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Future Challenges Faced by Russian Military

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JCSP 48

Service Paper

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 48 – PCEMI 48

2021 – 2022

Service Paper – Étude militaire

Future Challenges Faced by Russian Military

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FUTURE CHALLENGES FACED BY RUSSIAN MILITARY

AIM

1. This paper will examine the challenges faced by Russia to maintain and modernize its military in the light of dwindling resources, and recommend suitable measures for Canada.

INTRODUCTION

2. Russia is an important country globally because it impacts international policy-making and politics.¹ It is important to study the Russian force development plan and analyze the challenges to understand how Russia will maintain its military in the long term, given its dwindling resources.

Since its short war with Georgia in 2008, Russia has devoted a significant amount of resources to modernizing its military.² Russia has ambitious military reform plans under GPV 2027. This includes the following:

- Developing long-range capabilities
- Recruiting 476,000 soldiers by 2025
- Expanding the Rapid Reaction Forces
- Revolutionizing the Aerospace Forces

3. However, the recent economic decline from the pandemic negatively impacted Russia's defense budget and its plans to upgrade and expand the military force.

The Russian military spending has also decreased compared to the \$68.5 billion spent in 2011. Internal challenges like poor infrastructure, widespread draft evasion, and unpopularity of the Russian Government contributed to the weakening of the military. This paper will also analyze facts and figures to highlight how Russian military spending has significantly decreased due to internal and external challenges, therefore; it is becoming harder for Russia to modernize and maintain its military

DISCUSSION/ ANALYSIS

Russia's Military Budget and Defense Industry

4. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia became known for revealing reliable and transparent information about its military and the defense industry.³ For

¹ Jr, R. E. (2021, July 13). *Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part I: The Quest for Great Power Status*. Retrieved from NTI: <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-i-the-quest-for-great-power-status/>

² Hamilton, A. C. (2011). *THE RUSSIAN MILITARY AND THE GEORGIA WAR: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS*. Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College.

³ Timofeev, I. (2017). *Theses on Russia's Foreign Policy and Global Positioning (2017–2024)*. Moscow: Center for Strategic Research.

instance, the Russian Government publicly released a comprehensive State Defense Order till 2006 as part of the federal budget.⁴ However, since 2006, information about the Russian military is obtainable only through UN reports, verified surveys, and official statements. Therefore, the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures that shows data about Russia's military trends is the only authentic source for this data.⁵ In 2020, Russia's military expenses grew by 2.5% to \$61.7 billion (Figure-1), marking the second consecutive year of growth.⁶ However, the actual military spending in 2020 was 6.6% shrinking on a year-to-year basis. Russia has one of the most significant military forces in the world; hence requires a considerable budget to manage, maintain, and develop its defense wing effectiveness. Same as many other countries, the Russian economy has been suffering for the past several years, thus making it challenging to even maintain the status quo for its military forces. Monetary inflations, political chaos, and the most recent impact of the coronavirus pandemic could be safely assumed to be the primary contributing factors to this challenging situation: The covid-19 outbreak paralyzed the world economy and directly impacted Russia's budgetary allocations towards the defense sector. The effect of this reduced spending has more severe cyclic consequences to both the current and future state of the country's military forces

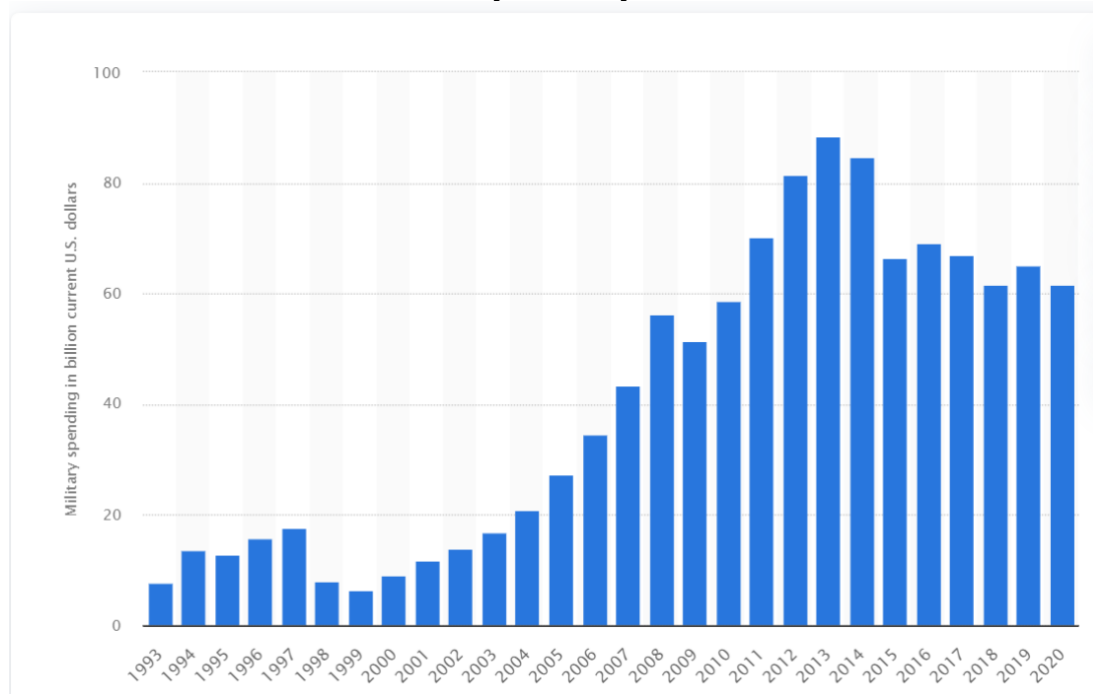


Figure 1-- Russian Military Spending (1993 - 2020)⁷

⁴ The Academy of Political Science. (2007). The Politics of Russia's Elusive Defense Reform. *Political Science Quarterly*, 597-627.

⁵ United Nations. (2021). *Military Expenditures*. Retrieved from UN: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/milex/>

⁶ STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sipri). (2021, April 26). *World military spending rises to almost \$2 trillion in 2020*. Retrieved from Sipri: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020>

⁷ Statista Research Department. (2021, November 8). *Military spending in Russia from 1993 to 2020*. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1203160/military-expenditure-russia/>

Composition of Spending by Expenditure Category

5. In the last 17 years, military personnel got the highest amount of funding (Figure-2), while only about a quarter of the budget was allocated to operations and maintenance.⁸ After 2013, expenses for research and development increased sharply, going from \$0.7 billion to \$1.9 billion. However, there were significant operations and maintenance budget cuts due to poor weapon quality and lack of maintenance.⁹ Nevertheless, the Russian Government could not cut down its spending on military personnel because it must provide various benefits and high salaries to attract military recruits.¹⁰

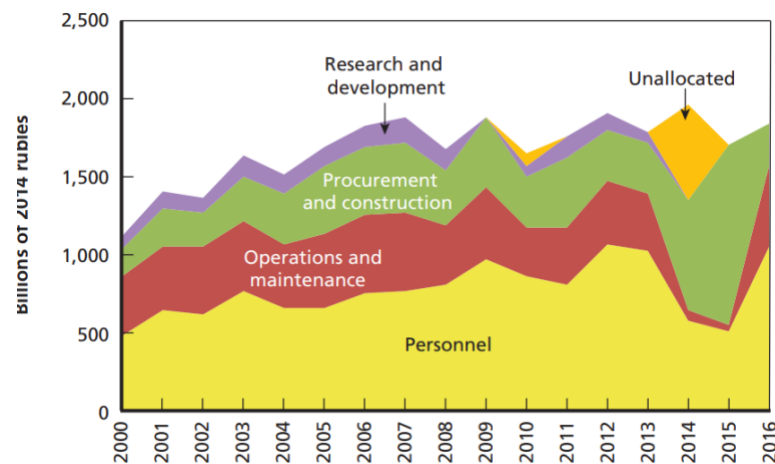


Figure 2 -- Composition of Spending by Expenditure Category

Composition of Military Spending by Service

6. If we draw a comparison of military spending by service, reported by Russia to the UN, the numbers vary drastically every year (Figure-3).⁷ For instance, undistributed expenses increased significantly, rising from 16% in 2012 to 64% in 2016. Land forces received the highest share of the budget by service, other combat forces got 12.8%, while the naval forces got 13.5% of the total budget. These statistics show significant inconsistency and poor allocations to the services due to lack of funds.

⁸ Keith Crane, O. O. (2019). *Trends in Russia's Armed Forces: An Overview of Budgets and Capabilities*. Santa Monica, California, United States: RAND Corporation

⁹ Felgenhauer, P. (2014). *RUSSIAN MILITARY REFORM: TEN YEARS OF FAILURE*. Moscow: Sevodnya Newspaper.

¹⁰ Redvers, L. (2016, November 3). *The high cost of avoiding the draft*. Retrieved from BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20161101-the-high-cost-of-avoiding-the-draft>

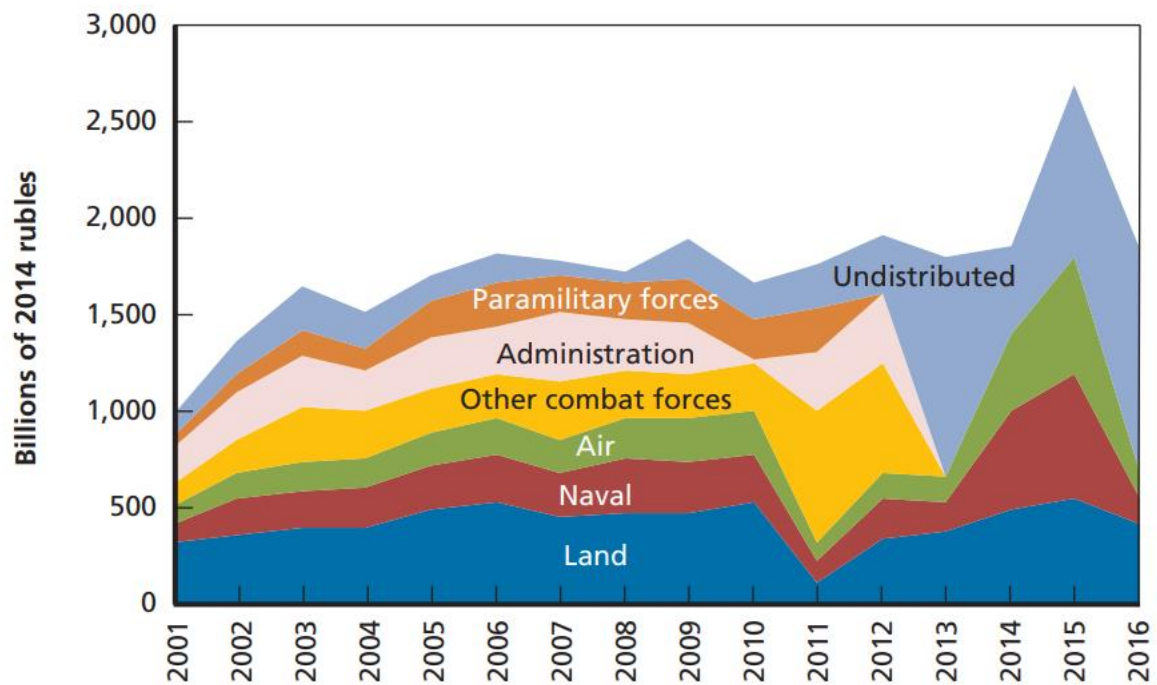


Figure 3 -- Composition of Military Spending by Service8

Future Spending

7. From the year 2011 to 2015, there was a sharp increase of around 10% per year in the defense budget (Figure-4). These budget expansions came to an end in 2015 due to sanctions imposed by Western countries along with the value drop of the ruble and decreasing tax revenues of Russia. Moreover, the current government led by President Vladimir Putin is against getting assistance from organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), so it has been projected that Russia would not be able to increase its military budget in the future.¹¹

8. Experts predict the military budget will experience only minor fluctuations by 2025 due to the modest GDP growth combined with the internal and foreign policies. In the near future, the military budget is not expected to exceed the budget allocation of \$68.5 billion (Figure-4).

¹¹ Hirst, T. (2015, May 20). *Putin is risking a stand-off with the IMF over a \$3 billion loan to Ukraine*. Retrieved from Business Insider: businessinsider.com/putin-is-putting-himself-on-a-collision-course-with-the-imf-over-ukraine-2015-5

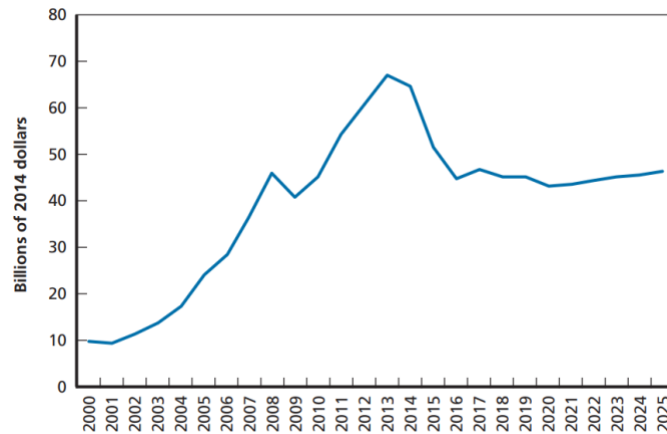


Figure 4 -- Composition of Military Spending by Service

Russia's Military Reform Goals

9. The Russian Government has undertaken various steps to modernize its military after the invasion of Georgia in 2008.¹² The current policies mainly focus on developing modern electronic warfare, recruiting skillful and qualified personnel, and bringing meaningful changes in the military structure.

10. Russia's military reform goals are covered in the 10-year State Armament Plans (GPVs) plan. The primary focus of the GPV from 2011 to 2020 was on providing more funds for the Navy and Aerospace forces, and offering professional training to recruits.¹³ However, the new GPV 2027 (from 2018 to 2027) focuses on bringing structural reforms to the Russian military and improving ground and rapid reaction forces like the elite Spetsnaz and Naval Infantry.¹⁴

11. The plan also shows that Russia wants to allocate more resources towards strengthening military mobility and upgrading legacy systems. However, experts predict that the global pandemic and economic crisis can adversely impact these plans.¹⁵ Following are the major components of Russia's military reform goals as part of the GPV 2027:

¹² Lavrov, A. (2018). Russian Military Reforms from Georgia to Syria. CSIS

¹³ Richard Connolly, M. B. (2018). Russia's New State Armament Programme Implications for the Russian Armed Forces and Military Capabilities to 2027. Chatham House.

¹⁴ Luzin, P. (2018, April 18). *Russia's GPV-2027 State Arms Programme*. Retrieved from Riddle: <https://www.ridl.io/en/russias-gpv-2027-state-arms-programme/>

¹⁵ Semenov, A. (2021, March 9). *Political Consequences of the Economic Crisis in Russia*. Retrieved from Wilson Center: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/political-consequences-economic-crisis-russia>

Development of Long-Range Capabilities

12. Russia has prioritized the development of long-range capabilities and missiles e.g. 3M-54 Kalibr and 9K720 Iskander-M due to perceived threats from the USA.¹⁶ Official documents show that the primary focus is on developing precision-strike weapons and hypersonic missiles like the 3M-22 Zircon. The most compelling driver for Russia's focus on expanding its precision-strike capabilities is that it feels threatened by the massive military powers of the USA including long-range precision strike capability. However, due to financial and technological constraints, it is not guaranteed that Russia will be able to fully achieve its goals of GPV 2027.

Recruitment

13. As of 2021, the official personnel strength of the Russian military is 3,569,000.¹⁷ Russian military aims to hire 476,000 new personnel by 2025.¹⁸ Elite units will get preference over other units to overcome the manpower deficiencies. Eradicating manpower deficiencies of Navy and Aerospace Forces is also expected to be challenging for Russia since this will require a significant number of highly skillful and professional personnel with trade-specific skillsets. Moreover, during the year 2017, Russia already missed the previous GPV goal of hiring 425,000 soldiers, so it's improbable that it will succeed in its ambitious recruitment goals of GPV 2027 as well.

Rapid Reaction and Ground Forces

14. Russia's Rapid Reaction Forces comprise the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV), Spetsnaz, and the Naval Infantry Forces.¹⁹ GPV 2027 has increased the funding for Rapid Reaction Forces to increase professionalism among troops and improve the equipment quality.

15. GPV 2027 also focuses on bringing structural and equipment reforms into the Ground Forces.¹⁸ At this stage, Russia is focusing on increasing mobility and firepower of the Ground Forces to ensure the military does not suffer the same setbacks it did during conflicts with Ukraine and Syria.

16. Combat units with professional soldiers have been a way of increasing combat readiness and effectiveness for a military force, so Russia wants more professionals

¹⁶ Plopsy, G. (2017, July 12). *Why Is Russia Aiming Missiles at China?* Retrieved from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/why-is-russia-aiming-missiles-at-china/>

¹⁷ Global Fire Power. (2021). *2021 Russia Military Strength*. Retrieved from Global Fire Power: https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=russia

¹⁸ Congressional Research Service. (2020). *Russian Armed Forces: Military Modernization and Reforms*. Congressional Research Service.

¹⁹ Global Security. (2020). *Rapid Reaction Forces*. Retrieved from Global Security: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/sbr.htm>

added to the ground forces under the GPV 2027.²⁰ Therefore, the Russian military is highly focused on increasing the number of professional soldiers in the Ground Forces.

Naval and Aerospace Forces Reforms

17. Although the Russian Naval Forces are getting lesser funding under GPV 2027, authorities are focusing on increasing the number of new designs and modernizing the existing equipment.¹⁸ Compared to the Naval Forces, the funding for Aerospace Forces is likely to increase. Russia wants to focus on developing advanced air-defense systems and long-range missiles like the S-400 and point-defense systems like the Pantsir-S1/M.²¹

Challenges and Dwindling Resources

18. Under GPV 2027, Russia plans to modernize its military and bring it up to par with international forces, especially countries like Canada and the USA. However, financial, technological, internal, and external challenges may hamper these plans.

Recent Global Economic Decline and Impact on Russian Military

19. Russia has been suffering due to a stagnant economy and thus dwindling resources since 2009.²² Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis, experts predicted a sharp decrease in the defense budget due to low oil prices and internal threats. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has predicted a 6.6% decrease in Russia's GDP due to the global economic crisis.²³ The pandemic is not closing to its end, so the Russian economy is unlikely to recover fully before the end of the year 2023, causing persistent challenges for the implementation of the GPV 2027 plan.

20. Furthermore, international sanctions are a serious challenge for the military industry in Russia.²⁴ Russia wants to mitigate the impact of these sanctions by focusing more on local production and military training programs, that will help minimize international interference.

²⁰ CSIS. (2021). *Understanding the Russian Military Today*. Retrieved from CSIS: <https://www.csis.org/programs/executive-education/global-policy-courses/understanding-russian-military-today>

²¹ VOI. (2021, December 5). *Russia Upgrades Pantsir Defense System Capability, Capable Of Dealing With Various Types Of Attack Drones*. Retrieved from VOI: <https://voi.id/en/news/110168/russia-upgrades-pantsir-defense-system-capability-capable-of-dealing-with-various-types-of-attack-drones>

²² Åslund, A. (2020, May 27). *The Russian economy is in health, oil, and economic crisis*. Retrieved from Atlantic Council: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/long-take/the-russian-economy-in-health-oil-and-economic-crisis/>

²³ Bodner, M. (2019, July 22). *Influence or profit? Russia's defense industry is at a crossroads*. Retrieved from Defense News: <https://www.defensenews.com/top-100/2019/07/22/influence-or-profit-russias-defense-industry-is-at-a-crossroads/>

²⁴ Regiony. (2016). *Rise and fall of the Russian military*. Regiony.

21. Over the next decade, Russia's economic performance will be a primary factor in deciding the fate of GPV 2027 goals. The government will likely cut down the budget elsewhere to accommodate the increase in defense spending, but the country's economic situation will determine how much funding could be allocated to the program.

Internal Challenges

22. Other than the external challenges from the West, Europe, and Asia, several internal challenges can adversely impact the implementation of GPV 2027.²⁵ These major internal challenges are:

- a. *Outdated Military Equipment.* Most of the current equipment and weapon systems of the Russian military are outdated, making it difficult for the government to modernize them.²⁶ Shortage of spare parts and qualified personnel have also contributed to deteriorating military equipment.
- b. *Poor Infrastructure.* Due to the decline in infrastructure, poor transportation networks, inefficient communication systems, and severe issues in the energy sector, Russia may not be able to achieve the goals of GPV 2027.²⁷
- c. *Draft Evasion and Health Problems*
 - Men between the ages of 18 to 27 have a legal duty to perform military service in Russia. However, it was revealed in 2015 that each year, 150,000 men were evading the military draft.²⁹ Russia has lost most of its manpower to Central Asia, Ukraine, and Belarus.²⁸ Under GPV 2027, Russia wants to recruit 476,000 personnel by 2025, but it's likely to miss its target due to widespread draft evasion in the past that has become a norm.²⁹
 - The issue of draft evasion is directly associated with the brain drain problem. It's called the "weapon of mass destruction". In Russia, a large number of professionals, skillful, and qualified people leave the country in unprecedented numbers, this leads to a shortage of qualified personnel to perform technical tasks, especially in the Naval and Aerospace Forces.³⁰

²⁵ Dr. Richard Connolly, M. B. (2018). *Russia's New State Armament Programme*. Chatham House. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/05/russias-new-state-armament-programme/2-trends-military-procurement-under-gpv-2020>

²⁶ Hollings, A. (2021, August 24). *RUSSIA'S HIGH-PROFILE WEAPONS ARE ALL SMOKE AND MIRRORS*. Retrieved from SandBoxx: <https://www.sandboxx.us/blog/russias-high-profile-weapons-are-all-smoke-and-mirrors/>

²⁷ The Borgen Project. (2019). *INFRASTRUCTURE IN RUSSIA FALLS BEHIND*. Retrieved from The Borgen Project: <https://borgenproject.org/infrastructure-in-russia-falls-behind/>

²⁸ Knorr, M. (2020). *Why Did Russia Let the Republics Go? Revisiting the Fall of the USSR*. Retrieved from Wilson Center: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-let-the-republics-go-revisiting-the-fall-the-ussr>

²⁹ Braw, E. (2015, November 9). *Russians Dodge a Bullet: How Young Russian Men Avoid the Draft*. Retrieved from Foreign Affairs: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-11-09/russians-dodge-bullet>

³⁰ France 24. (2021, June 3). *Activists in Russia say military conscription is a weapon for silencing dissent*. Retrieved from France 24: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210503-activists-in-russia-say-military-conscription-is-a-weapon-for-silencing-dissent>

- Internal military documents also show that the military discipline system has collapsed, leading to draft evasions at an unprecedented level.³¹ Moreover, health issues among the population have also led to the poor quality of Russian conscripts.
 - Lack of manpower had affected the Russian military since the early 2000s as Deputy Defense Minister Andrey Kokoshin admitted that the ground forces were not a reliable fighting force in case of an emergency.³²
- d. Rising Unpopularity of Russian Government. The increasing unpopularity of the current government led by President Vladimir Putin is also creating challenges for the Russian military. The country invaded two of Russia's neighbors (Georgia and Ukraine) and has threatened to use nuclear weapons numerous times in local and international disputes.³³ These aggressive tactics received a lot of negative publicity and criticism, leading to more draft evasion causing further lack of military professionals. Records show that people are not joining the military; despite Government incentives.³⁴ If the unpopularity of President Putin continues to increase in the future, it's expected that Russia will miss its GPV 2027 target of an increasing number of professional personnel in the military.³⁵

CONCLUSION

23. With the increasing conflict of interests between Russia and various western states and allies, coupled with the country's political intentions in the future, the development of Russia's military could present significant challenges to Canada and its allies.³⁶ However, dwindling resources and internal challenges faced by Russia are likely to hamper Russian efforts to maintain and modernize its military. These challenges include a weak economic situation, brain drain, severe regime criticism, and rising discontentment with neighbors as well as Western countries like USA and Canada. After the war in Georgia, Russia embarked on a rigorous process to enhance modernization and upgrade its entire military force. These changes focus on how the country could

³¹ Arbatov, A. G. (83-134). *Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles, and Prospects*. *International Security*, 1998.

³² Peck, M. (2020, April 23). *Moscow Is Taking Action To Combat Russian Draft Dodging*. Retrieved from The National Interest: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/moscow-taking-action-combat-russian-draft-dodging-147106>

³³ VOA News. (2021, December 14). *Russia Threatens to Deploy Tactical Nuclear Weapons*. Retrieved from VOA News: <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-threatens-to-deploy-tactical-nuclear-weapons-/6354408.html>

³⁴ Woolley, E. (2021, February 1). *The Russian Military is Facing a Looming Demography Crisis*. Retrieved from Russia Matters: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/russian-military-facing-looming-demography-crisis>

³⁵ France 24. (2021, September 18). *Putin's United Russia party is more unpopular than ever ahead of parliamentary elections*. Retrieved from France 24: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210918-putin-s-united-russia-party-more-unpopular-than-ever-ahead-of-parliamentary-elections>

³⁶ Blank, S., (2020). Russia's Geo-economic Future; The Security Implications of Russia's Political and Economic Structure. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 24(3), pp. 351-395.

effectively promote its readiness in combat operations, both on the land, sea, as well as air operations. Russia has ambitious plans under its GPV 2027 to bring reforms in all parts of the military. Some of the steps as part of the GPV 2027 plan include modernization and improvement of military equipment, proper coordination between the different defense forces, recruitment of soldiers, structures, and electronic warfare, development of long-range capabilities, recruiting 476,000 soldiers by 2025, expanding the Rapid Reaction Forces, and revolutionizing the Aerospace Forces. The recent economic meltdown in Russia due to COVID-19 is likely to force Russia to cut its military budget, consequently; the achievement of various goals under the GPV-2027 plan will be extremely challenging due to resource constraints. The economic collapse could force Russia to significantly constrain the quality and numbers of the forces, resulting in a weaker defense for the country.³⁷ Moreover, Internal challenges like poor infrastructure, widespread draft evasion, and unpopularity of the Russian government are also contributing towards the weakening of the Russian military.

24.

Canada needs to keep track of the Russian military's plans because Russia conceals its strategies and policies. Canada should focus on improving its national security policies to establish good bilateral relationships with Russia and at the same time remain fully prepared to tackle any threat emerging from Russia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Russia is certainly a dominant regional superpower with significant influence on the global political landscape. However, Russian status as a “regional superpower” is threatened by a variety of internal and external issues discussed throughout its paper. According to the NATO chief, Russia is a "power in decline," but it still poses a significant military threat to the world.³⁸ However, it could be challenging to identify the most effective techniques to protect Canada against possible Russian aggression with the current developments. Nonetheless, Canada should enhance its military capabilities and ensure the implementation of effective national security protocols.

26. Under GPV 2027, Russia is working on expanding its long-range capabilities, therefore, Canada should enhance its missile defense capability and integrate this objective in the overall air defense plan.

27. Canada should keep a close watch on Russia's modernization plans and capabilities and take appropriate measures to develop competing capabilities.

³⁷ Cooper, J. (2018). Can Russia afford to modernize its military?
http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/publications/unpubl_milex/Cooper%20Presentation%20SIPRI%202018.pdf

³⁸ Turak, N. (2021, December 16). *Russia is a power in decline' but still poses a military threat, NATO chief says*. Retrieved from CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/16/russia-is-in-decline-but-still-poses-military-threat-nato-chief.html>

28. In an event of Russian involvement in a war with any other country, e.g., Ukraine, it is recommended that Canada should remain neutral since it is still recovering from the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹ Moreover, Canada and Russia have multiple similarities and have been in a long relationship; restoring this relationship could be crucial in reducing the risks of an attack.⁴⁰

³⁹ Government of Canada. (2021). *Canada's engagement in Ukraine*. Retrieved from Government of Canada: <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/country-pays/ukraine/relations.aspx?lang=eng>

⁴⁰ Gresh, J. (2011). The Realities of Russian Military Conscription. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24(2), pp.185-216.

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- France 24. (2021, September 18). *Putin's United Russia party is more unpopular than ever ahead of parliamentary elections*. Retrieved from France 24:
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