Click to read: Defence Reform and the Russian Navy - NATO Defence College Occasional Paper No 17, October 2006.

In the introductory pages to this paper there is no indication of the author's (Yuri Krupnov) background, simply that he was attached to the NDC under the auspices of the NATORussia Council Fellowship Programme late in 2005. Without that background knowledge it is difficult to judge the motivation for this paper as well as the level of frankness in some of the statements. Overall the paper tends to lack depth and many of the key statements are not corroborated. Parts of the paper are confusing in that the author jumps from discussion of the pre-2000 situation when there was no finance for reform, to considerations of the reform objectives based on the circumstances post-2000.

Russian defence reform started in 1991 on a basis of ignorance in political and military circles of what was required and in a climate where the domestic and economic structures were subject to immense upheaval following change in the international world order. Krupnov rightly points out that Russia was militarily isolated whereas the former Warsaw Pact states had prospects for integration into western organisations such as NATO. The paper demonstrates that by 1998 Russia had recognised that realistic reform meant future Russian military forces had to be capable of operating with other international forces on peace support and counter-terrorism missions and that its threat focus needed to shift from a westwards European/Atlantic perspective to the Transcaucasus, Central Asia and the Far East.

Probably the most significant statement in the paper is not given due prominence in referring to the old and largely autonomous Soviet defence establishment that was used to having the state and society serve its needs rather than the reverse. Krupnov emphasises that the new realism in 1998 extended to the acknowledgement that defence reform was only a part of broader state reforms and that defence capability had to address real threats to the Federation but, importantly at that time, the size of the armed forces was not to be sacrificed for quality of equipment or support. He argues that this latter aspect is justified by Russia having porous southern and eastern borders of 13,000 km where the border guards need army support and hence Russian forces cannot be excessively small. Indeed, Russia is not expected to abandon conscription for some time.

However, there is an apparent and unexplained contradiction to an earlier statement that the reformed forces needed to be capable of defeating well-organised regular combat units,

presumably through better equipment, as technology is a declared key component of defence reform. The equipment restraints do not appear to apply to the strategic nuclear forces but the overall arguments are confused and may be a personal attempt by Krupnov to justify a priority for naval strategic forces.

With the change in economic prospects from 2000, Russia developed a strategic policy that led to the approval of a new Russian Military Doctrine that was less confrontational to the West but there are strong arguments put forward for retaining its nuclear capability, probably the last vestige of its former superpower status. However, the strategy lacked agreement on

the threats that was reflected in the new doctrine as well as over the concepts underlying Russia's national security. These disagreements are on-going and Krupnov attributes them to NATO's continued policy of expansion eastwards (and the adoption of an offensive military doctrine) whilst the traditional threat perceptions towards the West were bolstered by the USled war in Iraq.

The Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty has caused further difficulties for Russia. Implementation of CFE by the mid-1990s was forecast to shift the force balance towards Russia in that the ratio of Russian to NATO forces would be 1:2.8. After the former WP states joined NATO the force ratio changed to 1:4.5 to Russia's disadvantage. The paper claims that Russian military chiefs argue that they must be prepared for concurrent involvement in one sub-regional and one regional conflict in the south or east, whilst at least half of Russia's conventional forces and the large part of the strategic and tactical nuclear forces should be committed to the western districts. The author does not comment on whether this isd Russia's strategic policy.

Krupnov is clear that the level of trust between Russia and the US is not sufficiently high and that there is an uncertainty about future US policy. Interestingly, he refers to the US and not to NATO, although it is the NATO Alliance's Strategic Concept that is most specific about powerful nuclear forces outside the Alliance - an obvious reference to Russia.

The paper chooses to look at Defence and Reform context of the Russian Navy but gives no rationale for not taking an equivalent look at the other armed services. Krupnov deploys the argument that a strong Russian navy is necessary to underpin Russian Maritime Policy across the whole military and civil maritime spectrum but in reality it highlights the lack of agreement concerning the threat spectrum of the 2000 strategy and military doctrine. Having put forward this proposition, Krupnov then describes the necessary strategic and tactical development of the Russian navy and uses it as a justification that Russian naval reform will

require a disproportionately higher expenditure than the army or air force. Whilst the proposals themselves may be sound, without comparative analyses of the army and air force roles and development the priority argument for the navy is questionable.

The main difficulty with this paper is that the author has skated over a lot of the political reasoning that dictates the direction of Russian defence reform. There are a lot of relevant statements concerning the domestic, social and economic aspects but the main influence has to be the Russian view of future international relations i.e. the potential threats. Indeed, it is the lack of agreement over the likely threats that is bedevilling coherent defence reform despite Putin's assurance in 2002 that "we are moving from radical reforms to deliberate, future-orientated development of the armed forces".

However, until there is agreement by the political and military leaders on the essential Russian national interests, its future relations with China, the US and NATO, the consequent potential threats as well as funding, Russia cannot make a thorough analysis of the type and affordability of the armed forces needed.

As a consequence, this paper only offers a superficial commentary on the progress of Russian defence reform and offers little upon which to predict the future course of that reform.