Putin approves new Russian military doctrine

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On December 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new military doctrine for the Russian armed forces. The document identifies the expansion of NATO and efforts to destabilise Russia and neighbouring countries as the biggest security threats.

As countermeasures, the paper advocates accelerating the development of the Russian army, the increased militarization of the whole of society, and the development of military cooperation with the other BRICS countries (Brazil, India, China, South Africa) and several Latin American states.

The new military doctrine is a response to the deliberate encirclement of Russia by NATO and the economic war against the country by the EU and US. Since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, which was deliberately provoked by Germany and the United States to increase pressure on Russia and to initiate a colonial-style redivision of the former Soviet Union, the geopolitical tensions between Russia and the NATO powers have steadily intensified.

Early last week, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to take the first step towards joining NATO by dropping the country's formal non-aligned status—an open provocation against Russia. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov then threatened that if Ukraine joined NATO, Russia could break all relations with the military alliance.

The new military doctrine was developed by senior military and intelligence officials headed by Nikolai Patrushev. Between 1999 and 2008, Patrushev was director of the domestic intelligence agency FSB. Since 2008, he has been Secretary of the National Security Council. President Putin signed the document in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces. In leading Russian media, former generals and officers have praised the re-evaluation of national security.

According to the website of the National Security Council, the new strategy corresponds "the changing nature of military threats." These threats were evidenced "in the situation in Ukraine" and "the events in North Africa, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan."

The Russian leadership is responding to the growing pressure of NATO with a mixture of threats and offers of cooperation. In their tone, the new military directives are much sharper than the previous doctrine from 2010, but stress their defensive character. Military intervention should explicitly only come into question after exhausting all non-military means. The document emphasizes repeatedly the importance of the UN and stresses Russia's willingness to cooperate with the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

At the same time, Russia retains the right of a preemptive nuclear strike, when a military attack—whether from nuclear or conventional weapons—immediately threatens the existence of the state. Russia has the second-largest nuclear weapons arsenal in the world.

The Kremlin reserves the right to military intervention, both in the case of a military attack on Russia itself, as well as on a military alliance partner. The most important military allies of Russia currently include China, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The expansion of the NATO alliance is classified as a major threat to national security. The Ukraine crisis is not specifically named, but a number of points refer to the security danger posed by "destabilized" countries, as well as potential members of NATO on the Russian border.

The eastward expansion of NATO was also named as a security threat in the military doctrine of 2000. It hardly played any role 10 years later, at the time of the so-called "reset" of US-Russian relations when Moscow strongly sought a political and military rapprochement with the US. Instead, the focus was placed on the fight against "terrorism" in Russia and internationally—an area in which Moscow is still offering its cooperation with the US and the EU.

The "core military threats" listed by the document include the "dramatic worsening of the military-political situation (international relations) and the creation of conditions for the use of military force;" "Obstructing the work of the system of state and military administration of

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the Russian Federation," and the impairment of the country's nuclear weapons; the "building and preparation of illegal military formations" that are active in Russia and neighboring countries; and "the demonstration of military force in the course of exercises on the territory of states bordering on the Russian Federation and its allies"—a situation that has repeatedly occurred with the numerous provocative NATO exercises in 2014.

In a special section, measures preparing Russia for a wartime economy are proposed.

The military doctrine lists many areas within the Russian military to be upgraded. For example, in Crimea, given its strategic importance, both ground troops and the Black Sea Fleet are to be upgraded. In the Arctic, where Russia wants to extract mineral resources, the military potential of Russia will also be developed.

The doctrine also emphasizes that the military reforms promoted by Putin in 2013 should be implemented. Details on military rearmament will soon be announced in the new programme for the years 2016-2025.

The massive rearmament programme that is required by the doctrine means a further militarization of Russian society. In face of growing social tensions, this military build-up is aimed not least against the Russian working class. For example, the "military-patriotic education of Russian citizens" should be strengthened and every Russian citizen be prepared to participate in military service. As in the West, in Russia the "fight against terrorism," which is also highlighted in the new military doctrine, serves as a pretext to increase state powers and expand the already extensive surveillance apparatus.

As one of Russia's "main tasks" in "the mitigation and prevention of armed conflicts," the document identifies increased military cooperation with the BRICS countries, and the countries of Central Asia and Latin America. Russia also wants to strengthen relations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the two regions whose secession led to a war with Georgia in 2008. The conflict is still one of the many ethnic and national conflicts in the post-Soviet space which could be provoked at any time and have the potential for a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia.

The defence of the so-called CSTO countries would be strengthened. These states, belonging to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) alongside Russia, include Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus, and also as observers, Afghanistan and Serbia. Cooperation with the OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) would also be extended.

In this way, Russia wants to participate in "the creation of a new security model in the Pacific region." In the last few years, this region has stood at the center of the so-called "pivot to Asia" by the United States, in which China is being systematically encircled militarily. The United States is building up its alliance with Japan, the Philippines and Australia, among others.

Russia and China have repeatedly held military exercises at sea in response. Reacting to the crisis in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia, Moscow and Beijing have moved closer together in recent months, both militarily and economically. (See also: China challenges US economic war against Russia).

In accordance with the new military doctrine, Vice Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov has made several trips to Southeast Asia in recent weeks. The Russian online magazine *Gazeta.Ru* commented: "The intensity of contacts with Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma and China speaks for the start of a turn to Asia." One foreign policy observer told the magazine that Russia was responding to US moves in the region: "Russia is moving closer to China and other players, while the interests of the United States are concentrated in South Korea, the Philippines, Japan and Australia."

Moscow also wants to expand its relations with Latin America. According to Antonov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu is planning a trip to Latin America in the coming year. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Cuba is also a move to push Russia out of this region of the world. Russia had traditionally maintained close economic and political, as well as military relations, with Cuba.

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