

PREPARING FOR WAR? MOSCOW FACING AN ARC OF CRISIS

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This Letort Paper explores Russian state mobilization. It first frames how Moscow sees the world and then turns to explore the range of measures that the Russian leadership is implementing to address a series of threats, both real and perceived, as well as numerous internal challenges. These are emergency measures, tantamount to putting the country onto a war footing.

It has been plain for some time that the world is seen very differently by policymakers in Washington, D.C. and Moscow. However, the differences are becoming evermore stark as the United States—and many of its allies—and Moscow increasingly draw different conclusions from the same bodies of evidence. This is true whether the topic is Euro-Atlantic security issues, such as NATO enlargement, missile defense, or—most notably—Ukraine, or whether the security questions are further afield, such as the wars in Libya and Syria. The Russian view contains a multiplicity of challenges, from the potential for war to erupt, to instability in the aftermath of U.S.-led wars of regime change. Many in the Russian leadership are particularly concerned about the possibility of such a regime change campaign being conducted against Russia itself. Russian President Vladimir Putin and others in the leadership circle have been explicit that they see events in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine in this light, and that Russia must learn lessons from these developments.

The Russian leadership has a Clausewitzian-style understanding of war, essentially meaning that it is a test of society. Their view is that despite Russia's actions during the war in Ukraine, and its intervention in Syria, Russia is not yet ready for such a test. This is because the Russian system, although in some respects powerful, is often dysfunctional. The leadership faces numerous problems, not only from Russia's Soviet inheritance including a limited and decrepit infrastructure, but also from post-Soviet problems, including corruption and passive opposition from the

bureaucracy. The military has also endured many years of underfunding and neglect. At the same time, there are other important pressures, such as longer-term economic stagnation that has developed into a sharper contraction over the last 2 years. This Letort Paper thus emphasizes the point that not only is Russian strategy not made in a vacuum, but also that the process of forming this strategy is itself a complex and arduous task.

This mobilization has been underway for some time and is best understood as a process of consolidation and preparation. Consolidation is reflected in a series of measures to strengthen the political system, both in terms of ensuring the implementation of orders (including the establishment of para-institutional organizations to conduct oversight of the bureaucracy and the firing of ineffective officials) and also ensuring resilience against potential civil disobedience and threats posed by extremism and terrorism. The Interior Ministry has conducted large exercises to prepare to respond to "Maidan-Style" developments in Russia, to seal the borders, and to deal with civil disobedience.

At the same time, the leadership is also conducting a major effort to modernize the military, including a major investment program, enhancements to command and control, and frequent no-notice exercises to test readiness and responsiveness. A spending program initiated in 2010 envisaged spending 20 trillion rubles—some \$640 billion at the time—on modernizing the Russian military and their military-industrial complex over a decade, including not only much improved service conditions, but also replacing Soviet-era equipment and increasing the share of "modern" armaments and technologies to 70 percent by 2020. This includes much of the heavy equipment designed for conventional warfighting.

At the same time, the leadership has sought to improve command and control, and combat readiness. A new National Defense Center was opened in

late-2014, a federal level organization that provides a single point of coordination for information and control. In the case of war, the National Defense Center would assume control of the country, coordinating all the ministries and agencies. In addition, the military has conducted hundreds of “no-notice” exercises from the tactical to strategic levels to test readiness, responsiveness, and coordination between the military, federal, and regional authorities.

There are ongoing problems, and despite the attempts to enhance the responsiveness of the system, orders are still implemented tardily, if at all. Furthermore, procurement is being postponed, and there is a continued resistance to some reforms in the military. Nevertheless, progress has been made toward the transformation of the security sector and the armed forces in particular.

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