

Russia's New Armament Programme - Leaner and Meaner

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Almost a month into 2018, President Vladimir Putin revealed that the new Russian State Armament Programme for 2018–2027 had been adopted. Considering the programme's importance, the announcement was surprisingly low-key. It was just a small remark the president made in passing in front of the cameras talking with a small group of workers at the Ufa Engine Industrial Association Plant (ODK UMPO) on 24 January.

The programme appears to be leaner, more focused, more realistic and more attainable than its predecessor. The defence industry is also better prepared today to undertake the new armament programme than it was with the preceding programme back in 2011, in spite of remaining shortcomings in arms and production technologies, productivity and efficiency.

This armament programme is the fourth of its kind since the formation of the current procurement system in 1996. The armament programmes are usually adopted for ten years but are replaced after the first five years of implementation. The actual programme has been delayed by two years due to falling oil prices and the difficulty of predicting the consequences of the sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 after it went to war against Ukraine. Comprehensive tests of new systems and equipment during the military operation in Syria have also led to some late adjustments in the last few months. Allegedly, the finished product is a vast document of some five thousand pages. As it is highly classified, data about the programme are made available on a partial and very selective basis.

The new programme earmarks 19 trillion roubles (US\$295 billion) for procurement, repair and development of armaments, military materiel and special hardware for the Armed Forces under the jurisdiction of the Russian Ministry of Defence. In nominal terms this is approximately the same amount as was allocated to the 2011–2020 armament programme. On top of this, the Ministry of Defence has another 1 trillion

roubles to synchronise and finance the construction of corresponding infrastructure. Allocations have been more evenly distributed between the different branches of service than in the previous programme, which benefits the Ground Forces at the expense of the Navy which got the lion's share of the old programme.

An inherited key target from the previous armament programme is that 70 per cent of the arms and equipment of the Armed Forces should be modern in 2021. One residual task is therefore to complete the transition from deliveries of modernised or updated versions of late Soviet designs to serial production of the new Russian-made designs that were developed under the 2011–2020 programme. Beyond these transitional arrangements, the emphasis of the 2018–2027 programme is on procurement of high-precision weapons for air, sea and land battle – including hypersonic missiles – unmanned air strike complexes, individual equipment for servicemen and advanced reconnaissance, communication and electronic warfare systems. Given these basic conditions, which arms and systems can the different branches of service of Russia's Armed Forces expect from the new programme?

Further development of Russia's strategic nuclear forces is a priority that had already been stressed at length in the previous armament programmes. As for the land component of Russia's nuclear triad, the percentage target states that 90 per cent of the ICBMs should be modern in 2021. In addition to the road-mobile RS-24 Yars (SS-29), in service since 2010, the light road-mobile RS-26 Rubezh is approaching deployment, and the heavy silo-based RS-28 Sarmat might enter service in the early 2020s. In the meantime, the R-36 Voievoda (SS-18) may possibly be modernised to extend its service life up to 2027.

Regarding Russia's Ground Forces, the testing cycles of the new tank and armoured vehicle designs T-14 Armata, Kurganets-25 and Boomerang are approaching their

end. Serial production and procurement will probably begin in the early 2020s. In view of the high costs of these systems, it is unlikely that their procurement will reach the quantities laid down in the original plans. Instead Russia will continue to procure the modernised T-72B3 as a gap-filler, and in the near future this main battle tank will probably be accompanied by equally modernised T-90Ms and T-80BVMs. Procurement of the Uragan-1M multiple-rocket launcher began in 2016 and is likely to continue, perhaps at a faster pace than at present. Preliminary testing of the Koalitsiya-SV self-propelled howitzer has been completed and it is currently undergoing preparations for state testing that will continue until 2020. Serial production will therefore begin in the early 2020s at the earliest.

As for the Frontal Aviation, Russia will continue to purchase Su 30SM and Su-35S fighter jets well into the 2020s. A small quantity of the light MiG-35 fighter also seems to be included in the programme. A full version of the fifth-generation Su-57 (formerly known as development project PAK-FA) with an upgraded engine is not expected to enter serial production until 2025–2027. Otherwise transport aviation will probably be a focus area under this programme, whilst deliveries of helicopters will be scaled back, as the Army Aviation became more or less saturated with new and upgraded helicopters under the 2011–2020 programme. Nevertheless, procurement of the Ka-52, the Mi-28N and its modernised version the Mi-28NM will continue under the new programme.

Less money and the persistent capacity constraints of Russia's shipyards mean that its naval ambitions will be held back. In spite of all current political gestures, naval construction of surface ships under the new programme will in all likelihood focus on more capable corvettes, basic Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates and Admiral Gorshkov-class frigates than on the proposed helicopter carriers, the Leader-class destroyer and a new aircraft carrier. To compensate for the Navy's continued shortcomings, Russia will continue to develop new weapon systems and improve the existing ones. Owing to the introduction of a new universal vertical launching system, more ships will be adapted to use both the existing anti-ship and land attack Oniks and Kalibr

missiles and the hypersonic Tsirkon anti-ship missile which is under development.

The renewal of Russia's air defence had already begun in earnest under the 2011–2020 programme. Within the long-range segment, Russia will continue to deploy S-400 systems. The time-line for the new S-500 system is more uncertain, but a first prototype might be built by 2020, according to plan. Within the medium- and short-range segments, procurement is very much linked to the ongoing conceptual development for tactical air defence, and several surface-to-air missile systems and combined surface-to-air missile and anti-aircraft artillery systems are being deployed or about to be deployed in the next few years. Some of the new air defence systems are also being adapted to Arctic conditions.

Russia's State Armament Programme up to 2027 demonstrates a more measured course on procurement and it is more conservative in terms of ambition than its immediate predecessor. The current level of financing has also been proved achievable under the previous programme. Given its modest tax level, Russia has more economic leeway to increase public spending than most countries. That this does not happen is more a result of the prevailing political will than of any actual economic constraints.

If the previous programme might be characterised as a once-and-for-all catching-up exercise, the new programme is more intended to consolidate progress already made in equipment recapitalisation. It signals a transition to a more regular procurement schedule. It is more focused on phasing in the new, delayed platforms it inherited from the previous programme than on design work and development of entirely new systems. Indeed, the programme focus has shifted from platform development to high-precision weapons and hypersonic missiles. This means that in order to take on a technologically advanced adversary, Russia is preparing itself to fight a contactless war as well.

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