



Russia Ponders the Creation of a Russian STRATCOM

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation regularly exercises the command and control of strategic weapons platforms (mobile and silo missile launchers, strategic bombers, and submarines), to include operational dispersal and the launch operations, (obviously with dummy warheads) before scheduled US strategic exercises. Russia has long been concerned with the US's Prompt Global Strike (PGS) concept, which the Russians believe is a US program to use advanced strike systems equipped with non-nuclear warheads to destroy an adversary's nuclear launch capabilities. (During the Cold War, the Soviets believed this feat would only be possible with the use of nuclear weapons, now, due to the advent of new and more accurate conventional munitions and delivery systems, the Russians believe this could eventually be accomplished by the US without crossing the nuclear threshold.) President Putin told the Federal Assembly in 2013: "We are carefully following the so-called 'Disarming Prompt Global Strike concept which can have negative consequences. No one should have illusions about capabilities to achieve military superiority over Russia. We will never allow this."

In order to prevent the US from acquiring a capability to deprive Russia of her strategic nuclear deterrence capabilities (without the use of nuclear weapons), the Russian Federation may be considering a reorganization of its nuclear command and control system. The accompanying excerpted article from *Moskovsky Komsomolets* claims that the Russian leadership has plans to create "a single strategic forces deterrence command" in the "very near future." This would entail the creation of a unified command for the command and control of strategic nuclear assets, similar to the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). The article explains that the Russian exercise preceding the STRATCOM Global Thunder exercise involved well-coordinated launch exercises executed by all three legs of Russia's nuclear triad (Strategic Missile Troops (RVSN), nuclear submarines of the Northern and Pacific Fleets, and the Long-Range Aviation of the Aerospace Forces). The author proffers the idea that the command and control of these forces may be improved by placing them under a single unified command, thereby decreasing the likelihood of a successful 'Prompt Global Strike' attack, and mentions how the idea has previously been considered.

At present time it is difficult to ascertain the likelihood of the Russian Federation executing such a reform to counter the PGS. It seems unlikely, given that Russia just recently cancelled plans to field the Barguzin rail-based ICBM missile system, as described in the accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax*. (The Barguzin system was reportedly intended to increase the resiliency of Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent, thereby preventing a US PGS attack.) On the other hand, the Barguzin cancellation could be due solely to financial reasons, or a belief that organizational restructuring alone is sufficient to deter the PGS threat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

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Soviet RT-23 ICBM rail-based missile.

Source: Panther - Own work via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1403242>, CC BY-SA 2.5.

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Continued: Russia Ponders the Creation of a Russian STRATCOM

Source: Oleg Bozhov, “В США начались ядерные учения: чем ответит Россия: В нашей армии может быть создано новое единое стратегическое командование (The US Begins Nuclear Exercise: How Will Russia Respond? A New Single Strategic Command May Be Created),” *Moskovsky Komsomolets Online*, 30 October 2017. <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/10/30/v-ssha-nachalis-yadernye-ucheniya-chem-otvetit-rossiya.html>

On Monday [October 30, 2017] the United States began conducting Exercise Global Thunder, a large strategic nuclear forces exercise. Washington officially notified Moscow about the exercise. Last week a similar training exercise of the nuclear triad, in which Supreme Commander in Chief Vladimir Putin participated, was held in Russia. Russia also notified the United States about this exercise. And although the American exercise [Global Thunder] was aimed at rehearsing the “Prompt Global Strike” concept, our exercise was aimed at improving the system of counteractions. According to Moskovskiy Komsomolets sources, this relates to the creation of a single strategic forces deterrence command in the Armed Forces.

...we recall that the United States has been working on the “Prompt Global Strike” concept for a long time. Under this concept advanced strike systems equipped with non-nuclear warheads are able to resolve the same missions which today are assigned to the strategic nuclear forces of the United States. Simultaneously, ballistic missile defense systems are developed and created which are yet another Prompt Global Strike factor capable of destroying the currently existing balance of forces, and thereby ensuring the global strategic dominance of the United States...

In this respect it is altogether reasonable to view Russia’s recent nuclear triad exercise as a step in this direction. We recall that during the maneuvers, interactions were practiced between the Strategic Missile Troops (RVSN), nuclear submarines of the Northern and Pacific Fleets, and the Long-Range Aviation of the Aerospace Forces. And the Supreme Commander in Chief conducted a launch of four ballistic missiles...However, one must assume that the main aspect here was not the launch of the missiles, but the rehearsal of the interaction of all of the nuclear forces. As confirmed by a number of military specialists, the plans of the Russian leadership include the creation in the very near future of a single strategic forces deterrence command. This unified command and control organization must coordinate all three elements of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces: the RVSN, the submarine ballistic missiles, and the Long-Range Aviation aircraft carrying nuclear weapons. In addition, this same structure must integrate assets of Russia’s ballistic missile defense, space defense, and missile attack warning systems...The idea of such a command was formed as early as the time of Minister of Defense Marshal Sergeyev, a veteran of the RVSN. But at that time it was not actually implemented due to political turmoil of every description and disagreements in the defense establishment (the generals seemed to be having a hard time coming to an agreement on who would ultimately head this single structure). Now the situation has changed. Now there is the political will, strong institutional leadership, and the military necessity to implement this idea.

Source: “Russia Needs ‘Nuclear Trains’ – Klintsevich,” *Interfax*, 6 December 2017.

“The topic is closed, at least in the short term. The design and experimental work on the Barguzin has been conducted. An experiment with a pop-up launch was successful. If there is an urgent need, our missile train will be on the tracks promptly. But for now, let’s forget about it,” the newspaper said, citing an informed source in the defense industry...“We need rail-based missile systems. This is one of the most serious elements of deterrence. The existence of such a system is seriously balancing. It’s impossible to determine where it is located. The Americans are unable to monitor it,” he said...



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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