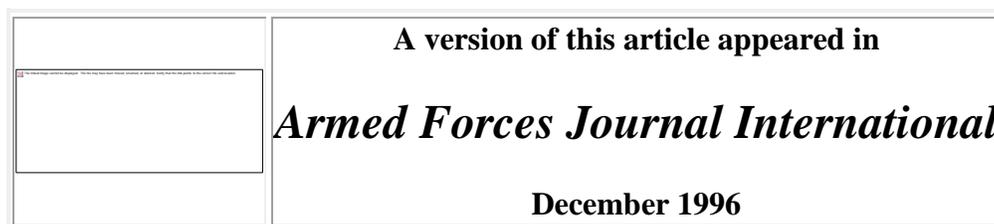

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Russian Minister of Defense Plans for a Smaller, Highly-trained, Modern Army Within a Decade

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Russia's Minister of Defense General Igor Rodionov wants the Russian Army kept out of contingency missions beyond Russia's borders.



General Igor Rodionov, the new Russian Minister of Defense, recently outlined his plans for a much smaller, mobile, highly-trained, professional army which will become a significant force within ten years. To do so, the Russian senior officer corps will be cut, new force structures will be adopted, expanded arms exports will provide funds for research and development, and the Russian Army will try to avoid contingency operations which detract from reform, restructuring and combat-readiness.



In a major interview with *Moscow News*, General Rodionov laid out his vision for the Russian Army in ten years. "We are talking about creating a small, mobile, well-trained army capable of carrying out its principal assignment--deflecting or

Russia's Minister of Defense General Igor Rodionov with U.S. Defense Secretary Perry

sustaining the first blow."⁴ General Rodionov's predecessor, General Pavel Grachev, preserved skeleton divisions at the price of combat readiness. The ill-trained, unpaid, starving army that stumbled into and out of Chechnya was the result. Despite much talk, General Grachev's military reforms were without solid content, specific direction or apparent implementation. General Rodionov is going to slash the ground forces to twelve combined-arms divisions which are deployable, fightable and combat-ready. Since financial constraints restrain the size of the ground forces, General Rodionov is determined to rid the force of its hollow divisions and convert the few that remain into a combat-ready, professional force that will serve Russia and serve as a basis for expansion in time of crisis. In doing so, General Rodionov is preparing Russia to fight her most-likely, if not most-dangerous, future war. Rodionov's ground forces must be affordable, deployable and expandable.

Affordable

General Rodionov plans to put his scarce financial assets into paying, training and feeding his forces and he calculates that he can adequately pay, train and feed only twelve divisions. He currently has approximately 80 divisions, although many are little more than some combat equipment and a flag. General Rodionov plans to push and expand arms exports as a means of keeping the defense industry alive and generating needed research and development funds. Integrated cartels within the defense industry will concentrate on prototype development. There will be few orders for new equipment from the Russian Army in the immediate future.

Deployable

Historically, Russia has relied on a large ground force to dominate the vast expanse of Eurasia. Rodionov plans to substitute deployability for a permanent presence around the Russian periphery. The earlier Russian MOD (Grachev-era) plan for centrally-based mobile forces was based on airborne forces. Rodionov is changing this concept to combined arms divisions which are deployable.



Rodionov's predecessor, General Pavel Grachev with President Yeltsin

These divisions will be air moveable, but not necessarily airdroppable. Rodionov has just announced the reduction of two of the five Russian airborne divisions by December. Despite the howls of protest from the Russian airborne community, Rodionov believes that the days of the airborne division combat insertion are over. Mobility, sustainability and combat power are the key components for future Russian ground forces and airborne forces need to become combined arms to meet the challenges of national defense.

Expandable

General Rodionov favors the establishment of a strong, professional NCO Corps for the Russian Army. Most of the training, discipline and performance difficulties of the Russian Army can be traced to their reliance on conscript NCOs. Although this is an expensive proposition, General Rodionov realizes that if a truly professional NCO Corps can be developed in the Russian Army, the potential for building an expandable force is realizable. If the NCO is capable of assuming lower-level leadership positions, the current force can be

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designed for expansion where platoons expand into companies, companies into battalions, battalions into brigades and brigades into divisions. General Rodionov will probably retain some division-sized equipment bases to support

an expanding force. This concept worked for the Reichswehr in the 1930s. With modifications, it can work again if the challenge is to deliberately expand over time to meet a vague danger as it grows into a real military threat. The strong, competent NCO is the key.

The Force



General Rodionov with Secretary Perry and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Shalikashvili.

What will Rodionov's combined-arms divisions eventually look like? First, there will be fewer tanks. For the past ten years, a debate on the future of the tank has raged in the professional journals of the Soviet and Russian Army. As commander of the Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan, General Rodionov saw that tanks had limited value on that terrain. In Russia's most-likely future wars, the terrain will probably not support large armored formations.² The armored division and tank army are no longer affordable, particularly since the formerly-dominant role of the tank has changed due to its vulnerability to modern weapons. Second, these new divisions will have a larger combat service and combat service support component. The Soviet-style division designed for short, intense combat will be replaced by a larger, sustainable division closer in concept to that of western armies. Third, the maneuver regiments will be replaced by maneuver brigades (although they might still be called regiments). This follows an on-going force-structure evolution of at least twenty years that Rodionov appears to endorse. The Russians feel that the maneuver brigade structure is better designed to fight separately on the non-linear battlefield of the future. Fourth, these divisions will be tailored to meet their theater-specific missions and there will not be one standard TO&E. The combined arms division may be primarily mechanized, air assault, light infantry or mountain. It will be deployable, which means airtransportable, but not necessarily airdroppable. Fifth, the divisions will make do with equipment in the current inventory for ten years. Funds from arms exports will keep the defense industry alive and support research and development. In order to keep up with the revolution in military affairs, the Russian Army will modernize with precision-guided munitions and information warfare systems as they can afford them.

Training and Combat Readiness

General Rodionov wants to pull the Russian Army out of contingency missions and concentrate on national defense. Over the past seven years, the army withdrew from the Afghanistan stalemate and deployed to Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Abkhazia, Ossetia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia and Chechnya. During these contingency deployments, training and combat readiness of the deployed forces slipped drastically. Further, the non-deployed forces were unable to train since all the training funds went to support contingency deployments. General Rodionov realizes that no nation can train, reform and restructure an army in the midst of contingency operations. General Rodionov hopes to concentrate on rebuilding his army for national defense and let the Minister of Internal Affairs and other Russian ministries worry about contingency operations (he is also likely to seek cuts in the forces of these ministries

to finance his army reform). However, withdrawing the Russian Army from all contingency missions at this point is problematic.

If Rodionov survives, his reforms have a chance of implementation and could lead Russia back to a position of military strength and competence within the next decade

How likely is it that Rodionov will be able to implement his vision? Currently, his vision looks like the only realistic plan that can save the Russian ground forces. However, his former chief

supporter, Security Chief Aleksandr Lebed, was recently ousted in a bout of Kremlin in-fighting. Lebed looked to Rodionov for strategic vision and sponsored his recent promotion to four-star rank.³ As the question of President Yeltsin's control of the country becomes more problematic, Lebed's power as an outsider should increase, and Rodionov seems well situated to survive within the current government or a future government. Rodionov is recognized as a competent Defense Minister and his potential replacements lack his credentials. If Rodionov survives, his reforms have a chance of implementation and leading Russia back to a position of military strength and competence within the next decade. His chief opposition will come from the Chief of Ground Forces, the airborne community and from the competing military and paramilitary establishments of other ministries and agencies such as the Ministry for Internal Affairs, the Border Guards, the Presidential Guard, the Federal Security Service, the External Intelligence Agency, the Federal Agency of Press and Information (similar to a National Security Agency with armed troops) and the Emergency Command. His reforms will initially prove expensive and will undoubtedly meet political opposition as well.

If Rodionov implements his reform, it will continue Russian reliance on nuclear deterrence, create changes in the way that Russia performs peace enforcement missions and encourage membership in regional security alliances. Financial reality is driving this change, but this may also be a response to the potential fragmentation of the Russian Army along regional lines.

Endnotes

1. A. Zhilin, "Igor Rodionov: Unpopular Measures Can No Longer Be Avoided", *Moscow News*, 11-18 August 1996, No. 32, 7.[BACK](#)
2. For a biography of General Rodionov, see Lester W. Grau and Timothy I. Thomas, "Russian Minister of Defense General Igor Rodionov: In With The Old, In With The New", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, June 1996, 442-452.[BACK](#)
3. Thanks to Dr. Jacob Kipp and Mr. Tim Thomas of the Foreign Military Studies Office and Dr. Rob Arnett of the Pentagon for their help and thoughts.[BACK](#)