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Putin Turns Attention to Military in Manifesto

By Alexander Bratersky

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Putin touring an aircraft production unit Monday while in Komsomolsk-on-Amur for talks on military issues. **Alexsey Druginyn**

Equating corruption in the armed forces with high treason, attracting private investors to arms manufacturing and providing better benefits to retired soldiers are some of the concepts Prime Minister and presidential candidate Vladimir Putin expounded on in his latest article, which was dedicated to military reform.

The 6,500-word article is the sixth written by Putin and was published by the government-owned Rossiiskaya Gazeta daily.

The previous ones covered the economy, demography and foreign affairs.

While highlighting some of the successes of the army reform started by his protege, Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, Putin has indicated that Russia will maintain an army at least

partially consisting of draftees, but will increase the number of professional soldiers by 2020.

The prime minister also took an alarmist tone, urging readers not to repeat "the tragedy of 1941," referring to the poor state of military readiness on the eve of the Nazi invasion.

He illustrated the cash-strapped status of the armed forces during the early part of his first presidency in 2002, saying he turned to two of the major national oil companies — TNK and Surgutneftegaz — to attract funds to maintain a strategic nuclear submarine base.

Putin said both companies "provided the necessary resources without hesitation."

The military budget has increased dramatically over the past few years, providing troops with new weapons and increasing their mobility.

Organizational reforms eliminated Soviet-era structures and reduced management overhead by nearly two times, Putin said.

Putin indicated that the armed forces would get 400 ballistic missiles, eight underwater strategic submarines and 2,300 tanks over the next 10 years.

"The military reform was successful and a new army has been created. The task today is to equip the army with modern weaponry," defense industry expert Igor Korotchenko said Monday.

Although Russia exported more than $12 billion worth of weaponry in 2011, the Defense Ministry has openly clashed with domestic producers over the quality of military equipment.

In September, armed forces chief of staff Nikolai Makarov said the armed forces would stop buying the legendary Kalashnikov machine gun and urged the Izhevsk-based producer to develop a new one.

In addition to the problems caused by outdated weaponry, corruption has reached cosmic proportions and remains the biggest headache for the country's military, chief military prosecutor Sergei Fridinsky said in early February.

He calculated that the armed forces have lost 3 billion rubles ($100 million) in 2011 due to corruption.

Putin, who called military corruption "high treason," also attacked "too much top secrecy" within the military as the main hindrance to competition, which "benefits selected businesspeople and bureaucrats."

"Whenever it is not against national interests as far as state secrets are concerned, we have to get away from the practice of closed tenders," said Putin, adding that military purchasing should remain under public control and punishment should be increased for disobeying military orders.

In November of last year, the Defense Ministry came under harsh criticism from President Dmitry Medvedev, who promised to fire large numbers of officials if orders to supply the armed forces with new weaponry were not fulfilled.

In 2010, the defense-manufacturing industry was able to supply only 70 percent of orders received. The ministry complained that while defense companies are trying to sell their equipment at high prices, the quality remains low.

The prime minister, who chaired a round table in the Far East on Monday dedicated to the military, said both officials and defense contractors "lack understanding."

The government plans to spend 20 trillion rubles ($667 billion) to buy new weaponry by 2020. Putin called the sum "a heavy burden," adding that "we will not have such an amount anymore," Itar-Tass reported.

His opponents have blamed Putin for turning the military-industrial complex into a bastion of loyalists. In the article, he said private business should be brought in to increase the efficiency of military production. "New private companies should become the source of technological breakthroughs that can change the industry radically," he said.

While private business involvement in military production is still limited, the country is planning to increase it, defense expert Sergei Melkov told The Moscow Times, adding that small innovative companies might be interested in producing parts for the military.

Melkov, head of a Moscow-based association of military and political experts, was critical of the idea of military conversion — where state defense factories are supposed to switch to churning out consumer goods — which was heavily promoted by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and later endorsed by Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov without much success.

"Conversion was not successful, and we should not dream about it having a bright future," Melkov said.

Defense expert Korotchenko said the Russian government will follow the example of the United States by creating an agency to foster military inventions, which has been proposed by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.

The agency will look like the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, which provides funding for competitive businesses working for the U.S. military.

"There should not be any reduced rates or special allowances: It should work based on market principals," said Korotchenko, an editor of National Defense and Industry magazine.

Putin also stated in his article that he favors a system of educational benefits and the opportunity for former serviceman to receive higher education at the government's expense.

"The armed forces should return to the traditional role of an important support of society," Putin wrote.

In outlining his vision for the future Russian military, he said the 1-million-strong armed forces would include 145,000 draftees — calling a mixed system a "compromise between the task at hand and current capabilities of the country."

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