons, to repulse exceptional threats [*isklyuchitelnyye ugrozy*], involving territorial integrity, sovereignty and, in general, the existence of the Russian state."<sup>103</sup>

A neater, more compact Russian summary of the April 2000 Military Doctrine would be hard to find! In essence, it explains contemporary Russian thinking concerning Russia's position in the world scheme of things: first of all, why the new Doctrine was adopted, because of war in Chechnya and NATO's action against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999; secondly, that, in the eyes of its own people, the Russian military doctrine is still profoundly peaceful in nature and, like the 1993 military doctrine, was designed to contain aggression, not unleash it and,

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finally, it unambiguously states that Russia will use all means at its disposal - including nuclear - to repel an aggressor but the threat of using nuclear weapons will be only realised under "exceptional" circumstances. It can be inferred from elsewhere that the nuclear button might be pushed if Russian territorial integrity, sovereignty or the very existence of the state was under threat.

There had been a number of very obvious signs in the previous year that Russia was set to replace its 1993 doctrine with one which would take into account the changes in the global and internal security picture. One was the publication of a draft military doctrine in October 1999; another was the adoption of a revised National Security Concept in January 2000.<sup>104</sup>

The original National Security Concept had been approved in December 1997. The new Concept highlighted Russian fears that Russia was becoming increasingly sidelined in international affairs, despite its history, culture and unique geostrategic position:

"The situation in the world is noted for a dynamic transformation of the system of international relations. Two mutually excluding trends dominate ... the first trend is seen in the strengthening of economic and political positions of a considerable number of states and their integration associations ... the second trend is seen in the attempt to create a structure of international relations based on the domination of developed Western countries, led by the USA, in the international community and providing for unilateral solution of the key problems of world politics, above all with the use of military force ... Russia is one of the world's largest countries, with a long history and rich cultural traditions. Despite the complicated international situation and internal problems, it continues to objectively play an important role in world processes, in view of its considerable economic, research-technical and military potential and unique situation on the Eurasian continent."<sup>105</sup>

Although the emphasis in this introductory passage may seem to represent old, Soviet-style thinking - particularly the "domination" of Western nations "led by the USA" - it must still have rankled that, as the largest part of a former super-power, the decline in their country's fortunes over the past decade had been so dramatic and profound. There would be little point in denying that Russia had and has the mentality of a great power (which is not the same thing as saying that it has the mentality of an imperial power) or that, thanks to its geographical position and huge potential, it wants to play a role in world affairs several ranks above the latest total of economic indices. Nuclear weapons ensure that Russia has at least part of that enhanced status.

The Concept analysed the main threats in the international sphere: amongst these, it listed attempts by "individual states ... to reduce the role of the UN and OSCE"; "weakening the political, economic and military influence of Russia in the world"; and "the eastward enlargement of NATO".<sup>106</sup> Analysing foreign threats to Russia, it stated that these included: "The expansion of military blocs and alliances, detrimental to the military security of the Russian Federation; the introduction of foreign troops ... on territory bordering the Russian Federation and states friendly to it; attempts to ignore (belittle) the interests of the Russian Federation in solving problems of international security, hindering its growth as one of the influential centres of a multi-polar world."<sup>107</sup>



It is easy to explain this in the light of NATO expansion in the East which, at the time was very much a "live" issue in Russian domestic politics. Rather than allowing world affairs to be dominated by the interests of one state, ie the USA, Russia has been very keen on creating a multi-polar world, where several power centres exist, one of which is Russia. Only in such a way can Russia hope to regain even part of the power of the former USSR. Nuclear weapons help to ensure that Russia can still lay claim to being one of the world's power brokers.

In responding to any future military threat, the Concept is fairly blunt and to the point: "The main task of the Russian Federation is to deter aggression of any scale against it and its allies, including the use of nuclear weapons. The Russian Federation must have nuclear forces capable of delivering specified damage to any aggressor state or a coalition of states in any situation."<sup>108</sup>

There is no indication in the Concept - except in the vaguest terms - of the conditions of nuclear weapon use and this is an important distinction between the Concept and the Doctrine. In the Doctrine, the relevant passage states:

"The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies, as well as in response to large scale aggression using conventional weapons *in situations critical to the national security* of the Russian Federation [emphasis mine].

"The Russian Federation will not use nuclear weapons against states party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty which do not possess nuclear weapons, except in the event of an attack on the Russian Federation, the Russian Federation's Armed Forces or other troops, its allies or a state to which it has security commitments that are carried out, or supported by, a state without nuclear weapons jointly, or in the context of allied commitments with a state with nuclear weapons."<sup>109</sup>

This wording was the object of controversy when it appeared in the draft version of the Doctrine in October 1999, largely because of the ambiguity of the phrasing. As in the 1993 Doctrine, there is no statement concerning the non-first use of nuclear weapons. The precise conditions under which Russia would use its nuclear weapons are left open: it would appear that nuclear weapons will only be used, for instance, if the state itself were under direct military threat. In this case, imprecision, not clarity, helps to add to the nature of the deterrent.

In a comment published not long after the formal adoption of the new Military Doctrine in April 2000, Colonel-General V Manilov, first deputy Chief of the General Staff, stated that:

"The provisions of the doctrine dealing with nuclear weapons do not just meet the vital requirements of Russia, but also correlate with the international obligations our country has assumed and the principles of nuclear strategy of, say, the US, UK and France ... The absolutely clear, extremely transparent essence of the warning ... is that nuclear weapons may be used as a response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against Russia and/or its allies, and also in response to large-scale aggression through the use of conventional arms in situations critical to Russia's national security. It is obvious that a critical situation could emerge as the result of aggression alone,

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as well as its consequences raising the question of the further existence, or end, of Russia. Finally, the integral formula of Russian policy in the field of the use of nuclear weapons may be reduced to the following: no aggression, no use of nuclear weapons."<sup>110</sup>

An interview of the man widely credited as being one of the main authors of the nuclear section of the Doctrine, Major-General V Dvorkin, was published a couple of months before the Doctrine itself was formally approved.<sup>111</sup> He naturally skirted round the question of authorship, stating that "the fundamental organ of the Commission [established to draw up the doctrine] was the Centre for Military-Strategic Research, General Staff and the apparatus of the Security Council," but as the newspaper identified him as one of the authors, his views on the subject are at least well-informed, if not authoritative.

In response to a question concerning the negative reaction of the Western media to the draft Doctrine, Dvorkin was keen to emphasise that it was a question of tidying up the wording, adding more "clarity": "Changing conditions behind the use of nuclear weapons have come about not because of Russia hardening its position, but more because of a not totally successful wording [*formulirovka*] of the conditions in the Basic statements of the Military Doctrine, approved in 1993."<sup>112</sup> In his words, it was necessary to remove the "negative guarantees" enshrined in the 1993 Doctrine to non-nuclear powers and make it clearer under what circumstances Russia would be prepared to use nuclear weapons. In short, according to the April 2000 Military Doctrine, Russia will use nuclear weapons under the following circumstances:

1. in direct response to a nuclear or large-scale conventional attack;
2. if its very existence as a state is under threat;
3. if its territorial integrity, or sovereignty, is threatened, or
4. if "critical situations arise in relation to national security".

In all of this, the role of RVSN was still crucial in responding to any future military attack on the Russian Federation, but comparatively little attention was paid to the role of the nuclear forces either in the National Security Concept or in the Doctrine. Other events were taking centre stage, not least the debate between the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence on the future role of the SNF. RVSN was not to escape unscathed.

## RVSN April 2000-June 2002

Accompanying these doctrinal developments has been recognition of the fact that, in the light of a number of very real internal threats to the country's territorial integrity, Russia must improve the combat capability of the general purpose forces. This is not just a question of tinkering with the Army, say, so that it can become more of an adequate policing force, rather of ensuring that it has an increased capability to fight, in the terminology of the April 2000 Military Doctrine "local wars" and "armed conflicts". The political leadership, especially during the period under review, appear to have come to terms with the idea that, in a very practical sense, little was to be gained in having large stockpiles of nuclear weapons rusting away in their silos still costing money, if the soldiers in the country's two designated most important "strategic directions" - the South-Western and the Central Asian - were not sufficiently trained, equipped, barracked, etc, to meet the threat there. Cutting back the numbers of nuclear warheads is not therefore a problem for the Putin

administration and, since the retirement of Marshal I Sergeyev in March 2001, this has been an easy course of action to pursue.

During this period there was a very acrimonious debate involving General Kvashnin and Marshal Sergeyev about the way ahead for the country's strategic and conventional forces, the public part of the dispute only being brought to an end by the direct intervention of President Putin at a session of the Security Council in August 2000.<sup>113</sup> At the end of the August session of the Security Council, a new development strategy designed to take the country's Armed Forces forward to 2015, was agreed upon and, although it did not result in the demise of RVSN, it was a Pyrrhic victory for Marshal Sergeyev. True, at the end of the meeting, he did seem pleased with its outcome, remarking that "the discussions are over and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [Putin] has passed the decision. It is well-grounded and substantiated within the framework of the country's economic possibilities. Not a single booster will be dismantled before it serves its full operational life." For his part, General Kvashnin was much more taciturn: "our main objective is the harmonious development of all Services of the Armed Forces."<sup>114</sup>

Marshal Sergeyev may look to have carried the day, but with so many of his zealously guarded missiles fast reaching their end of service life as well as the limitation of the arms control treaties, many missiles would have to be scrapped sooner rather than later. Putin had made a decision that Russia had to gear its military reform more towards developing its conventional, as opposed to its nuclear, might. In an interview commemorating the first anniversary of the August 2000 Security Council session, Sergeyev's replacement as Minister of Defence, Sergey Ivanov, remarked that it was only necessary to keep the strategic nuclear forces "at the minimum required level" but, "at the same time, analysis of the state and future prospects concerning the developing ... military-political situation shows that threats to the security of the Russian Federation in the next few years could be called forth by the rise of possible armed conflicts and local wars, in which basic tasks will have to be carried out by general purpose forces. The Army could be used ... in peace-keeping operations, in the fight against the movement of drugs, combating terrorist organisations, capable of presenting a threat to Russia's national security."<sup>115</sup>

Somewhat intriguingly, there is also the possibility that it was during this session of the Security Council that the decision to reform the RVSN was taken, eventually leading to its demotion from being a Service branch to an arm of the Armed Forces. In a comment to journalists in December 2001, Ivanov admitted that "the decision on reforming the Strategic Rocket Forces was adopted 1 1/2 years ago by the Security Council of the Russian Federation".<sup>116</sup>

In addressing the "leading staff" of the Armed Forces in November 2000, Putin made a clear reference to the importance of developing the country's general purpose forces:

"The Army and the Navy must be ready in all strategic directions to neutralise and repulse any armed conflict and aggression. And one very important task - the creation and stationing of groups of permanent readiness units in the South-Western and Central Asian strategic directions. Here the state of the general purpose forces is of primary importance. Such forces must have the latest technology."<sup>117</sup>

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This speech was made after a critical meeting of the Security Council on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000, at which the future course of the military organisation of the state was worked out. Putin addressed the session and remarked that "it is absolutely wrong to maintain a bulky and often ineffective military organisation in our conditions."<sup>118</sup> He also added that "the value of this question [military reform] is very great. This matter encroaches upon the security of our country, the army, the fate of the people."<sup>119</sup>

Based on macro-economic projections over the next ten years, the planned reform of Russia's military organisation produced by the Security Council envisaged a two-stage process. The first stage covered the period 2001-2005 and forecast a big drop in the number of personnel serving in the country's power structures: a reduction of 600,000 people overall: 470,000 servicemen and 130,000 civilian personnel. By 2005, the total strength of all Russia's power structures will have been reduced by 19.7%. Of the proposed cut, 365,000 will be personnel serving in the Armed Forces. Needless to say, all the Service branches were to be cut: RVSN, for instance, was forecast to lose 60,000 by 2005.<sup>120</sup>

The second stage would see what was in effect an increase in the military budget, to be spent on switching the emphasis to logistical support of forces and units: although the numbers of personnel would be cut, funding would stay at the same level, allowing more money to be paid to the men in the ranks, as well as more equipment to be bought, thus replenishing the old stock.<sup>121</sup>

In looking back at the importance of both sessions of the Security Council, Sergey Ivanov stated that:

"At the heart of forming a modern view of the Armed Forces and the state's military organisation were the decisions of the August and November 2000 sessions of the Security Council. Stemming from an assessment of the real situation, an analysis of the state and perspectives on the unfolding military-political situation, the possibilities of the state in militarily and economically supplying the Army and Navy, the tasks were corrected and steps taken to optimise the structure, composition and number of the Armed Forces ... All of this found expression in the approved ... plan for the construction and development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation for 2001-2005. This fundamental document provides for maintaining the country's strategic nuclear forces at the necessary level, permitting the guaranteed solution of nuclear deterrence and the development of groups of general purpose forces."<sup>122</sup>

This did not prevent C-in-C RVSN Yakovlev fighting a rearguard action to prevent the further demotion of his Service branch. Thus, in a number of public pronouncements, Yakovlev spoke about the utility of leaving the integrated Service's structure intact. In an official commentary concerning Putin's proposals in November 2000 to cut the number of nuclear warheads in Russia's stockpile to 1,500, Yakovlev stated that this reduction would "fit into the scheme" of Russo-American treaties on the reduction of strategic offensive weapons "very well". However, in terms of the future of RVSN: "In the past three years, we created an optimal structure of the Strategic Missile Forces, made up of the strike element, the military space command and the missile defence force. This structure is reliably protecting the homeland and should be preserved."<sup>123</sup>

A few weeks later, in an official comment on the increase, by 20,000, of the number of personnel to be removed from RVSN by 2005 as part of the continuing reform process, once again Yakovlev made the same point: "The fact is that the optimal integrated structure is more effective than when [RVSN] was divided and the past three years' experience has confirmed this".<sup>124</sup>

Finally, in his last commemorative piece as C-in-C, marking the professional holiday of RVSN, as well as noting the results of the year - 6 successful missile test launches; 44 satellites and space apparatus put into space; 650 million rubles' worth of savings in administrative costs, thanks to the reorganisation, etc - Yakovlev stated: "I will say only one thing [on this issue] that nuclear weapons are the basis for the country's defence strategy, the decisive factor in maintaining deterrence. Thanks to [its] nuclear potential, Russia remains a state able to fully maintain its political, economic and territorial interests."<sup>125</sup> Yakovlev also pointed out that the "weight" of RVSN in the country's defence budget had been reduced from 19.3% on the eve of integration to 11.2% by the end of 2000 - so much protection for such a comparatively small amount of money.<sup>126</sup>

For his part, in his address to "leading staff" of the Armed Forces in November 2000, Putin did not deny that the twin tasks of "strategic deterrence and the prevention of aggression" were being handled "successfully" but he also pointed out that "it is necessary to see other challenges ... Our Army and Navy must be ready to neutralise and repel any armed aggression and conflict in all the strategic directions."<sup>127</sup>

Renewed emphasis on the Armed Forces being able to cope with "other challenges" was a signal that the earlier Sergeyev versus Kvashnin debate had swung in favour of Kvashnin. Evidence that this was indeed the case appeared in February 2001, when the respected Military News Agency (AVN) reported that in mid-January 2001, Putin had approved the plan for the organisational development for the Armed Forces to 2005, which envisaged the conversion of RVSN to a combat arm of the Armed Forces by 2002, becoming incorporated into the Air Force by 2006, in line with progress to a three-force structure. Furthermore, according to AVN, anyone who made public comments opposed to the plan - and the report cited, by name, Marshal I Sergeyev, General V Yakovlev and the head of RVSN's fourth research department, Major-General V Dvorkin - would face the threat of instant dismissal. The then Secretary to the Security Council, S Ivanov, was identified in the report as being one of the main authors of the plan, along with his deputy Secretary, A Moskovskiy, and Chief of the General Staff, General A Kvashnin.<sup>128</sup>

If this AVN report is accurate, it helps to explain a number of things. First of all, Yakovlev's renewed emphasis on the need to retain the integrated RVSN structure - he had obviously got wind that something was afoot and attempted to forestall the attack, by emphasising how good the defence afforded by RVSN was and how cheap it was, in comparative terms; secondly, Marshal Sergeyev's apparent silence: after all, it was not long ago that he had fought tooth and nail against General Kvashnin on the whole nuclear versus conventional forces argument. Finally, the report also helps to explain the subsequent turn of events, ie the retirement of Marshal Sergeyev and his replacement by S Ivanov, which could be viewed as further evidence that the *raketchiki* had lost out in the power struggle to the *Genshtabisty*, the 'General Staffers'. From this point on, it was only a question of time before Yakovlev himself would be replaced and RVSN transformed further.

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And so it duly happened. Reports appeared that Marshal Sergeyev, as in the previous two years, had requested that his term in office be extended for another year, but on this occasion his request was turned down.<sup>129</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> March, *Interfax* reported that Sergey Ivanov had been appointed the new Defence Minister and that Marshal Sergeyev had become an adviser to the President.<sup>130</sup> On the same day, another report appeared which stated that, in line with a decision of the President, RVSN had "lost" Space Troops.<sup>131</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2001, Sergey Ivanov published his outline for the future reform of the Armed Forces and, to all intents and purposes, confirmed the speculation of the previous few months:

"In January 2001, the Russian president approved the plan for the development of the Armed Forces for 2001-2005 ... **the main aim of the construction and development of the Armed Forces** [emphasis in the original] is to orientate their structure, composition and number in accordance with the nature and direction of threats to the military security of Russia and with the financial-economic possibilities of the state. ... In accordance with the approved plan, in 2001-2005, there will be a planned transfer to a **three-force structure of the Armed Forces** [emphasis in the original] (Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy) ... the Strategic Rocket Forces will be transferred into an arm [*rod*], following the removal of the Missile-Space Defence Troops and the Military Space Command. On the basis of the latter will be formed a new arm [*rod*] of troops - the Space Troops. The land-based strike group of RVSN will be developed independently within the current structure of the land, air, naval components of the SNF." <sup>132</sup>

RVSN's reduced status was further underlined with the appointment - a day after Ivanov's article was published - of a "Commander": no longer was RVSN to be headed by a C-in-C. The man in question was Colonel-General Ye Solovtsov who, prior to his new appointment, had been Commandant of the Peter the Great Strategic Missile Force Academy.<sup>133</sup> Immediate speculation was that Yakovlev would be appointed Commandant of this Academy, but it was eventually decided to appoint him Chief of Staff for Co-ordinating Military Co-operation amongst the CIS Member-States.<sup>134</sup>

Old RVSN had now been revamped to become new RVSN (headed by Colonel-General Solovtsov) and Space Troops (headed by Colonel-General A Perminov, formerly Chief of Staff of old RVSN, and appointed Commander of Space Troops on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2001).<sup>135</sup> Sergey Ivanov, however, was keen to emphasise that even following this re-structuring of the country's nuclear deterrent force, much would still be expected from it: "**The main goal of the policy of the Russian Federation in the area of nuclear deterrence is to ensure the guaranteed defence of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Russian Federation and its allies. This is an inviolable position** [original emphasis]. Whilst carrying out military reform, reducing both the number of weapons and personnel, we will maintain the demanded combat readiness of the nuclear forces and, undoubtedly, the high standard of nuclear security."<sup>136</sup>

By the end of April 2001, RVSN had been divided into "two separate, but closely co-operating" arms of service, but the revamped RVSN still retained its primary function of securing the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>137</sup> As S Ivanov's reforms take hold, RVSN will continue to fall in size, even though its importance to the strategic defence of the country will remain high. As Colonel-General Solovtsov, reflecting the thoughts and words of his predecessors, stated a

few months after he became Commander: "In this difficult period which Russia is living through, only reliance on nuclear deterrence will allow it to ensure the balance of forces and the reserve of time to reform its Armed Forces and raise their combat might to the required level".<sup>138</sup>

Since its division into two separate arms, RVSN's Commander has been at pains to point out not only its importance, but also how much work has been undertaken since the reform was introduced, just over a year ago, to reduce costs and improve overall operational effectiveness. In his annual commemorative article on RVSN's professional holiday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, Solovtsov outlined what his force had achieved since June 2001:

"For about half a year, the Strategic Missile Forces have functioned as an independent arm. During this period, the formation of the command has been completed, a complex of measures on optimising the structure of the departments and services has been realised, the requisite legal base has been re-worked, purposeful lessons have been undertaken to improve the training of the operational staff of the central command points."<sup>139</sup>

Further underlining how much the force was actively re-structuring itself and saving money, Solovtsov also stated that the bureaucratic apparatus of RVSN had been cut by 32% and that there was now a whole new generation of officers serving in RVSN's command apparatus - average age 33, 90% of whom had higher military or specialised higher military education. Solovtsov also emphasised that the combat readiness of the units under his command, as in previous years, was still high:

"As a result of inspections, including 'spot' checks, carried out by commissions of the General Staff, RVSN command and formation commanders, all inspected missile divisions are combat ready, able to carry out their allotted tasks. About 95% of the large formations and 90% of the missile regiments were judged 'good'; there were no 'unsatisfactory' results."<sup>140</sup>

And yet his conclusion implied that despite the good results achieved so far, the higher military and political authorities might yet further downplay the role of the RVSN:

"We are adopting a whole series of comprehensive steps to solve existing problems, but we hope that our concern for the future does not escape the attention of the Government and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation."<sup>141</sup>

When he was presenting Colonel-General Solovtsov with the Standard for RVSN, S Ivanov, for his part, stated that "nuclear weaponry serves as the basis for preserving peace and preventing war"; thus, on the surface at least, Solovtsov's quietly stated pessimism appears wrongly placed. Indeed, according to recent speculation Marshal Sergeyev has succeeded in persuading Putin to allocate more money to developing RVSN as a cheap strategic alternative to counteract the recent US decision to pull out of the 1972 ABM Treaty.<sup>142</sup>

However, throughout the 1990s, a debate had been going on within the ranks of both the professional military and civilian experts about the future role of the naval

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component of the Russian strategic triad. Indeed, given the restrictions imposed by SALT-2, particularly on Russia's land-based ICBM force, the Russian Security Council took the decision in 1997 that by 2010, approximately 55% of Russia's strategic nuclear warheads should be carried on board the country's submarines and warships. However, with the departure of Andrey Kokoshin as Secretary to the Security Council later that year and Sergeyev's appointment as Defence Minister in May 1997, the emphasis was soon switched back to developing Russia's land-based ICBM force as the main component of the country's strategic nuclear forces.<sup>143</sup>

This issue has surfaced once more. The first deputy Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Yuriy Baluyevskiy, in February 2002 stated that the priority in the development of the country's nuclear forces would be switched back, once again, to developing the country's ballistic missile submarine force.<sup>144</sup> Given Baluyevskiy's position and the fact that he is not a professional navy man, this was an important indication of how an influential section of Russia's senior military leadership viewed the long-term future of the country's nuclear deterrent force and the utility of the land-based ICBM part of the triad. Submarines are much harder to track, monitor and, if needs be, target. This argument was further developed by one of Russia's foremost proponents of a greater role for the naval component, Captain V V Zaborskiy, former head of department, Operations Directorate, Main Staff of the Russian Navy. In September 2002, he cogently argued that not only was the SLBM (submarine launched ballistic missile) "invulnerable and effective", but also had a greater "future" than the silo-based missiles.<sup>145</sup> Given General Kvashnin's intent to reduce "strategic nuclear forces to a level of minimum sufficiency", there would appear to be scope for an increase in the more cost-effective SLBMs, at the future expense of their land-based counterparts.

## Conclusions

Over the past decade the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have undergone a tremendous period of change, possibly unparalleled in their nation's history. This statement is no less true for the main component of the country's Strategic Nuclear Forces, the RVSN. Although its history dates back to the Khrushchev era, thanks to its development throughout the Brezhnev period, it became not only a force to be reckoned with but, ironically, transformed itself from a military force which could be used to gain strategic victory in war to a force under Gorbachev which, because it was now so powerful, so accurate and so deadly, had become one which played a very important political role. In some respects, in the past 10 years under Yeltsin and Putin, it has moved even deeper into the political arena, as it allowed Russia both to continue the overall reform process "under peaceful skies" and to play a good few notches above the indices of power and influence, too commonly measured in terms of economic production. Russia has influence, arguably, through two main factors: its geostrategic situation and its arsenal of nuclear weapons, which still make it the second largest nuclear power in the world. These two facts combined ensure that Russia's voice, although undoubtedly weaker than it was 10 years ago, still has to be heard and reckoned with.

Over the past 10 years, RVSN have seen their influence and power within the country's defence system vary, as a re-prioritisation of basic defence needs has taken place. Initially, at least, it looked possible that a "common defence space" would function over the new CIS. However, thanks to an outbreak of national militarism - when every one of the republics of the fSU scrambled to create their own national Armed Forces, regardless of cost - the only country which seemed to



be even remotely keen on the idea of creating and maintaining a defence force for the whole of the CIS was Russia. This could have been a reaction to the fear of what would happen if the entire edifice of the old Soviet defence system was allowed to collapse, but it could also have been an attempt to retain influence over what was happening in the other republics. For whatever reason, the attempt did not succeed even though, at the strategic level, Russia was keen to operate the nuclear defences to protect the entire space of the old USSR. However, when Russia decided in August 1992 to create its own C-in-C RVSN, then the military experiment which had been the United Armed Forces of the CIS was at an end.

Even before the last nuclear missile had left Belarus' in October 1996, Russia had already formally approved its first Military Doctrine. Regardless of the merits of the previous Soviet stance, Russia's doctrine writers were already very aware that, for a long time to come, there would be no significant improvements in the country's general purpose forces. Therefore, the easiest and cheapest way to forestall aggression was to increase the level of doubt in the minds of potential opponents about Russia's policy in relation to the nuclear deterrent. It was not pretty, or even subtle, but as a policy it was cheap and effective: no one has carried out any large-scale aggressive acts against the Russian Federation.

Under its first C-in-C, Colonel-General (later Marshal) Sergeyev, RVSN enjoyed a unique advantage in relation to the other Services: his weapons were controlled by the president, even if the troops were under the control of the MoD. C-in-C RVSN had privileged access to the two most senior members of the country's military machine.<sup>146</sup> Sergeyev did take a number of important steps to ensure that RVSN functioned as best it could, not least being the re-sourcing of missile production within the Russian Federation itself.

The decision to integrate RVSN with the Military-Space Troops and the Troops of Missile-Space Defence in July 1997 was an interesting move - not only was it an old Soviet idea dusted down, but it also reflected the economic and political conditions of the period. This was not simply a "technical" decision. Economically, the projected savings looked very good, especially in a declining military budget but, politically as well, it afforded further protection to this increasingly "put on" force, compelled not so much to justify its existence, but to justify the money being spent on it. The underlying essence of the comments of Colonel-Generals Yakovlev and Solovtsov is "so much security at such little cost". In the strategic picture, there would appear to be a large grain of truth in this: it has been a baseline of Russia's strategic thought that, were it not for its nuclear arsenal, it would be involved in many more conflict situations than it is. The weapons perform more of a political than military role, but one which is no less vital for that.

Of course, by the time of the adoption of a new National Security Concept and Military Doctrine in 2000, Russia had been involved in yet another, comparatively bloody conflict within its own borders and the money being spent on Russia's nuclear forces did rankle with the military leadership, most notably General A Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff. While the mind set which found expression in the new documents confirmed that, to all intents and purposes, Russian nuclear policy had not changed, there was a much greater awareness of the nature of the conventional threats facing Russia in the future.

The most recent couple of years in the history of RVSN have seen it being further reduced in status. Very few of the senior military and political establishment, if any, deny the overall importance of RVSN to the security of the country at large, but

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in helping to tackle the real threats facing Russia, nuclear weapons are not the answer. Russia's nuclear arsenal has become one of the last victims of the end of the Cold War, expensive to maintain and, all going well, useless in any practical way. Its importance to strategic security has not lessened, but Russia is not the USSR: it does not occupy the same stature on the world stage; it does not have the economic base to maintain a large nuclear missile fleet, nor the ideological base to support the array of nuclear weapons. If its conventional forces were stronger, then the standing of Russia's nuclear force would diminish further. A certain minimum number of nuclear weapons will always be maintained, but it does look extremely likely that RVSN will become part of an air-space Service branch, as planned by the current administration. Events inside Russia seem to be moving inexorably to that final denouement for RVSN.

## ENDNOTES

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- 16 Nedelin, *ibid*, 62; "Voyennaya entsiklopediya", *ibid*. The importance of the discrepancy lies in the fact that the title of "Commander" would imply a reduction in the status of the Service from being a Service branch to an arm of service. There would appear to be no other indication that the force had been reduced in status.
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- 18 "Voyennyi entsiklopedicheskiy slovar' ...", *ibid*, 630; Nedelin, *ibid*, 62; "Voyennaya entsiklopediya", Vol 4, M.1999, 530.
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- <sup>113</sup> "Development strategy of the Armed Forces defined", (*Military News Bulletin*, No 8, August 2000, 1-2. At the session, Putin is reported to have stated that "when pilots do not fly and sailors do not go to sea, can it be said that everything is right and proper in the structure of the Armed Forces today?" In bringing the public debate between Kvashnin and Sergeev to an end, he stated: "I have been rather tolerant of the debates in the defence ministry and society as a whole ... now is the time to bring the matter to its rightful conclusion." (*Ibid*, 2.) For more on the use of history as a political tool in the debate, see Steven J Main, "It's the thought process that first went to war': Marshal I Sergeev, General A Kvashnin and the experience of World War Two. A commentary", (*Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol 14, No 2, June 2001, 49-70).
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- 143 V Urban, "'Yuriy Dolgorukiy' undercuts the 'Topol'", *Novyye Izvestiya*, 9 February 2002, 1.
- 144 Ibid.
- 145 V Zaborskiy, "Neuyazvimyye I effektivnyye", *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 30, 30 August-5 September 2002. A few other articles worth mentioning include, V S Stepanov, "On the destabilising factors of strategic offensive arms", *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 3, March 1994, 10-15; S Sokut, "Rossiya soberet yadernye sily v yediny kulak", *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 40, 23 October 1998; Rear-Admiral I Zakharov, "Okeanskiy raketno-yadernyy", *Morskoy Sbornik*, No 11, 2000, 23-7; V Zaborskiy, "Struktura triada", *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 31, 24-30 August 2001.
- 146 In a recent article in the highly-respected newspaper, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, the following statement was made: "When Sergeev was the minister [of defence], the Strategic Rocket Forces did what they wanted with the military budget, commandeering a lion's share of the funds for themselves," (*NVO*, No 9, 22-28 March 2002, 6). Even accounting for some exaggeration, it is hard to imagine such a situation arising unless the President gave it his blessing.

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