



The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past

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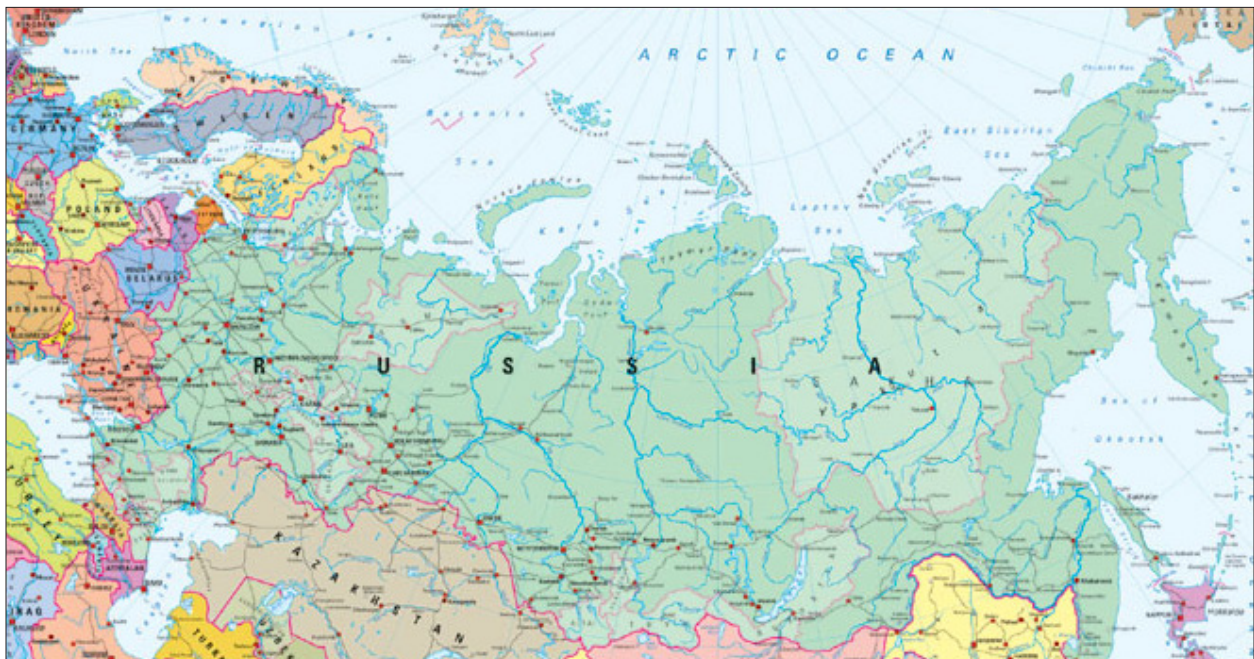
The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past

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More than twenty years after the dissolution of the USSR and the collapse of the Soviet Armed Forces, despite a litany of failed attempts by Moscow to reform and modernize Russia's Armed Forces, the reform launched in the fall of 2008 was both real and fraught with unforeseen difficulties and setbacks.¹ Unlike the previous efforts to conduct reform, which yielded structural changes and steady downsizing, the reform managed by the then Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, with *carte blanche* political support from the ruling duumvirate of Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, did not fall captive to limited experiments or quietly fizzle out as a result of institutional inertia or political opposition to the process. This paper therefore traces the nature of the problems encountered in this reform period, addressing the roots of Russia's limited defense policy planning capacity, and consequently seeks to outline and explain many of the reform rever-



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sals in the period 2009-12. Indeed, arguably these issues were so deeply entrenched that it was hardly surprising that Serdyukov’s successor, Army-General Sergei Shoigu, appointed in November 2012, initiated a number of reviews of the “progress” of the reform during his first six months in office.²

Although the reform of the Armed Forces resulted in significant changes, this was mostly structural in its nature, and gradually became subject to revision while containing a disparate set of aspirations. Creating smaller, more mobile, and more flexible forces, with improved combat capability and combat readiness, to use rapidly in modern conflicts, seemed a rather nebulous mantra for the reform agenda. Indeed, since 2008 the reform itself has undergone serial facelifts and reversals, experienced inherent contradictions and exposed numerous mistakes made during its ruthless, if uncertain, implementation.³ This chapter, therefore, examines the roots of the weak planning capacity in the Russian Defense Ministry to plan and support such systemic reform efforts, and draws attention to the linked weakness in operational analysis and the consequent endemic *bardak* (chaos) that marks the planning system.



Vladimir Putin (Above).

The Medvedev-Putin reform marked a final departure from the old mass mobilization system, which existed only notionally by 2008, with its vestigial features within the structure of the conventional Armed Forces, such as the existence of cadre or skeleton units, as well as the Soviet legacy aspects of manning, doctrine, training and equipping the military, opting for a “new look”

Dmitry Medvedev (Below).



based on smaller, mobile units, better trained, and equipped with modern weaponry and equipment.⁴ However, Putin’s earlier references to the need for an “innovative army,” even before the end of his first term in office, and other statements since by the political-military leadership that indicated a deeper recognition of impending reform and military modernization, left the task of fleshing out the real meaning behind such general aims to the capacity of the Defense Ministry to plan and execute complementary and detailed guidance to achieve these goals.⁵ Although the ruling tandem provided clear and consistent political support for the reform, the underlying weaknesses in formulating adequate planning in the Defense Ministry and in the General Staff exposed the reform to ridicule by its opponents, skeptics and supporters alike.

During the period 2008-12, Vladimir Putin remained cautious in lending unambiguous public support for the reform of the Armed Forces, restricting himself to comments more geared to-

“These weaknesses, often masked during the many years of failed reform attempts, are crucial to understand . . . [and] will likely limit defense reform planning for many years to come.”

wards stimulating the management of the defense industry companies, which would prove to be crucial in moving towards the realization of the high and arbitrary aim of 70 percent “new” or “modern” weapons and equipment by 2020. Yet his role was vitally important in the reform process. In his pre-presidential election article in *Rossisykaya Gazeta* in February 2012, Putin made clear that he understood the controversial and radical nature of the reform agenda. He explained that the decision to initiate the reform was based on recognizing that Russia no longer possessed Armed Forces suited to its evolving threat environment.



Dmitry Medvedev & Vladimir Putin

According to Putin, by 2008, if not before, it was apparent that Russia required a fundamentally “new army.” Of course, implementing this task would never prove to be easy, further complicated by the complex tapestry of tried and failed reform efforts since the early 1990s, but the political leadership appreciated the necessity of reform if not its deeper implications and challenges.

Moreover, no one advocated starting from scratch by abolishing the pre-reform military, and in this context the actual tasks of deconstructing and reconstructing the Armed Forces essentially led to the creation of a hybrid system straddling old and new. An embryonic superstructure emerged that did nothing more than await further refinement and internalization at some unspecified later date. The planning, however, lacked genuine consistency, often avoiding the more difficult questions or tinkering with tangential aspects until the planning capacity was exhausted, leaving observers to conclude that there was certainly no “master plan,” or grand strategy involved. The Russian Defense Ministry, carrying out the arduous task of reforming itself, did so much like a set of mechanics attempting to build a prototype futuristic car, with no clear guidance on the required characteristics involved.

Rather than focusing upon the precise contours of the reform and modernization and its impact on the Armed Forces, it is worthwhile examining the aspirations and challenges facing the entire process that Russian defense planners will likely face until 2020 and beyond (unless the course of the reform is derailed earlier), and considering some of the most serious mistakes made since 2008, before assessing the roots of the underlying planning capacity weaknesses in the Russian Defense Ministry. These weaknesses, often masked during the many years of failed reform attempts, are crucial to understand in order to determine the real limits of Moscow’s defense reform ambitions, while some aspects of this institutional weakness are embedded deeply in the political and bureaucratic system and will likely limit defense reform planning for many years to come.⁶

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Indeed, these flaws in Moscow's capacity to adequately plan, manage, test and conduct systemic military reform (encapsulating all security structures) have been long in the making, and arguably only as an indirect consequence of initiating real reform have these factors been brought to light more clearly.⁷ Understandably, when any modern state plans and implements such reform in its Armed Forces' structures there are elements of correction or modification needed in order to fine tune such changes and help the reform to take root. However, some of the corrections required by the Medvedev-Putin reform since 2008 are of such a deep nature as to raise basic questions about the competence of the Defense Ministry at almost every level.

What are the factors that serve to induce Russian military planners to effectively plan in the dark, with an attitude or mindset simply resigned to hoping for the best? Why are these underlying flaws not corrected, and to what extent could these factors stifle the success of the present reform and the stated goal of achieving by 2020 the level of 70 percent new or modern equipment and weapons in the table of organization and equipment (TOE)?⁸ Why should Western decision makers and analysts know about these institutional inefficiencies within the Russian system, and how might this serve to change approaches to defense cooperation with Russia in the future? If the system of planning is so bedeviled by numerous inhibiting factors, how realistic are the declared aims of the present reform?



Outlining the “New Look”

On September 26, 2008 President Dmitry Medvedev outlined five priorities in the reform, claiming that these would determine the future combat capability of the Armed Forces:⁹

1. Improving the organization and structure of the forces by converting all divisions and brigades to permanent readiness brigades, abolishing the mass mobilization principle and abandoning the division-based system.
2. Enhancing the overall efficiency of Command and Control (C2) and improving its effectiveness in the armed forces [which was later interpreted as opting for a three tiered structure: operational command-military district-brigade].
3. Improving the personnel training system, including military education and military science.
4. Equipping the armed forces, the army and the navy with the latest weapon systems and intelligence assets, primarily high-technology, in order to “achieve air superiority, deliver precision strikes on ground and maritime targets, and ensure operational force deployment.”
5. Improving the social status of military personnel, including pay and allowances, housing, and everyday living conditions as well as a broad range of support packages.¹⁰

Public statements by the political-military leadership since the reform began lack consistency, and often provide further evidence of planning issues within the Defense Ministry, contributing to a sense of confusion.¹¹ In November 2011 Army-General Nikolai Makarov, the Chief of the General Staff, defined the seven priorities facing Russian defense transformation:

- Creating a new and modern system of automated command and control.
- Developing and equipping the Aerospace Defense Forces (*Vozdushno Kosmicheskaya Oborona --VKO*).
- Re-equipping the Armed Forces with modern weapons and equipment in line with the State Defense Order (*gosudarstvennyi oboronnyi zakaz – GOZ*) to 2020.
- Introducing new types of approaches in operational and combat training, including new advanced combat training centers.



General Nikolai Makarov

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- Organizing the structure of the Armed Forces, improving support systems and increasing the number of units.
- Forming an optimal basing system and building modern military towns.
- Creating Military Police.¹²

The reform was thus amorphous, lacking clear overall direction and subject to constant change, tinkering and afterthought, as the Defense Ministry adopted an approach to conducting reform planning marked by sudden unexplained policy reversals. According to Serdyukov, these proposals often emerged from officers working in the Defense Ministry. His statements on how the conceptual reform agenda emerged suggest that the initial work was conducted by committee in the ministry, before taking soundings in the presidential administration and from the other power structures.¹³ Consistent reference was made by the ministry leadership to the conceptual framework of the reform being rooted in a study of foreign militaries, though no explanation was ever offered as to how the ministry planned to adopt “best practice” elements from foreign militaries and then adopt these to suit Russia’s distinctive military culture.¹⁴

It is worth noting the way in which the VKO appeared as the second highest priority by November 2011, again a feature of the reform not clearly set out or planned as part of the original reform agenda. Questions must be raised, however, about devising a reform plan and securing state backing to modernize and re-equip the conventional Armed Forces, only in mid-stream to form a new service branch that would slice off 20 percent of the finance set aside for rearmament. The VKO’s formation and its equipping with high-technology assets in the future will no doubt impact on the share of rearmament for the Ground Forces, and may well have serious implications for modernizing the Air Force.



Vladimir Putin & Anatoly Serdyukov Inspecting the troops.

A report published in April 2004 by the Foreign and Defense Policy Council (*Sovet po vneshney i oboronnoy politike* - SVOP) in Moscow also seemed to offer some guidance to the Defense Ministry in its search for reform ideas. The late Colonel (retired) Vitaliy Shlykov had headed a team of writers including Alexei Arbatov, Aleksandr Belkin, Major-General (retired) Vladimir Dvorkin, Sergei Karaganov, Mikhail Khodorenok and Andrei Kokoshin. The 70-page report was based on roundtables and went through several editions. *Voyennoye stroitelstvo i moderinzatsiya Vooruzhennykh sil Rossiy* (The Development and Modernization of the Russian Armed Forces) identified 15 traits present in the world's leading militaries absent from the Russian Armed Forces.¹⁵ The report was referred to in a letter by Serdyukov to Sergei Karaganov, the Chairman of SVOP, on September 30, 2009, providing evidence that the Defense Ministry planning capacity was so weak as to require a search of the military academic literature to formulate the basic conceptual approach to the entire process:

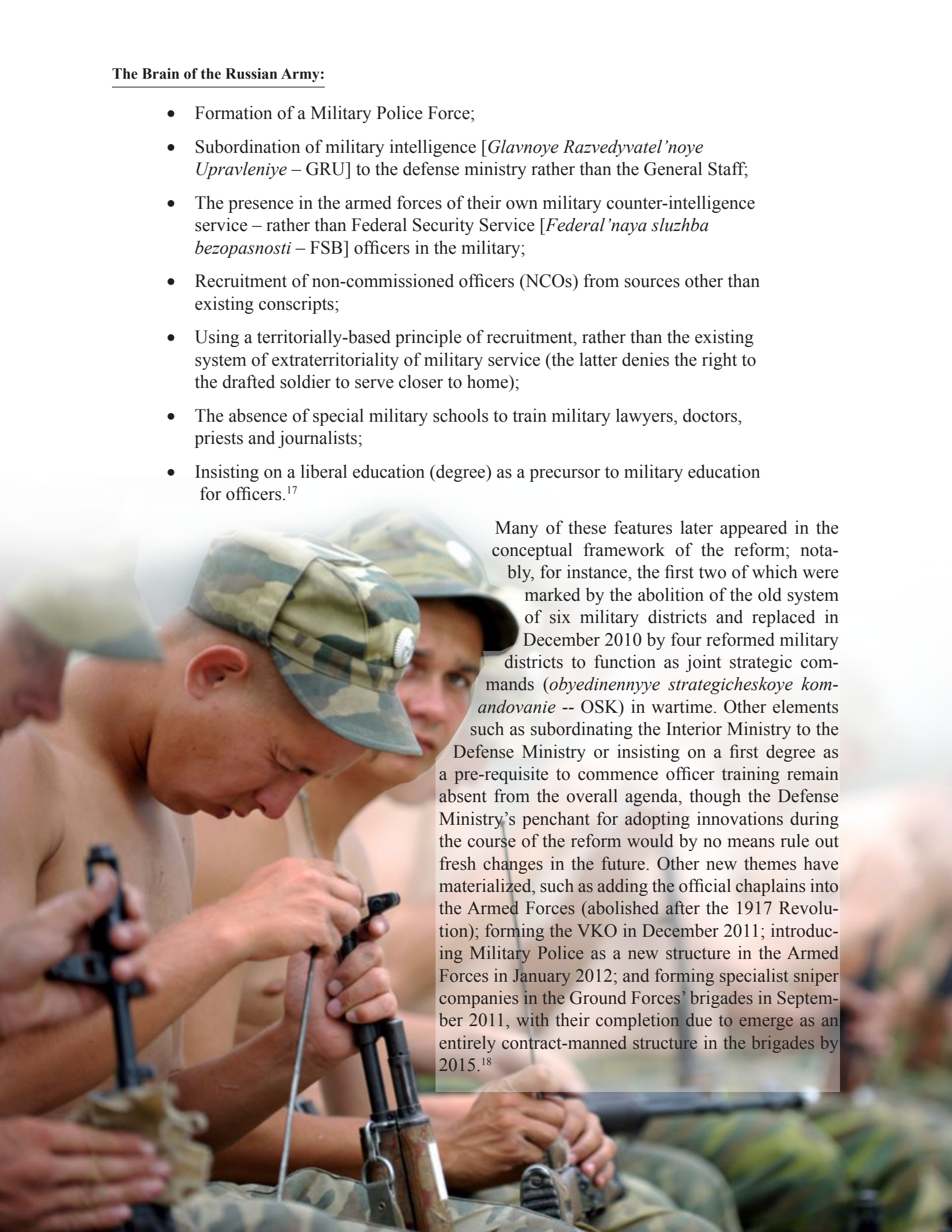
The issues which are raised in the report are important during the period of profound reforms in the Russian Federation armed forces. In the process of the transition to the new model of the Russian Federation armed forces, the Russian defense ministry is currently implementing the most important measures which are proposed in the report, including the transition to the new table of organization and establishment of the military formations, optimization of the command and control bodies, comprehensive technological rearmament of the troops (forces), improvement of the system of staffing, optimization of the system of military education, improvement of the system of mobilization planning and other measures.¹⁶

The 2004 SVOP report delineated these main traits as follows:

- Abolition of the previous system of military districts, which contributes to a shortage of generals and senior officers capable of managing combined-arms groups and adaptable planning, adjusting operational plans in response to fast moving events;
- Formation of joint forces commands; ensuring operational management and control of all military assets deployed in the theater of operations;
- Subordination of the defense industry to the defense ministry rather than other government entities, with parliamentary oversight and public control and transparency over the defense budget;
- The absence in peacetime of compelling private enterprises to maintain mobilization capacity;
- Concentrating the administrative and operational control of the armed forces in the hands of a civilian defense minister;
- Subordination of the interior troops to the defense ministry;
- Granting the exclusive right to the armed forces to military titles and wearing military uniforms, rather than permitting other power ministries to do so;
- The presence of specially trained mountain troops;

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- Formation of a Military Police Force;
- Subordination of military intelligence [*Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye* – GRU] to the defense ministry rather than the General Staff;
- The presence in the armed forces of their own military counter-intelligence service – rather than Federal Security Service [*Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti* – FSB] officers in the military;
- Recruitment of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from sources other than existing conscripts;
- Using a territorially-based principle of recruitment, rather than the existing system of extraterritoriality of military service (the latter denies the right to the drafted soldier to serve closer to home);
- The absence of special military schools to train military lawyers, doctors, priests and journalists;
- Insisting on a liberal education (degree) as a precursor to military education for officers.¹⁷



Many of these features later appeared in the conceptual framework of the reform; notably, for instance, the first two of which were marked by the abolition of the old system of six military districts and replaced in December 2010 by four reformed military districts to function as joint strategic commands (*obyyedinennyye strategicheskoye komandovanie* -- OSK) in wartime. Other elements such as subordinating the Interior Ministry to the Defense Ministry or insisting on a first degree as a pre-requisite to commence officer training remain absent from the overall agenda, though the Defense Ministry's penchant for adopting innovations during the course of the reform would by no means rule out fresh changes in the future. Other new themes have materialized, such as adding the official chaplains into the Armed Forces (abolished after the 1917 Revolution); forming the VKO in December 2011; introducing Military Police as a new structure in the Armed Forces in January 2012; and forming specialist sniper companies in the Ground Forces' brigades in September 2011, with their completion due to emerge as an entirely contract-manned structure in the brigades by 2015.¹⁸

There are certainly positive features of the reform, drawing upon earlier failed reform efforts, primarily the effort to rationalize and streamline the structure of the Armed Forces, as well as paying more attention to combat support and combat service support, along with the military educational system.¹⁹ Serdyukov's approach to reform depended on a recognition that the reduction in the overall size of manpower was inevitable. In this sense, the initial planning in 2008 to reduce the officer corps to 150,000 in a notional total of one million seemed sensible, though adding more officers at a later stage undermined the logic of the argument or justifications used to support this policy. The system of military districts has been simplified, reduced from six to four, functioning as OSKs during combat operations, which will lessen inter-service rivalry and increase the trend towards genuinely joint operations in the future involving Defense Ministry forces and security forces drawn from other power ministries.²⁰ Military chaplains and Military Police were introduced, overcoming stiff resistance to such plans, in an effort to raise the standards of morale and discipline among military personnel. The number of Army psychologists was also increased to 3000. Military education has also been targeted in pursuit of higher standards among officers.²¹

Combat service support also benefited from the decision to free up more time for training by releasing soldiers from non-military duties, including cleaning and catering. Consequently, "the norms of the provisions of the servicemen are determined by orders of the defense ministry, but the soldiers are fed by outside organizations, which conclude contracts with Voyentorg (a defense ministry dependent trading company) who organize the entire process, including the food delivery, preparation of the meal, and its distribution to the servicemen. Goodbye to poor meals!"²² In January 2012 pay was been increased for officers and soldiers. Equally, there is more emphasis placed on physical fitness among officers and soldiers to cope with the demands of increased training.²³ Arguably the most positive aspect of the reform was to introduce real change in the Armed Forces.

The Roots of Russian Military Planning *Bardak*

Russian Defense Ministry reform planning could have been anticipated to be weak at some level, reflecting the absence of progress on military reform since the early 1990s, as neither the Defense Ministry, Civil Service nor other government departments had experienced successful reform programs. However, the planning *bardak* that became so sharply exposed by the first genuine effort to reform the conventional Armed Forces cannot simply be explained due to a lack of experience in pursuing such efforts, or other variables such as the personalities involved. Here it is important to first identify a significant systemic weakness in Russian defense planning that finds its origins in the Soviet era and, in effect, renders the planning processes blind: specifically the absence of reliable military statistics.

Absence of Reliable Military Statistics and Obsessive Secrecy

At first glance it may appear an abstract point, but as Western defense planning practitioners appreciate, military statistics, in fact, forms the very basis of the defense planning process. Without it the process is at best based upon guesswork and at worst the results are limited, and this lack of a statistical framework for Russian planners results in confusion and serial experiment. Military statistics is a specialist field that allows the study of data and the formulation of planning based

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on the use and analysis of such data. David Mikkleson found in 1968 that the duty performance of military officers, for instance, could be improved by developing a better understanding of experimental statistics. He explained that the role statistics in the field experimentation conducted by the US Army Combat Developments Command Experimentation Center typified the approach involved; to improve standards among US officers, Mikkleson's study demonstrated the utility of statistical techniques and measures of performance during field experimentation.²⁴

Defense Ministry planning staffs require reliable and accurate military statistics in order to conduct proper planning. Its importance cannot be over-emphasized, and any attempt by policy planners to engage in the formulation of a long-term reform strategy that is not grounded in proper and reliable military statistics would certainly yield unpredictable results, waste resources, and result in additional time expended correcting and adjusting such planning. It dooms the officials involved in attempting to carry out planning and devise its implementation strategies to perpetual unscientific experiments.

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Indeed, the problems related to Russian military statistics stem from the mid-1920s, and this was reinforced during Stalin's period in power, with the obsessive secrecy which developed within the Soviet State in its approach to a wide spectrum of issues, including in the area of defense and economic planning. Statistics, per se, gave way to “full registration,” and the resulting statistical farce. Military statistics (*voyennaya statistika*) was removed from the curricula of military academies around this time; for instance, at the Frunze Academy the teaching of military statistics was replaced by military geography, only preserving socio-economic statistics in the military economy faculty (not attended by most of the faculty students –future Red Army officers). In fact, “statistics” only featured in the second year of the curriculum in the Military-Financial Faculty (*voenno-finansovyi fakul'tet*) at the Frunze Academy.²⁵

Consequently, during this period a whole generation of Soviet General Staff officers experienced deterioration in the knowledge base in comparison with the Tsarist era. By the late Soviet period military encyclopedias restricted themselves to cursory entries on *voyennaya statistika*. In the final edition of the Soviet Military Encyclopedia the reference to statistical methodology was removed, and the entry on the tools of military statistics (*tabel'srochnykh donesenii*) offered only a remarkable and vague observation about the “combat” nature of the tools.²⁶

More recently, Mark Harrison, a researcher in at the University of Warwick (UK), addressed the issue of the burden of secrecy on the Soviet system and the lack of accurate military statistics or accountability:

The Soviet military budget lay deep inside a mountain of secrets. Into the mountain led many tunnels, but most of them went nowhere. Because of the mountain, people could not get by. They could not see where they were going or where they had come from. They could not find each other to build businesses, networks, or markets. They could not learn what was going on over the mountain, in other regions or countries. A lot of people lived under the mountain, but those that did were lost in darkness, cut off from the light. The most precious resources of the country lay under the mountain, and nobody could find them anymore. That was why the Soviet Union got stuck the way it did at the end of the twentieth century.²⁷

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That Soviet legacy, which hung over Russian defense planners in their efforts to conduct proper planning, serves to saddle them with a need to find alternative compensating schemes that never quite replicate the stability to planning provided by the statistical framework. In Putin’s power vertical, the need for secrecy has grown in areas where it makes no sense, and further contributes to this underlying problem. Colonel (retired) Vasily Zatsëpin, Head of the Department for Military Economics, Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy, Moscow, highlighted the continued and deep problem facing Russian defense planners as a result of the lack of reliable military statistics:

Russia has accumulated little or no experience in using the various performance and similar indicators in public administration. In particular, there was little evidence of introduction of performance-based budgeting or preparation of departmental reports on results and main activities. In addition, there was no practice of regular publication of performance indicators and departmental statistics on national security both due to excessive secrecy and lack of modern statistical offices in the respective departments. These institutional limitations contributed to a lack of rationality in public administration and provided ample opportunities for corruption and mismanagement at all levels.²⁸

Zatsëpin noted the problem of Russian military statistics and its linkage to obsessive secrecy and the weakness of institutional development. Moreover, he highlighted that even within Russia’s official security documents there is clear evidence of this cultural shyness towards statistics. In the 2009 National Security Strategy there is an express denial of any intention to consult professional statisticians, preferring instead to use a system of “distributed situational centers.”

By late December 2011 the Russian Defense Ministry published official departmental statistics provided by the federal statistical work plan. The statistics only relayed details on the numbers

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of military pensioners, including those with disabilities, which served to confirm that the total is smaller than officials had earlier claimed. It showed that as of January 1, 2011 there were 1,118,475 pensioners, including 956,368 receiving pensions; disability pensions were paid to 39,500 and death benefit to 122,500. Official figures cited by *Krasnaya Zvezda* in 2006 showing the total number of pensioners paid by the Defense Ministry revealed a decline during the five-year period to 2011 of 24,000, while the actual number of pensioners had increased by 45,000. According to Zatsepin, the two-page statistical file represented a model in existence in the Defense Ministry for twelve years.²⁹

It is equally important to note that beyond the issue of the planning capacity of the Defense Ministry, the lack of reliable military statistics renders impossible the task of conducting sound operational analysis/operational research (OA). Consequently Russian journals dealing with OA do not address the discipline at any level other than the mathematics of OA. The dysfunctional nature of Russian OA leaves the system denuded of the ability to carry out analysis at all levels of the cycle, including tactical; put simply, the existing approach to OA prevents any proper assessment of whether tactics are working in combat. Moreover, this weakness in the OA cycle also restricts the capability of the General Staff to conduct a “lessons learned” post-conflict examination of operations.³⁰ OA methods are essential in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in organization, training and equipment. Due to this flaw in Russian OA, an essential tool is missing in helping to decide the procurement priorities for the Armed Forces, as well as the organization and improvement of their training and education.³¹

Compounding these problems further still, in the late Soviet and post-Soviet military academies curricula “military administration” was replaced by “management of everyday activity” (*upravlenie povsednevnoi deyatel'nost'yu*). So in addition to the deep-rooted problems stemming from the lack of reliable military statistics, the Russian defense establishment declared as unfashionable the subject of military administration.



Understanding the missing dimension to Russian defense reform planning, it is easy to see that the policy *bardak* is not only part of the system, but, in the absence of the prerequisite planning tools, *bardak* is the system; there is simply no alternative. From this perspective it is remarkable that the reform to date has achieved anything, and succeeded in introducing real change. As this flaw in the planning system persists, however, how may the Defense Ministry reliably measure the progress of the reform? Which indicators might be used, and how would these officials know they are seeing objective data?

Some of the most fundamental blunders of the reform process find their origins in the extent to which the Defense Ministry is consequently conducting such planning in the dark. Its leadership is uncertain as to the precise figures on military manpower, while claiming stubbornly that the “one million” target has been achieved; the number of brigades required or the numbers that are actually in existence seem to confuse the top brass, as do some of their references to mobilization brigades. Creating new courses for prospective NCO training only to discover inadequate secondary educational levels at the entrance examination stage would have been prevented if planners in the ministry could have easily accessed data on the educational and skills sets among personnel.

Key Planning Aspects Not Game Tested



Vladimir Shamanov

While the constant policy reversals and innovations during the course of the reform of the Armed Forces suggest inherent weaknesses within the planning capacity of the Defense Ministry stemming from the military statistics issue and culture of secrecy for its own sake, an additional factor is the complete disregard for game-testing policy. There are numerous examples of this within the various efforts by senior officers and defense officials to bring some level of improvement to the Armed Forces. For example, when Lieutenant-General Vladimir Shamanov was the head of the combat training directorate prior to being appointed as the commander of the Russian Airborne Forces (*Vozdushno-desantnye voyska – VDV*), he “discovered” a curious flaw in combat training.³² When exercises were being staged, the Defense Ministry often did not factor in the issue of personnel being on leave, either on vacation or due to illness. Shamanov corrected this by banning leave during exercises in order to ensure that the units were not depleted in key areas.³³ The issue of leave, however, could also surface in other vital areas of the reform planning, such as officer downsizing. As the downsizing proceeded at breakneck speed, it was not until Vostok 2010 that De-

fense Ministry officials learned that when the downsizing figures were being calculated no one had factored in the issue of leave or sick leave.

“Four years after launching the reform, it is clear that the Defense Ministry lacked a planning or conceptual framework for the future manning of the brigades.”

The absence of game-testing policy initiatives was also in evidence in the central theme of creating the “permanent readiness” brigades, only to discover after operational-strategic exercises that the model had turned out to be too heavy. This not only suggests a disregard for game testing and properly planning initiatives before their implementation, but also calls into question the depth of the study of foreign militaries. Which foreign military model was in mind when forming these heavy brigades? If the brigade-based structure was so important, then why avoid game testing the model, not least in terms of calibrating staffing and manning levels required according to brigade type? If game testing were in use, how did the Defense Ministry arrive at the conclusion that all the brigades need to have the same combat readiness levels?

Planning for the Future Manpower Structure

This remarkable lack of planning was evident in relation to the crucial question of the future of military manpower. The “debate,” in Russia between the advocates of conscription and those favoring a professional all-volunteer force had persisted for a considerable period, but the “reformers” had no answer to these deeper questions. Yet, these were by no means abstract issues.³⁴ Creating “permanent readiness” brigades in the Ground Forces, capable of deployment on a significantly faster timescale than the displaced divisions with their cadre elements and bloated officer corps, surely demanded serious attention to how these would be manned. Four years after launching the reform, it is clear that the Defense Ministry lacked a planning or conceptual framework for the future manning of the brigades. Instead, during the operational-strategic exercises in 2009-10, the General Staff was left to puzzle over how the mixing of twelve-month serving conscripts in large numbers with contract personnel in insufficient numbers could ever permit any advance in combat readiness.

The thorny issue of manning the brigades, which was easy to foresee prior to commencing the reform process, became entangled in constant in-fighting over the conceptual approach to the merits of conscription versus contract service, and confusion and disagreement over the precise meaning and future development of the *kontraktniki*, while the top brass tried to stick doggedly to the farcical claim that the brigades could respond within “one hour” to the order to deploy.³⁵ Developing a mythology around the “new look” brigades was preferred in the marked absence of any planning on the future of military manpower. As the top brass and political leadership vacillated on the pendulum of conscript-contract personnel, with initiatives and a constant stream of admissions linked to past *kontraktniki* failure, the “plans” underwent perpetual re-writing.

A number of observations may be made concerning the planning chaos that ensued around the issue of manning the Armed Forces. When the reform was planned and initiated in the fall of 2008, it was carried out in the complete absence of any planning policy on manpower. It appeared to be

relegated to the status of a secondary issue, as the Defense Ministry focused in 2008-09 on the structural tasks of deconstructing the existing division-based system and creating its brigade-based replacement. Consequently, there was plenty of scope for disagreement, experiment and possible revision of the numerous reform vignettes. This may reflect an ongoing sensitivity within Russian military culture that predisposes the top brass to avoid the complete abandonment of conscription and with it any potential to mobilize forces, or to retain a traditional reserve. As the discussion proceeded among the top brass and brigade commanders, consensus emerged around one point: it was difficult to distinguish in terms of quality between the conscripts and the *kontraktniki*, despite the so-called development of the latter over several years and their previous use during combat operations. Something had to be done urgently, but no one offered a solution.

The proponents of the draft were allowed to push their interests in preserving unrealistic conscription targets despite a widespread understanding of the demographic crisis within the country that would eventually compel some level of correction to the numbers of conscripts drafted each spring and fall. Addressing the rougher aspects of *dedovshchina* left a complicated legacy for Serdyukov after his predecessor, Sergei Ivanov, had initiated a staged reduction in the term of conscript service in an effort to reduce ill discipline in the barracks. The result was to turn the Ground Forces brigades into revolving doors in terms of their manning, with the twelve-month conscripts arriving and departing from the brigades twice each year. This impacted not only on combat readiness levels, but also on officer morale, as the training, discipline standards and unit *élan* were all equally negatively affected.

Rather than compelling the Defense Ministry to address the root causes of these manpower-linked problems, the policy focus instead was briefly placed on the implausible task of reducing and maximizing the utility of the twelve-month conscripts by “intensifying” and shortening their basic training period from five to three months. No doubt this was calculated to allay concerns among the diehard conscription supporters. Serdyukov ignored reporting on the worsening of discipline in the units, failing to understand the deeper roots of *dedovshchina*, and, as if to offer unambiguous proof that he failed to master such basic concepts concerning the Russian Armed Forces, he insisted on using the term “hooliganism,” when referring to ill discipline in the “new look” dormitories (having abolished the term “barracks”).³⁶

“Increasing the numbers of serving contract personnel has been promised in the past, later abandoned or built into a specific program, only to yield disappointing results.”

The reformers had boasted that conceptually the reform agenda was rooted in an analysis of foreign militaries, and these concepts were being actively adapted and introduced into the Russian Armed Forces. However, close analysis of the correlation between the term of conscript service and the persistence of *dedovshchina* within other former Soviet republics’ Armed Forces would have revealed that the reduction of the term of service had little or no impact on the phenomenon.³⁷

Reform of the Russian Armed Forces

By 2012, the military is to be downsized to 1 million personnel, a professional NCO corps is to be created, and its command and control system is to be streamlined

Structural Changes

At present: military district - army - division - regiment

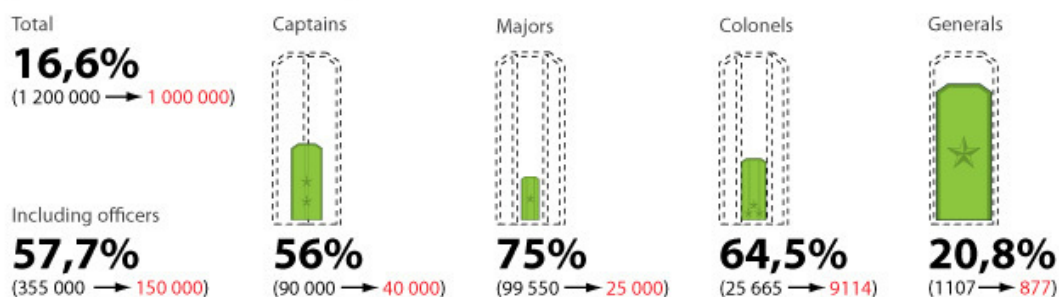
In the future: military district - operation command - brigade

Goals:

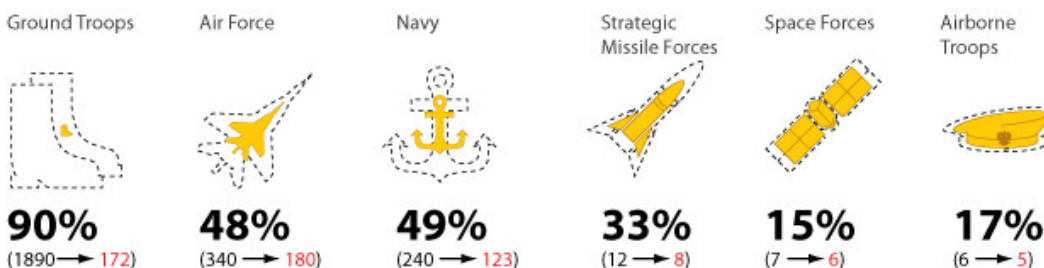
- ★ Keeping up with modern challenges (a division is a unit that is too large for local armed conflicts prevalent in the modern world)
- ★ Optimization of command and control (eliminating superfluous elements)

Division	Brigade
Numerical size	
8,000–14,000	4,500–6,500
Constituent units	
Brigades, regiments, battalions, companies	Battalions, companies
Commander's rank	
Major general	Colonel

Personnel reductions



Reduction in the number of military units



Source: Rossiiskaya Gazeta, Oct. 15, 2008



When the dust finally settled and the demographic reality compelled a correction to the draft cycle in the fall of 2011, resulting in a substantial reduction in the number of conscripts arriving in the units, the top brass offered an apparent solution to the manpower predicament by once again blowing the dust off the *kontraktniki* theme.³⁸ Its latest incarnation aims to increase the *kontraktniki* numbers in the Armed Forces by 2016 to 425,000 by recruiting 50,000 contract personnel annually

“...the planning weaknesses on the part of the Defense Ministry’s efforts to enhance the NCO cadre were all too numerous, and the shortage of students...indicated far deeper challenges for the manning system.”

until then. The balance would shift, according to Serdyukov, to 70-30 in favor of contract servicemen, and if financial restrictions were eased on the process it could reach as much as 80-20.³⁹

Despite this apparent breakthrough on the manpower issue, it has the hallmarks of planning on the hoof, based on a response to the problems stemming from finding enough conscripts to fill the ranks rather than upon a thorough analysis of the manning requirements for the Armed Forces. Increasing the numbers of serving contract personnel has been promised in the past, later abandoned or built into a specific program, only to yield disappointing results. The latest drive towards professionalization of the Armed Forces will have to address the conundrum concerning recruitment policy: since the conscripts act as the main recruitment pool for *kontraktniki*, how will greatly reducing the conscript numbers facilitate such a boost in contract personnel figures? Moreover, it is unclear to what extent the Ground Forces brigades may benefit from such a shift in the manpower policy within the Armed Forces, or the nature of the units intended to receive priority. According to Colonel-General Aleksandr Postnikov, the Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of the Ground Forces, in an interview on February 21, 2012, by 2017 the army brigades will consist of 40 percent contract personnel.⁴⁰

No Clear Planning Concerning the Development of NCOs

In September 2008 President Dmitry Medvedev ordered Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov to commence the reform of the conventional Armed Forces. As Army-General Nikolai Makarov, the Defense Minister and the Chief of the General Staff, outlined the reform agenda in the months that followed, it was clear that if the aims of overhauling the structural organization of the Armed Forces were to raise standards in combat training, improving the officer corps and soldiers within these structures, raising combat readiness levels and producing “jointness” in future operations as Defense Ministry and security forces operate under the single command of the newly formed OSKs, a critical, if not deciding, factor would be to introduce an entirely new cadre of NCOs.⁴¹

By early 2009 the Defense Ministry leadership was showing an awareness of the importance of this pivotal task, consequently announcing elaborate plans to rapidly recruit, train and introduce new professional and high standard NCOs in the Armed Forces.⁴² That confidence soon gave way to a realization that the process may take longer than envisaged or demand additional conceptual planning for the precise nature of the type of NCO model to use in the future. Early efforts to realize such plans failed utterly. Potential recruits arrived to sit entrance examinations for NCO courses, only to fail due to their inability to do basic decimals or quadratic equations.⁴³

Around this period, as the Defense Ministry planners were rethinking the approach to developing the new professional NCO cadre, attention turned to replicating aspects of officer training in order

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to attempt to raise NCO standards based on elite courses. In its final form, the ministry promised to produce the desired results by opening a new NCO training center at Ryazan, the headquarters of the elite Russian VDV. By locating the center in Ryazan and insisting that all the trainees should complete parachute jumps, some observers wrongly concluded that the center would only yield professional NCOs for the VDV, possibly also further reinforced by the admission by Lieutenant-General Vladimir Shamanov that Serdyukov had tasked him to help to instill the elite attitudes of the VDV in the new professional NCOs.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the original planning for the Ryazan NCO Center envisaged this being used as a model to replicate elsewhere in order to facilitate the introduction of professional NCOs throughout the Armed Forces. In the summer of 2009 details of these plans emerged. More than 2,000 recruits, selected from the units, would commence a specialist and generalist course in Ryazan lasting two years and ten months. The curriculum included management and psychology, with access to simulators and other specialist training equipment. In an attempt



NCOs at the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School

to attract sufficient numbers of recruits for the course, candidates were offered increased pay and allowances, including the receipt of a salary on graduating from the course which would have been equivalent to that of a serving general in the Armed Forces. However, when the course finally commenced after delays in December 2009, only 254 students were enrolled, way short of the original target. To critics of the reform, and those supporting its aims but seeking to impress on the Defense Ministry the importance of the future development of the NCO cadre, the Ryazan NCO Center seemed more akin to a PR exercise on the part of the ministry rather than a serious effort to raise NCO standards.⁴⁵

What seemed particularly striking about the Ryazan NCO adventure, apart from the shortage of recruits and the length of the course, was why the Defense Ministry deemed it necessary to educate and train such professional NCOs in isolation from the units within which they would later serve. By the spring of 2012 General Shamanov was able to confirm that for the first Ryazan graduates there may be access to a new role in the Armed Forces, namely the post of “master sergeant,” which, he explained, was designed to provide NCO leadership at high levels in the future efforts to organize, train and retain sufficiently high standard professional NCOs within the Russian military.

However, the planning weaknesses on the part of the Defense Ministry’s efforts to enhance the NCO cadre were all too numerous, and the shortage of students for the high profile course in Ryazan indicated far deeper challenges for the manning system. More to the point, at the outset of the reform process, reflecting the approach to military manpower per se, there was limited or no

planning carried out in relation to devising the system and support needed to introduce these new NCOs.⁴⁶ Moreover, the role and precise model of NCO to be developed and trained and used in the structures was also neglected at the planning stage. Equally, how the training, pay and retention of these NCOs may actually work was given insufficient attention, while the questions related to delegating real authority on the part of the officer corps to the NCOs, allowing them to conduct training of their subordinates or develop a working relationship with their commanding officers based on equality was either ignored or underestimated.⁴⁷ Defense Ministry planners appeared to entirely misjudge the fundamental need to have a proper NCO cadre in place in order to improve training and discipline levels, provide leadership, motivation and examples to soldiers, or to serve as a means to drive and facilitate both the reform of the officer corps and introduction of greater numbers of contract personnel.

The late Colonel (retired) Vitaliy Shlykov highlighted in an article in *Voyenno- Promyshlyennyy Kuryer* the most significant blunder in the course of the reform. This stemmed from the complete failure to devise conceptually and plan for the recruitment and training of a new NCO cadre. More specifically, the reduction of the officer corps in 2008-10, coupled with reducing the term of conscript service to twelve months without introducing better trained NCOs, had resulted in lowering of discipline. The planning fiasco had almost resulted in the collapse of the Russian Army, and Shlykov laid the blame for the planning mess at the door of the Defense Ministry. Calling for something to be done about the lack of a proper NCO cadre, Shlykov condemned the experiment since the end of the Great Patriotic War, which had essentially run contrary to the experience of many Western and other foreign militaries: Russia had constructed a spineless army, lacking the critical backbone provided by the NCO cadre.⁴⁸

Downsizing the Officers Corps: Placing Reform on Hold

Planning the reform of the officer corps as a key task in the wider effort to transform the Armed Forces and shift the emphasis away from a top-heavy structure to one more streamlined and efficient necessarily involved the downsizing of the pre-reform officer system. Much of the public controversy revolved around the plan to cut the officer corps from 355,000 posts to a declared target of 150,000. Serdyukov and Makarov offered great detail to justify the need for such sweeping cuts, ranging from the former using the “egg-shape” metaphor to refer to the top-heavy structure of the officer corps and the aim of achieving a “pyramid” hierarchy, to the “lessons learned” from the Russia-Georgia War in August 2008, which had exposed the manifold weaknesses among Russian officers, as well as corruption among them.⁴⁹ These, in turn, were elaborated, to include officers refusing to obey orders during the conflict or the General Staff struggling to find enough officers for the operation capable of real leadership.⁵⁰ Makarov had noted, for instance, that due to the persistence of the cadre units, many Russian officers only knew about command on paper and lacked real experience in command and leadership.⁵¹

Justification for the figure of 150,000 was always linked to an analysis of the officer to enlisted personnel ratio in foreign militaries. The Defense Ministry consequently set the 150,000 target figure as representing 15 percent of the personnel in a notional overall manning strength of “one million.”⁵²

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Thus, the officer corps entered a period of protracted uncertainty between the fall of 2008 to the spring of 2011, during which the plan to reduce the overall number of serving officers was implemented ruthlessly.⁵³ The cuts were designed to cull the colonel posts in particular and eventually arrive at the streamlined replacement system. As this process unfolded, some oddities began to emerge, suggesting the limited and perhaps unscientific basis for the planning to reform the officer corps.⁵⁴ For instance, the Defense Ministry suspended the intake of lieutenant cadets for two years. In perhaps the most staggering insight into the planning chaos that developed as part of the reform process, the ministry even managed to create a unique category of officer: placed at the disposal of the commander. Realizing there were simply not enough apartments to provide to officers shed from the Armed Forces during the downsizing of the officer corps, the new category meant that thousands were placed in limbo: they were neither in nor out of the military.⁵⁵

Despite the numerous statements and justifications on downsizing the officer corps so drastically and reach the stated goal of 150,000, by February 2011 the Defense Ministry had reset the target to 220,000, arguing that extra officers were needed for the planned creation of the VKO. The 1:15 ratio was quietly abandoned. If any proof was needed concerning the Defense Ministry's limited planning capacity to conduct such reform, it seems evident in the sudden and almost irrational reversal of the downsizing policy.⁵⁶

However, the planning issues were far worse than the problems over the precise numbers of officers required in the new look TOE. The deeper questions about how the reform of the officer corps might be carried out were often avoided. In short the Defense Ministry understood that change was needed in the officer corps - correction to the structure, as well as how these personnel were educated and trained, but there was no consensus on how to achieve any of this in real terms. Downsizing alone would not produce the type of officer referred to by Makarov or other top brass.⁵⁷ The sudden fleeting appearance of hope that the Russian officer corps might devise a written code of conduct as part of a wider effort to raise standards of discipline and professionalism among the officer corps was also quietly shelved after postponing a planned officer conference in Moscow in 2010 to discuss such a codification strategy.⁵⁸

Reform planning on the officer corps did nothing to address what Makarov identified as its key challenge, namely to overcome issues of mentality. Indeed, the streamlining in progress of the military educational system, including the General Staff Academy, held out little hope of transforming the officer corps, mainly due to the lack of planning for what type of officer the Armed Forces needed in the future. Since 2008 the number of military educational establishments was reduced from 65 to 17 (three research centers for each service of the Armed Forces, eleven academies and three military universities).⁵⁹

“...the military educational system, including the General Staff Academy, held out little hope of transforming the officer corps, mainly due to the lack of planning for what type of officer the Armed Forces needed in the future.”

Nonetheless, there was no attention to the system of recruitment for officers; without changing the recruitment policy it seemed that such efforts would be limited to unclear experimentation. Moreover, the Defense Ministry paid little planning attention to the existing pre-reform system of promotion.⁶⁰ After forming the new brigade-based structure of the Armed Forces in 2009, the top brass highlighted the high turnover in brigade commanders. General Makarov explained that colonels had even attended interviews for brigade command posts, only to admit that they simply did not know how to command a brigade. Only at this stage did the Defense Ministry begin to recognize the need to offer courses and training for potential commanders, rather than having built this into the reform planning. If the top brass lamented the lack of leadership skills on the part of Russian officers or their absence of individual initiative, they were unable to connect their aspiration for higher officer standards to the need to change the promotion system. Securing the best individuals for officer posts, retaining them and developing their careers would surely demand a move toward placing merit at the very center of the promotion system: for the Defense Ministry this proved too much even to contemplate.⁶¹

Reflecting on four years of reform in Russia's Armed Forces, plans to reform the officer corps center mostly on downsizing the officer posts, revising pay and allowances and gambling on the longer-term impact from streamlining the military educational system. Nonetheless, the planning did not include changing the system of officer recruitment and the approach to promotion and career development, nor did it address the relationship between officers and the planned introduction of professional NCOs.⁶² Conceptually, the brigades were intended to become more mobile and flexible, and the tactics and methods of conducting operations would demand greater initiative, problem solving and leadership skills on the part of officers. The Defense Ministry was, however, at a loss on the mechanisms to use to facilitate such a radical transformation in the military culture.⁶³

The Russian officer corps remains largely unreformed. Inadequate policy planning was masked by repeated aspiration and a promise of better times ahead. Downsizing raised critical questions about the nature and the quality of the Defense Ministry planning. Should the number of officers in the Armed forces represent 15 percent of the total manpower in a notional "one million" or 22 percent? Can 220,000 be considered as 22 percent if the real total manpower figure is actually lower than one million? At the outset of the reform the officer corps accounted for around 40 percent of the total manpower, although the leadership of the Defense Ministry was unclear as to the precise total personnel numbers.⁶⁴ Did the planning simply set out to correct the bloated nature of the officer corps structure by slimming down from 40 percent to around 30 percent? In the planning for the downsizing what steps were taken to ensure that the best quality officers were retained? If a concerted effort existed in planning terms to address corruption among officers, would culprits be discharged if their command and leadership skills otherwise showed potential? How did the reform planning envisage developing individual initiative, responsibility and leadership skills among those officers not exposed to a "reformed" system of military education?⁶⁵

“...the challenges facing the development of the VKO itself will serve as a testing ground for the durability of the modernization agenda.”

“the rapid brigadizing of the existing divisions in 2009 had more realistically created small divisions, probably out of concern to retain sufficient firepower.”

Brigade Structure: Experiment and Innovation

Although the Defense Ministry characterized the reform as being scientifically based on the studies of foreign militaries and attempting to utilize aspects of these lessons in conducting the process, fundamental planning weaknesses were revealed as a result of one of the main reform elements: namely, the rapid formation of the new brigade-based structure of the Armed forces in 2009.⁶⁶ Within a short period after forming the brigades and examining their performance in operational-strategic exercises, the General Staff concluded that the model adopted was flawed. The one-size-fits-all approach of creating standardized brigades proved to be too “heavy,” which meant the brigades were slow to move and lacked flexibility during the exercises. In fact, the rapid brigadizing of the existing divisions in 2009 had more realistically created small divisions, probably out of concern to retain sufficient firepower.⁶⁷

Consequently, having identified this weakness in the new brigade structure, a fresh approach was developed to form three basic brigade types: light, medium and heavy. It then seems that officials in the Defense Ministry recalled the references in the 2009 National Security Strategy to the strategic importance of the Arctic to the Russian Federation, and as a result further modified the concept to also include “Arctic brigades” in the future, formed most likely on the model of the small number of mountain brigades in the North Caucasus.⁶⁸

There was also a planning fiasco linked to the precise number of Ground Forces’ brigades. In December 2009 Serdyukov reported to President Medvedev that the task of creating “85 permanent readiness” brigades had been achieved. Following the publication of the new military doctrine in February 2010, replete with its references to “mobilization,” the top brass talked of the need for 180 brigades including the mobilization potential, while others disputed the precise numbers of Ground Forces’ brigades; the estimates ranged from 64 to 79, but no one adhered to the earlier claimed pinnacle of 85.⁶⁹

Moreover, further experiments were built into operational-strategic exercises prior to introducing additional changes to support the brigades, notably in terms of logistics and supplying of the brigades in the field. This, as well as the prototype for outsourcing catering to civilian contractors, was tested during Vostok 2010. Equally, as another reform afterthought, sniper platoons in the combined-arms brigades were expanded into sniper companies in 2011, with the aim of completing the process of developing the concept, training and manning of these companies, as well as re-equipping them by 2015.⁷⁰

From a planning perspective, however, prior to conducting the reform the Defense Ministry neglected basic questions about the brigades, such as how many are needed, the types of brigade required or how to develop and strengthen combat support and combat service support.⁷¹

By 2012 the interim results of forming the “permanent readiness” brigades were as follows:

- Most of the Ground Forces’ brigades are undermanned, and as a result their “permanent readiness” status is purely notional.
- The mixture of contract and conscript personnel within the brigades limits their combat readiness levels.
- The brigades remain heavily reliant upon dated weapons and equipment, and the modernization program is only very slowly improving the situation.
- The brigades are largely staffed by an unreformed officer corps.
- Problems linked to command and leadership persist at brigade headquarters level and are likely to be more acute within the battalions.
- No professional or better trained NCOs have been introduced in the structures, other than demoted officers.

The final overall brigade structure has yet to emerge, and will take time to fully achieve.

An automated C2 system is planned for introduction, but the defense industry capacity would only extend to equipping five brigades per annum, implying that two C2 systems will co-exist until the more advanced version is fully implemented. Combat training is limited in its scope for improvement due to the presence of large numbers of conscripts serving for twelve months and rotating out of the brigades twice each year.

By 2017 the brigades will be manned by 40 percent contract personnel, suggesting that if this is the final target, combat readiness and training will consequently be limited by the high conscript numbers in the manpower structure.

VKO: a Work in Progress

On December 1, 2011 the VKO was officially formed, headed by Lieutenant-General Oleg Ostapenko and his first deputy General Valeriy Ivanov. Two commands were included in the structure: the Space Command, headed by Major-General Oleg Maydanovich, and the Air and Missile Defense (*Protivo-vozdushnaya oborona/Protivo-rakentaya oborona – PVO/PRO*) under Major-General Sergei Popov.⁷² In the first phase of equipping the VKO, which is placed operationally under the General Staff, the PVO/PRO Command’s missile defense division and three S-44 SAM brigades stationed in Podmoskovye were tasked with protecting Moscow. This will be reinforced by additional brigades, and by 2020 advanced S-500 will be used. Initially, General Makarov opposed utilizing assets from the military districts (MDs) to equip the VKO, prefer-



Emblem of the Aerospace Defense Forces (VKO)

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ring an entirely new arsenal, but he had to accept a compromise. Of the 20 trillion rubles for the State Armaments Program (*Gosudarstvennaya programma vooruzheniy – GPV*) to 2020 to rearm the Armed Forces, 20 percent of this figure will go to arming the VKO.⁷³

“...but the challenges facing the development of the VKO itself will serve as a testing ground for the durability of the modernization agenda”

The continued sense of contradiction and policy planning challenges within the reform arguably reached a crescendo in late 2011 with the formation of the VKO as a new branch of service. Unlike the wider reform agenda announced in late 2008 and pursued in all its vignettes since, the development of the VKO was directly driven by a General Staff assessment of the threat environment, and signals a further departure from modeling the conventional Armed Forces to fight smaller wars on the Russian periphery, including mission types ranging from counterterrorism or counterinsurgency. Critics of the initiative and its timing and numerous challenges rapidly made known their views, which reflected a “debate” concerning such plans going back to 2006. Aleksei Sinikov, a former professor in the Zhukov Aerospace Defense Academy, criticized forming the VKO based on the caliber of the supporting military science. In Sinikov’s view, the most important aspect of military science is to predict the nature of future warfare: he asked what the nature of the military science was that lent credible support to this new development in the transformation of the Armed Forces, and concluded its basis was weak. That threat assessment may have been no doubt influenced by Russian assessments of the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, the US-led interventions in Iraq (1991 and 2003) and Afghanistan (2001), and the more recent air operations over Libya, as well as anxiety over US Global Prompt Strike, US and NATO ballistic missile defense (BMD) plans, and whether a cooperative Russia-NATO BMD framework might emerge in the future. Indeed, the potential danger to the Russian Federation from a hypothetical enemy with air- and space-based assets was declared in the 2010 Military Doctrine, and in a sense the creation of the VKO is consistent with this pattern; however, it makes clear that as the conventional transformation proceeds in the future, the VKO is given much more priority than the Ground Forces, and will also arguably restrict the modernization of the Air Force.⁷⁴

Lieutenant-General (retired) Anatoliy Gavrilov, an expert in the Association of Military Political Analysts, argued that the interest in S-400 and S-500 systems would lead to a diminution in the importance of tactical PVO. By 2020 the VKO would receive 56 S-400 complexes and equip ten battalions with the latest S-500s. Tactical PVO radio technical units were disbanded, with none of the more than thirty radio technical battalions left in existence. The training of officers from the Radio Technical Troops has been halted, while 80 percent of equipment in the tactical PVO inventory is obsolete. Without serious attention and consistent support for the defense industry’s weak capacity to modernize such systems, Gavrilov warns that tactical PVO may face a deep crisis within ten to fifteen years.⁷⁵

Major-General (retired) Vyacheslav Ryzhonkov, the former Head of the Zhukov Aerospace Defense Academy, and Colonel (retired) Aleksandr Dreshin, in the Instruction and Methodological

Department, Zhukov Aerospace Defense Academy, believe that the VKO faces potentially insurmountable challenges including:

- No precise distribution of the administrative and operational functions among the commands of the MDs and commanders of the services and branches of the Armed Forces.
- The discrepancy between the rights and responsibilities assigned to the VKO command.
- A functional integration problem for air defense and missile-space defense.
- Integration problems for antiaircraft and aviation forces and means.
- C2 issues linked to air defense troops in the MDs within the borders of the OSKs in wartime.
- VKO staff training.

During combat operations the OSKs assume overall authority in the conduct of operations; however, with the formation of the VKO, some operative functions are being returned to the new unified command. Moreover, Missile-Space Defense, Antiaircraft Missile Troops, Radio-Electronic Troops, fighter aviation specialists, and electronic warfare and reconnaissance specialists have a limited understanding of the specifics of each other's C2 activities and weapons systems. This serves to mitigate any effort to ingrate these specialists, and will take time to correct. The authors concluded that in the future the VKO will need to introduce VKO officer posts into the C2 bodies; define the staff posts for VKO officers and the specialist training in military educational facilities; develop national standards for qualified VKO specialists; and organize a system of VKO specialist training. The creation of the VKO will further complicate Moscow's efforts to reform the conventional Armed Forces, placing additional pressures on the rearmament program and testing the defense industry.⁷⁶ It also marks a shift in terms of threat perception, consistent with the high level of interest in transitioning towards more high-technology centered forces, but the challenges facing the development of the VKO itself will serve as a testing ground for the durability of the modernization agenda.⁷⁷

Conspectus

Russia's Armed Forces, as a result of a reform agenda susceptible to change and surprising deviations and the extent to which the modernization of the weapons and equipment inventory proves successful, will likely emerge by 2020 appearing significantly different from the Russian combat forces that entered Georgia in August 2008. Unless there is a similar and perhaps even complimentary process in the militaries of Russia's closest allies, there may well be interoperability problems in the future in the country's efforts to act in concert with its defense allies.⁷⁸

However, there is no doubt that the aspirations in the reform of the Russian Armed Forces are

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high and in many cases open to question. Among its many features to modernize the military and transform its structures and achieve higher levels of combat capability and combat readiness is the aspiration to develop network-centric approaches to operations.⁷⁹ This network-centric or sixth-generation approach to warfare has transmogrified into the high priority assigned to VKO development, and suggests that the Russian threat perception may attach greater importance to a high-technology state actor or actors than to substate or other low intensity emerging threats. Whether or to what extent this might be implemented successfully, laying aside the technological, manning and social challenges, like other aspects of the reform it represents a drive to modernize based on visions of future war and the fear that Russia may be drawn into conflicts suddenly.⁸⁰ These visions are tethered, however, to Russia's past, to a weak planning capacity and inefficient supporting structures, as well as the limits of a beleaguered defense industry struggling to cope with meeting these demands, which will likely mitigate the level of success.

As Dale Herspring correctly notes:

However, there is much left to be done. For example, the lack of stability in the upper ranks, the one year draft, how to deal with NCOs, the lack of a plan, the chaos at the General Staff Academy, insufficient housing and other types of 'creature comforts,' corruption, crime, and in particular, the lag in technology. Until these latter issues are dealt with in a serious fashion, the Russian Army will be far behind its Western neighbors.⁸¹

Almost two decades of tried and failed military reform preceded the current transformation process. In itself this may provide solid grounds to ask instead the question as to what extent will the reform fail, and what might its implications be for the future of Russia's Armed Forces? However, recognizing that the many policy reversals, delays, contradictions, experiments, conceptual disagreements, setbacks or confusion among senior Russian officers and officials reflects a much deeper malaise linked to an inadequate approach to planning and implementing reform initiatives raises a number of points.



Sergey Shoigu

The planning muddle that ensued so publicly following the reform process is linked very closely to the system of decision making and leadership in modern Russia. No announcement of intention, declared agenda or fixed goal is ever actually accepted by the very intra-military agencies or interest groups involved; all see enough scope for revision or later reinterpretation. This, in turn, acts as a major obstacle in the path of successful reform.⁸²

Western decision makers and experts alike must regard with caution Moscow's many public statements linked to the reform agenda, its aims and precise goals. It has, over the course of four years, witnessed a metamorphosis into something difficult to define, and loosely connected to the original planning. Russian officers themselves do not understand the reform; it is hardly surprising, since they have

never had a clear delineation of its aims and goals, or a route-map to achieve any of this nebulous agenda. Certainly there may be generic improvements within the Armed Forces, whether accidentally or by design, but the process is unlikely to yield rapid results or to provide the type of Armed Forces that meet the criteria set out in so many of the political statements of intention or in the security documents. There is much scope for future correction to existing plans. This is likely to leave the state heavily reliant upon the nuclear deterrent.

Like orchestra members attempting to play without sight of their music sheets, Moscow embarked on a highly ambitious reform program without first correcting the military statistical basis for its planning capacity. Moscow's defense planning is essentially conducted in the dark, while its inherent flaws coalesce to form a system of *bardak* that explains much of the policy setbacks and contradictions or corrections in the reform process. For the observer it provides an appearance of impulsive planning. It is precisely this feature which became so exposed by the reform process in 2009-12 that will confront Shoigu as he seeks to make sense of his predecessor's reform. The reintroduction of some divisions in the "brigade-based" TOE in the spring of 2013 and the appearance of the first "surprise inspections" in February 2013 to test a range of factors, including combat readiness levels, serve to highlight the absence of thorough planning underpinning the reforms of 2009-12.⁸³

The eventual outcome of that reform is more likely to emerge, therefore, as a result of "learning by doing," and witness modifications to the high aims and the declared goals of the reform. High priority elements of the reform, ranging from the VKO to the Ground Forces' sniper companies, will not emerge in their final form for several years, while the Ground Forces in the future will face a continued turf war with other services and branches for scarce resources, as well as the uphill task of raising the numbers of serving contract personnel, currently capped at 40 percent by 2017. The Air Force, likewise, will face similar challenges if it is to avoid losing out to the VKO, and the whole modernization agenda could be derailed by a switch in emphasis to pursue "countermeasures" if the plan to cooperate with NATO on missile defense fails at a later stage.

ENDNOTES

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