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"SILOVIKI" IN POLITICS RUSSIAN MILITARY REFORM

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Analysis

The *Siloviki* in Russian Politics: Political Strategy or a Product of the System?

By Bettina Renz, King's College, London

Abstract

Many observers have interpreted the rising number of *siloviki* in Russian politics as a conscious policy choice pursued by President Putin. In view of the Russian system of elite recruitment and the widely varying backgrounds of these figures, however, their role seems more modest than often asserted and the possibility of a coordinated “*siloviki* project” is unlikely.

Putin and the “Force Structures”

Since Vladimir Putin's election in March 2000 as president of the Russian Federation, the appointment of politicians and high-ranking officials with a force-structure background – the so-called *siloviki* as defined in the supplement to this article – has attracted the attention of academic analysts and journalists both in Russia and in the West. One dominant interpretation of this phenomenon has been to evaluate such appointments as a conscious political strategy and as an expression of a more authoritarian policy direction pursued by Putin, himself a former KGB officer. Some commentators, particularly political scientists Olga Kryshchanovskaya and Stephen White, even went as far as to assert that Putin's ultimate goal was the establishment of a “militocracy.” According to these experts, such a system dominated by *siloviki* would increasingly come to resemble the merely formal democracy of the Soviet Union.

The appointment of *siloviki* to political posts is not unique to the Putin era and should not be over-emphasized as a characteristic of his leadership alone. According to a recalculation of Kryshchanovskaya and White's data by the American analyst Sharon Rivera, the numbers of *siloviki* in political and official posts have risen monotonically since perestroika and the practice was relatively common, particularly in the second half of Boris Yeltsin's presidency. The noticeable rise in the numbers of such appointments since Putin's election to the presidency cannot be overlooked. The significance of this, however, requires further investigation. In view of the specific system of elite recruitment in contemporary Russia and considering the widely varying backgrounds of *siloviki*, a conscious political strategy for the establishment of a “militocracy” is unlikely.

Russian Patterns of Elite Recruitment

It is important to contextualise the rise in the numbers of *siloviki* within the framework of the post-Soviet political system and, particularly, the under-institutionalized mechanism of elite recruitment.

Treated as a phenomenon in isolation, an increase in politicians with a background in the military and security services will inevitably be evaluated as anti-democratic. This is the case particularly if approached from a Western point of view holding that a “military beyond politics” is fundamental to democratic governance. When Putin became acting president in December 1999 he was faced with a political system that has been termed by the British political scientist Richard Sakwa as a “regime system of rule.”

One characteristic of this system was that the formation of government was only tenuously linked to the outcome of elections, the parliament or political parties represented in the latter. Instead, political appointments were highly personalized and determined by the president's construction of tactical combinations aimed at maintaining a balance focused on himself. Within this context, personal links and loyalty were the predominant factor for political appointments under Yeltsin, whose regime centered on the so-called “Family” – a fluid group of favored Kremlin insiders. These included powerful oligarchs like Boris Berezovskii and Roman Abramovich, but also less prominent figures, such as the head of Yeltsin's presidential administration, Aleksandr Voloshin and Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko.

When Putin became acting president in December 1999 he “inherited” this political system. No institutionalized channels of elite recruitment were available to him and the political regime was highly personalized. As such, this system both allowed him to and, to an extent, left him no choice but to rely, at least in part, on representatives of the force structures. Putin had only five months experience in federal politics and lacked a ready-made shadow government able to run the state machine. Thus, in addition to retaining key figures of the Yeltsin era, Putin formed his government by relying on trusted individuals he had previously worked with. Several high-profile posts went to

his former colleagues from the Leningrad KGB and to other FSB officers, some of whom had served under his directorship from July 1998 until 1999. Former Russian Defense Minister and current First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov and presidential aide Viktor Ivanov are prominent examples of high-profile officials of Putin's early KGB years. However, a number of important posts also went to "civilian" economists whom Putin had worked with in the St. Petersburg city administration of Mayor Anatolii Sobchak. According to Rivera's abovementioned study, the expansion under Putin of the role of individuals with a business background and training in economics and law in the Russian elite is often underestimated.

Siloviki in Putin's "Team"

One would expect a strategy of government based on force structure representatives to be evident in important institutions, such as the presidential administration and federal ministries. However, the numbers of *siloviki* appointed to key posts in these institutions do not clearly support the idea that the appointment of force-structure representatives is a conscious policy pursued by Putin. In 2004 Putin replaced the head of his first administration, Yeltsin appointee Aleksandr Voloshin, with the civilian lawyer, Dmitrii Medvedev. Medvedev in turn was replaced in November 2005 with the regional politician, Sergei Sobyanin. According to the biographical data of 46 leading officials in Putin's administration published on the Kremlin website, eight have a force-structure background. None of these are in the top three positions of the administration (chairman and two deputy chairmen). Many of them are active in advisory roles for military-related subjects directly relevant to their previous experience. Others are long-serving members of the administration who were appointed to their posts already during Yeltsin's presidency.

With regard to the federal ministries, clear evidence of a consciously pursued strategy for the establishment of a "militocracy" is lacking. Five of 21 federal ministers are of a force-structure background. However, three of them are at the helm of ministries belonging to the force structures (the interior ministry, the defense ministry, and the ministry for emergency situations). The heading of such ministries by *siloviki*, rather than by civilians, is traditional in Russia and not a characteristic of the Putin era. Yeltsin's interior ministers, for example, were all *siloviki* with a background in the interior ministry.

Militarizing Politics?

Many commentators and politicians in Russia see Putin's reliance on the loyalty of former col-

leagues, particularly in the early stages of his presidency, as the obvious explanation for the increasing numbers of *siloviki* in political and official posts. The decisive factors for such appointments, in their opinion, are personal links and loyalty typical of the personalization of the political system of post-Soviet Russia, rather than these persons' background in the force structures as such. Valerii Ostanin, a former Yabloko deputy, accurately summarized this view: "The mechanism of elite recruitment under Yeltsin and Putin is the same. They included people in their entourage who were personally devoted to them, who came from the same institution, from the same community. There is nothing new in this."

Critics of such a view might justifiably suggest that even if the rising numbers of *siloviki* under Putin were not the result of a strategic plan, this insight does not change the fact that their presence might push Russia into a generally more authoritarian policy direction. Indeed, analysts including Kryshanovskaya and White have been concerned particularly with the anticipation of more undemocratic or authoritarian politics resulting from the military frame of mind setting *siloviki* apart from their civilian counterparts.

However, the significance of a politician's background in the military or security forces is not obvious. Whilst the presumption of a link between the rise in the numbers of *siloviki* and the tightening of democratic freedoms in some spheres might be intuitively appealing, it is problematic to use an individual's previous career as a guide to current action. Due to the varying institutional backgrounds, previous ranks and roles of these figures, the presumption of a shared political psychology is questionable. Simply speaking, the individuals concerned are too different to be treated as a political or analytical unity.

Heterogeneity and Blurred Delineations

In view of the wide array of functions fulfilled by *siloviki* during active service in one of the Soviet or Russian force structures, their previous ranks and roles are likely to affect the degree of their attachment to a military mind or military-style traditions. In asserting that *siloviki* accounted for 15 to 70 percent of the membership of a variety of elite groups, Kryshanovskaya and White crucially did not indicate the degree of seniority of the military personnel included in these comprehensive figures. However, taking into account the factor of previous rank, the military mindset of a conscript is likely to differ significantly from that of a high-ranking officer with a lifelong career in the force structures. In terms of the specific roles carried out by *siloviki* during their active service, differentiation

is also important. There are ten institutionally distinct force structures in contemporary Russia, whose only common denominator is a loosely defined concern with the country's defense and security. The array of activities carried out by *siloviki* in these institutions is immense. It ranges from commanding armies and divisions (prominent *siloviki* with such a background are the former governors Aleksandr Lebed and Vladimir Shamanov), to specializing in public relations and journalism (for example, Andrei Chernenko, the former head of the Federal Migration Service, and Valerii Manilov, a former Federation Council senator), and recruiting and analyzing sources of information (President Putin).

We cannot simply presume that the experience of *siloviki* in a command-oriented military organization is of lasting importance for their conduct in a civilian post, or that they will permanently act in line with the undemocratic *modus operandi* of their former employer. Many *siloviki* have long since retired from active service and have had the opportunity to adapt to the more compromise-based environment of "civilian" politics. As a result, the delineation between *silovik* and "civilian" politician is often blurred. Vladimir Putin, for example, resigned from the KGB in August 1991. When he was appointed director of the FSB in

1998 he was a bureaucrat with seven years of experience in civilian posts, including two years of experience in Yeltsin's administration.

Conclusion

The portrayal of *siloviki* as a tool in the hands of a president pursuing a more authoritarian policy direction can at best provide a simplified explanation of events and should not be taken too literally. In this respect an observation made by the American political scientist Peter Reddaway – that the *siloviki* neither have a leader, nor the means of coordinating their goals and plans – is important. The tightening under Putin of democratic freedoms in some spheres, for example the media, cannot be disputed. However, explanations of political developments should focus on actual policies rather than on the backgrounds of those implementing them. Catch-all explanations do injustice to the intricacies of Russian politics and should be eschewed in favor of assessments considering developments in all their complexities. In the words of the veteran Moscow correspondent of the German public television channel ARD, Gabriele Krone-Schmalz, "people attempting to evaluate Putin and his policies unidimensionally risk getting it wrong altogether."

About the author

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Further reading

- Olga Kryshstanovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19(4), 2003, pp. 289–306.
- Bettina Renz, "“Putin's Militocracy”? An Alternative Interpretation of the Role of *Siloviki* in Contemporary Russian Politics," *Europe-Asia Studies* 18(6), 2006, pp. 903–924.
- Sharon Werning Rivera and David W. Rivera, "The Russian Elite under Putin: Militocratic or Bourgeois?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 22(2), 2006, pp. 125–144.
- Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, London: Routledge, 2004.

Documentation

The Russian Force Structures

By Bettina Renz, London

Force structures are defined as ministries and other institutions within the federal system of executive power that command uniformed personnel and/or their own militarized or armed formations. The terms of service of most Russian force structures' personnel are determined by the same laws that apply to the regular armed forces. Additionally, a number of force structures are law-enforcement agencies. Their uniformed personnel are classified as law-enforcement personnel in accordance with the federal law "On state service." A number of Russian force structures are hybrid organizations, employing both military and law-enforcement personnel. In the Soviet Union, the number of force structures was limited to three entities (the Ministry of Defense, the Interior Ministry or MVD, and the KGB). The number of force structures in post-Soviet Russia has risen, due to the break-up of the KGB, the MVD, and the Ministry of Defense into numerous separate institutions, and fluctuated up to 14 entities. Entirely new force structures have also been created. In the course of reorganizations of the force structures in 2003 and 2004, their number was reduced to 10.

The Ministry of Defense, MO (www.mil.ru)

The functions and tasks of the MO and of the armed forces it oversees correspond largely to the "traditional" understanding of the purpose of a military (the protection of the state's territory and population from external aggression). In 2004, two previously separate force structures, the disbanded Federal Railroad Troops (FSZhV) and the Federal Service for Special Construction (*Spetsstroiz*), were incorporated into the MO. Estimated numerical strength of armed forces personnel: 960,000, plus approximately 50,000 railroad troops and 14,000 special construction troops.

Ministry of the Interior, MVD (www.mvdinform.ru)

The array of tasks fulfilled by the MVD is wide-ranging and, in addition to traditional police assignments, includes the regulation of all issues related to refugees and migration (the Federal Migration Service, FMS, was subordinated to the MVD in 2001). The principal mission of the MVD's militarized units, the internal (or domestic) troops, is containing violent disorder on Russian territory. In Chechnya the internal troops fought alongside regular armed forces and FSB special units. Estimated numerical strength: 649,000 uniformed personnel, including 151,100–183,300 internal troops (military personnel).

Ministry for Civil Defense Matters, Emergency Situations and Managing the Consequences of Natural Disasters, MChS (www.mchs.gov.ru)

The MChS's fundamental tasks are to organize and provide civil defense, to protect Russian territory and its population from natural and man-made disasters, and to provide a fire-fighting service. The MChS, moreover, contributes to the provision of humanitarian aid in international emergency situations. In 2001, for example, an MChS deployment erected a mobile field hospital in Kabul in the aftermath of the Coalition's attack on Afghanistan. In 2002, MChS specialists supported the German authorities in dealing with the effects of massive floods and in 2003, the ministry provided aviation equipment and personnel to France in support of efforts to extinguish forest fires. Overall establishment strength is estimated at 70,000, plus about 300,000 personnel of the State Fire Service (GPS). Estimated numerical strength of military personnel (civil defense troops) is 23,000.

Ministry of Justice, *Miniust* (www.miniust.ru)

Miniust is responsible for the Federal Service for the Execution of Sentences (FSIN), which in turn oversees the administration of Russia's penal system. In addition to uniformed prison service personnel, the FSIN has under its command militarized special assignment units that were used, for example, in the Chechen conflict. As a condition of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe, the FSIN was transferred from the MVD to *Miniust* in 1998. The service's law-enforcement personnel include about 251,600 uniformed employees. The numerical strength of its special assignment units is not known.

Federal Security Service, FSB (www.fsb.ru)

The FSB's tasks are manifold and, in addition to counterintelligence, include fighting organized crime and terrorism and the protection and control of Russia's borders. The service's director also heads the National Antiterrorism Commission, which was created in 2006 in order to coordinate the work of all institutions involved in the fight against terror. In 2003 parts of the disbanded Federal Agency for Government Communication and Information (FAPSI) and the Federal Border Guard Service (FPS) were incorporated into the FSB. Estimated numerical strength: 66,200 uniformed personnel, including 4,000 armed special forces, plus an estimated 160,000–200,000 border troops. According to an estimate by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the FSB's overall establishment strength is 350,000.

Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR (www.svr.gov.ru)

The SVR's tasks and functions are broadly comparable to those of the CIA, the German Bundesnachrichtendienst, or the British MI6. In 2003 parts of the disbanded FAPSI were incorporated into the SVR. Estimated establishment strength: 10,000–15,000, including about 300–500 special forces.

Federal Guards Service, FSO (no website)

The major task of this institution is to provide personal protection (Russian president, high-ranking officials and politicians, foreign delegations), as well as to protect important buildings (for example, the Kremlin, State Duma, Federation Council and strategically important infrastructure). In 2003 parts of the disbanded FAPSI were incorporated into the FSO and a new Service for Special Communications and Information (SSSI) was created within the FSO. Estimated establishment strength: 10,000–30,000, including about 3,000 military personnel in the Presidential Guards regiment. The majority of the personnel strength of FAPSI, which was estimated between 38,000 and 55,000 personnel, was reported to have been transferred to the FSO.

Federal Service for the Control of the Drug Trade, FSKN (www.gnk.gov.ru)

This service was created in 2003 on the material and personnel basis of the disbanded Federal Tax Police Service (FSNP). As indicated in its title, the FSKN's major task is fighting drug-related crime and controlling trade in pharmaceutical products on a national and international level. Estimated establishment strength: 36,000–40,000, including an unknown number of special forces.

State Courier Service, GFS (www.gfs.ru)

The GFS's main task is handling and delivering sensitive and secret official documentation and other goods for the federal bodies of state power. In 1997 the GFS's institutional predecessor was detached from the Ministry of Communications and received federal service status. Numerical strength of personnel is estimated at 4,570, including about 3,500 uniformed personnel.

Main Directorate for Special Programs under the President, GUSP (no website)

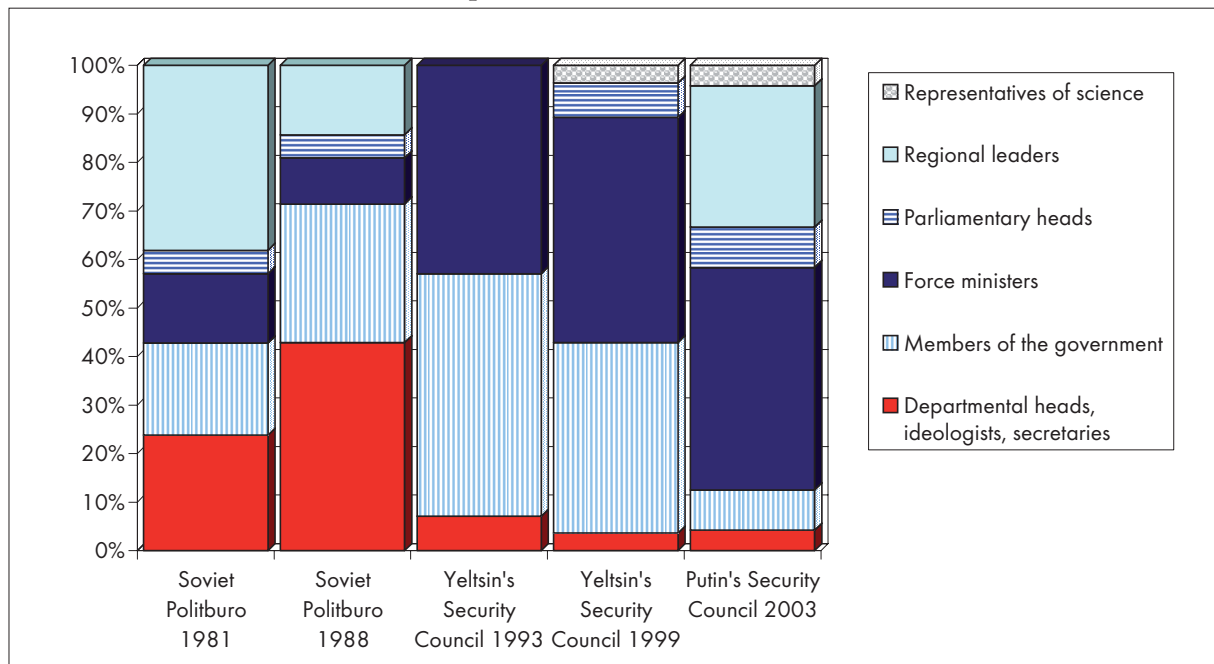
Due to the specificity of its tasks, few details about the GUSP's structure and activities are available. The directorate's main task is planning and organizing the mobilization of Russian federal bodies of state power in the case of an armed attack on the country. It is also tasked with planning, building and maintaining dedicated infrastructure (underground bunkers, transport routes, et cetera). Having previously been part of the presidential administration, the GUSP received federal agency status in 1998. Its numerical strength is estimated between 8,000 and 20,000.

*Source: Bettina Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures' and the Study of Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 18, 2005, pp. 559–585.*

Tables and Graphs

“Siloviki” in the Putin Administration: Olga Kryshstanovskaya’s Figures

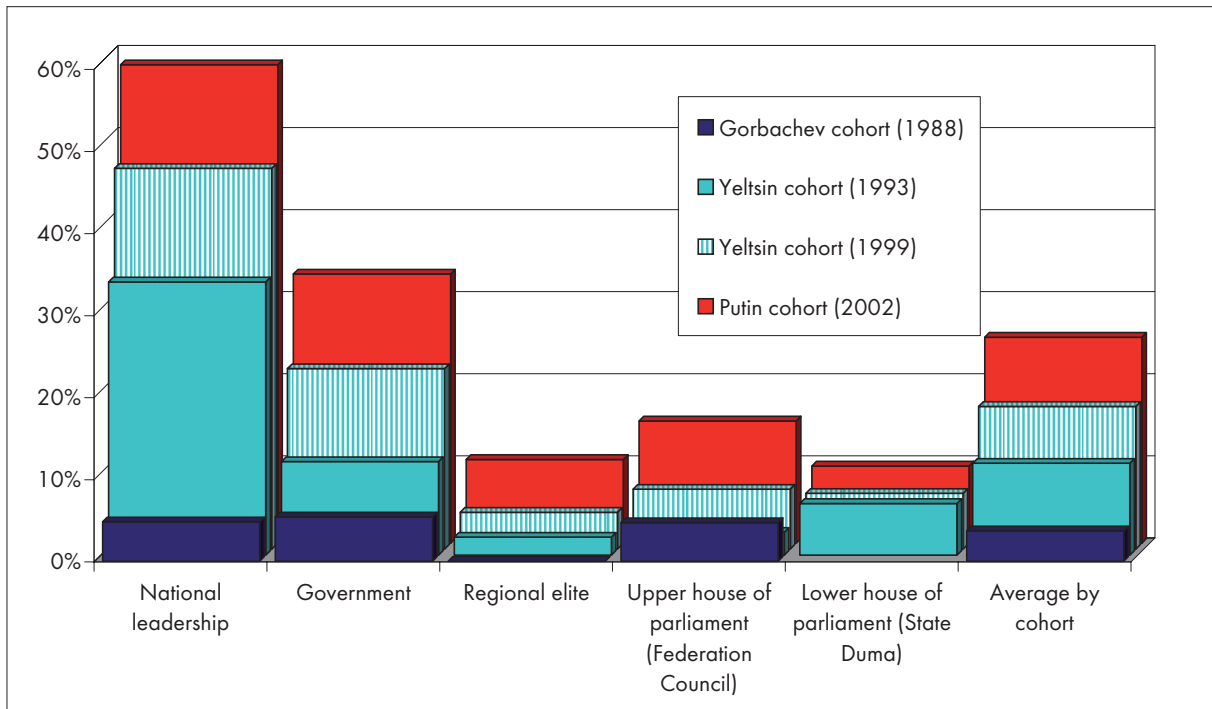
The Structure of the National Leadership 1981–2003



	Soviet Politburo		Yeltsin's Security Council		Putin's Security Council
	1981	1988	1993	1999	2003
Total (number)	21	21	14	28	24
Departmental heads, ideologists, secretaries	23.8%	42.9%	7.1%	3.6%	4.2%
Members of the government	19.0%	28.6%	50.0%	39.3%	8.3%
Force ministers	14.3%	9.5%	42.9%	46.4%	45.8%
Parliamentary heads	4.8%	4.8%	-	7.1%	8.3%
Regional leaders	38.1%	14.3%	-	-	29.1%
Representatives of science	-	-	-	3.6%	4.2%

Sources: Olga Kryshstanovskaya: *Rezhim Putina: liberalnaya mitokratsiya?*, in: *Pro et Contra*, Tom 7.2002. No. 4, pp. 158–180. here: p. 171; Olga Kryshstanovskaya and Stephen White, “Putin’s Militocracy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19(4), 2003, pp. 289–306, here: p. 298.

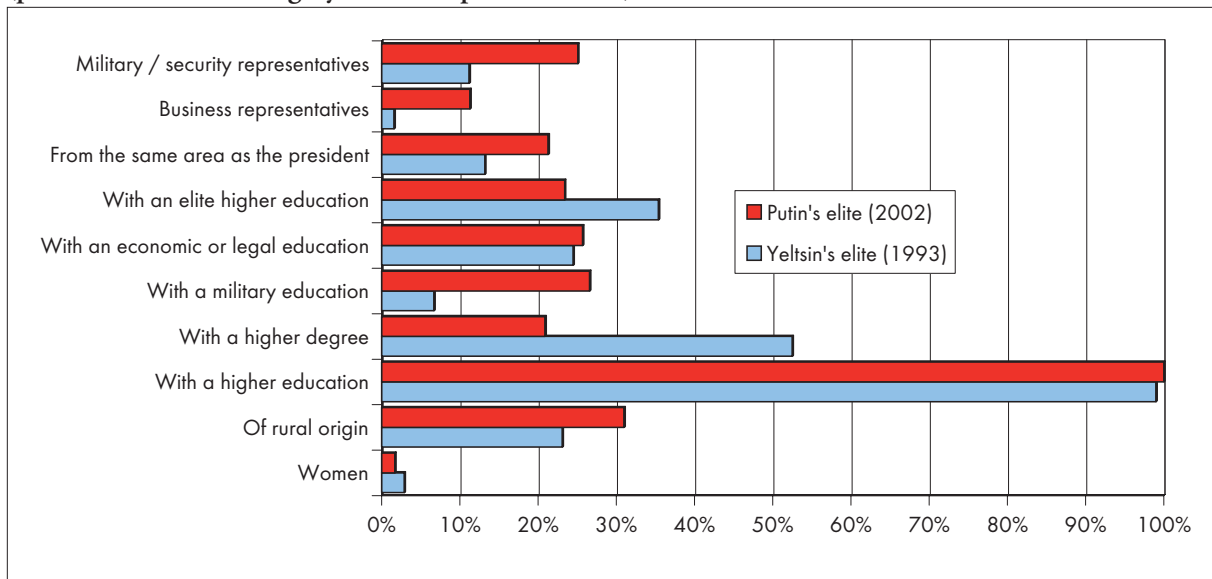
The Share of the Military in Elite Groups 1988–2003



	National leadership	Government	Regional elite	Upper house of parliament (Federation Council)	Lower house of parliament (State Duma)	Average by cohort
Gorbachev cohort (1988)	4.8%	5.4%	0.0%	4.7%	-	3.7%
Yeltsin cohort (1993)	33.3%	11.4%	2.2%	2.8%	6.3%	11.2%
Yeltsin cohort (1999)	46.4%	22.0%	4.5%	7.3%	6.8%	17.4%
Putin cohort (2002)	58.3%	32.8%	10.2%	14.9%	9.4%	25.1%

Sources: Olga Kryshstanovskaya: *Rezhim Putina: liberalnaya militokratiya?*, in: *Pro et Contra*, Tom 7.2002, No. 4, pp. 158–180, here: p. 162; Olga Kryshstanovskaya and Stephen White, “Putin’s Militocracy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19(4), 2003, pp. 289–306, here: p. 294.

The Russian Elite under Yeltsin and Putin 1993 and 2002
 (percent of the each category in the respective cohort)



The Russian Elite under Yeltsin and Putin

	Yeltsin's elite (1993)	Putin's elite (2002)
Average age (years)	51.3	51.5
Women	2.9%	1.7%
Of rural origin	23.1%	31.0%
With a higher education	99.0%	100.0%
With a higher degree	52.5%	20.9%
With a military education	6.7%	26.6%
With an economic or legal education	24.5%	25.7%
With an elite higher education	35.4%	23.4%
From the same area as the president	13.2%	21.3%
Business representatives	1.6%	11.3%
Military / security representatives	11.2%	25.1%

Sources: Olga Kryshchanovskaya: *Rezhim Putina: liberalnaya militokratiya?*, in: *Pro et Contra*. Tom 7.2002, No. 4, pp. 158–180, here: p. 161; Olga Kryshchanovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19(4), 2003, pp. 289–306, here: p. 293.

Analysis

Russian Military Reform

By Rod Thornton, King's College, London

Abstract

Until recently, the Russian military has focused on the threat of terrorism and the drug trade, emphasizing plans to reduce the number of troops to build a smaller, more professional army. In the last few months, however, the generals have come to see their main threat as being NATO and the US. The result has been a shift in priorities to concentrate on building a more powerful military to deal with states, rather than non-state actors.

Evolving Goals

Reform of the Russian military has been ongoing for several years now. The emphasis, in moving from the massive number of troops of the Soviet era, has been on downsizing to create a smaller, more professional force geared to dealing more adroitly with the perceived threats that Russia faces. These threats, until very recently, have been related to counter-terrorist and counter-narcotics operations. At the higher, strategic level, the threat from other states was considered to be minimal for most of the post-Cold War period. Deterrence was thus concentrated on developing a sufficiency of nuclear potential through the fielding of the new Topol-M missile.

This reform agenda has changed over the last few months. These changes will be discussed later in this article. First, however, some detail needs to be provided as to the reforms of the past few years.

Professionalization

The main driver of reform has been the need to lower the burden of conscription on Russian society and to reduce the size of the military (i.e. the armed forces which excludes troop bodies such as the Interior Ministry, the FSB, Border Guards, etc). Conscription is gradually being phased out with the idea being to have smaller, better-trained and motivated troops who are paid a decent salary. Such contract-based forces (*kontraktniki*) are becoming more and more evident. This move towards "professionalization" began in the 1990s under Yeltsin, but continued more determinedly under Putin. During Putin's tenure, this process began with the Airborne Forces (specifically, with the 76th Airborne – now Air Assault – Division based in Pskov), which is now fully manned by contract troops.

More and more professional units are being formed and are seeing service in places such as Chechnya and abroad on peacekeeping operations. These contract troops, while described as "professional" have often proved to be less than professional; occasionally worse,

indeed – on several levels – than conscript units. The main reason for these failings is that individuals who join the army on a contract basis tend to be those who cannot get jobs in civilian life for a variety of reasons. Contract service has meant that, in many ways, the army has become a "dumping ground" for social misfits. Given their low caliber, many of these *kontraktniki* are dismissed before they complete their full terms of service. Some of those who leave, though, are actually quite capable personnel who have become disenchanted with the failure of the authorities to provide the promised standards of pay and accommodation – both for single soldiers and for married men and their families. In 2005, 12.9 per cent of *kontraktniki* broke their contracts and left the armed services.

The gradual process of reducing overall numbers and professionalization has meant that, as of January 2007, the armed forces' strength was officially 1,130,900 (in 1994 it was 3.5m). Of these, some 78,100 are on contracts. Numbers will fall even further in January 2008 when the term of conscript service drops from two years to one. The quid pro quo here, though, is that nine types of recruitment deferment – such as studying in university – will be removed. This reduction in the number of deferments will lead to an extra 90,000 conscripts per year. Nevertheless, in the years ahead there will be an overall shortfall of conscripts. At the moment, 350,000 are needed every year to maintain the armed forces at 1.1m. When the length of service is cut in half, 700,000 will be required. However, the current birth rate in Russia cannot support such a figure: the expectation is that after 2010 the annual available pool of young men will only total 600,000. Thus even if every young man is called up – a patent impossibility given medical reasons alone – the armed forces would still be shrinking.

The hope of the authorities is that the armed forces – and especially the army – can be filled out with the *kontraktniki*. Those conscripts who have served their one year can take advantage of the possibility of stay-

ing on and becoming full-time soldiers. The Defense Ministry expects many conscripts to do this and thus numbers in the armed forces can be maintained. Such expectations may not be realized, however, as service in the armed forces is a far from popular career choice. In a recent survey, 59 percent of conscripts said that they did not want to serve in the army.

The lack of men taking up *kontraktniki* posts is bound to affect standards within the military. Even the most optimistic of reports sees only half of the 109,000 non-commissioned officer (NCO) posts in the military being taken up by *kontraktniki* in the next few years. And, if the conscript term of service is to be reduced to one year, then the shortfall cannot be made up from the conscript ranks. Whereas with a two-year conscript term, soldiers can become NCOs for their final year or six months; with the one-year term, the levels of experience will be insufficient for conscripts to become NCOs.

As things stand in Chechnya – the only Russian “combat zone” – the sole Defense Ministry troops stationed there are in the 42nd Infantry Division. This unit is filled out entirely with *kontraktniki*. No military conscripts serve in Chechnya.

Thus, the year 2008 will be a crucial one for the armed services when the conscript term is reduced to one year. In that year the demographic shortfall will begin to bite in terms of bringing in new conscripts. It is also the year in which most of the *kontraktniki* currently serving are due for release after their three-year contract is up. The majority are expected to leave. The fear is that many military units will then become mere cadre or “ghost” units: manned only by officers and some NCOs but without any personnel below them to fill out the ranks.

Nuclear Forces

When the idea of reducing the size of the Russian military first began to be mooted in the early 1990s, many analysts, who feared that the country would be left weaker, took comfort in the argument that Russia’s nuclear deterrent capability would be upgraded, principally by fielding the new Topol-M missile. Again, though, Russia’s nuclear arsenal has been very much reduced over the last few years. There appears to have been an inability to maintain the triad of nuclear systems – air-delivered, submarine-based and ground-based – which has seemingly left Russia in a parlous state in terms of being able to provide reliable strategic defense. Russian aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons rarely get off the ground these days. The submarine force is poorly maintained and only three new missile boats are currently being built.

With so few replacement boats, Russia cannot hope to maintain the most effective deterrence – the submarine-based capability – that it once had. Even the new Topol-M missile carries only a single warhead and the numbers of actual missiles is limited. The other main missile (with 10 warheads each) – the SS-18 – is old and servicing regimes have not been maintained. These missiles were originally built in Ukraine and engineers from the production plants do not cross the border to carry out the necessary checks. Overall, the pressure is now building for Russia to overhaul its nuclear capabilities.

Military Doctrine

Many are seeking to adjust and refine Russian military doctrine, which was first established in 1993 and revised in 2000. This doctrine is similar to the US National Security Strategy, but the Russian version is just as much a military doctrinal statement as it is a strategic scene-setter. The main driver for change in doctrine is the growing perception that NATO, and, in particular, the United States, represents a threat. NATO has not withered and died, as many in Russia had hoped. Indeed, it has expanded and drawn closer to Russia’s borders. There is a sense that Russia, to use former Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov’s words, has been “simply cheated” over original post-Cold War agreements on the expansion of NATO. To add to such negative impressions of the West, there have been the pro-Western “color revolutions” in the former Soviet space, the sense of Western “intrigue” in Central Asia and the presence of US troops in places like Georgia. In view of the latter, in the words of the Russian Chief of the General Staff, General Yuri Baluyevski, the US is trying “to entrench itself in the regions of Russia’s traditional presence.” President Vladimir Putin, in recent speeches, has also painted the US in a very negative light, saying “we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force [by the US] ... that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.”

To add to this turn for the worse in terms of relations with the West, in early March, Russia’s Security Council posted on its website a statement saying that it no longer looked upon the threat of global terrorism as being the chief danger to Russia. The threat, it said, now came from rival alliance structures that were becoming stronger, “especially NATO”. Additionally, tensions have been heightened by the emergence of US plans which envisage the setting up of missile interceptor facilities in both Poland and the Czech Republic. These would be part of the US National Missile Defense Shield. While US rhetoric fixes on the

need to set up such bases in order to bring down missiles fired from “rogue” states, there are many Russian officers and defense analysts who do not accept this rationale. These are systems, they assume, aimed at intercepting Russian missiles and thus designed to negate Russian deterrence capabilities.

All these moves provide ammunition to hardliners within Russia who are keen on developing a new military doctrine that takes into account these perceived threats. The dynamic would then be away from the development of small, flexible, professional forces designed to deal with sub-state actors, such as terrorists or insurgents, towards the shaping of grander, more powerful forces formulated to deal with strong state adversaries.

Modernization

There are thus demands from within the armed forces that, if numbers are to be reduced so substantially, then defense spending should increase to procure more and better technological systems. The generals want to increase the present level of 2.5 percent of GDP spent on defense to 3.5 percent. However, given that the Russian GDP is already growing commensurate with the rise in world oil prices, defense spending has been rising recently by about one third each year anyway. This increase is thus now enabling the modernization of much of the military equipment within all the armed services.

The current re-equipping program, scheduled for the period 2007–2015, sees the introduction of 50 Topol missiles, 50 bombers, 100,000 vehicles and 31 ships (both surface and sub-surface). The numbers

could be increased in scope if the new doctrine deems it necessary.

Conclusion

The new Defense Minister, Anatolii Serdyukov, is, as in the case of his predecessor Ivanov, a civilian. Whereas Ivanov had a power ministry background (FSB), Serdyukov merely used to manage a furniture store. It seems unlikely that Serdyukov will have the necessary leverage to oversee radical change within the military. While the movement of recent years away from conscription and towards professional forces has been broadly welcomed in Russian society, the generals are less than happy. They want more of everything, not less. What undermines Serdyukov most specifically is the fact that the Russian Defense Ministry lacks a corps of civil servants that he can work with. Serdyukov is virtually on his own as a civilian figurehead. The military officers within the Ministry are probably powerful enough to ensure that they will get their particular way in terms of the direction in which the Russian armed forces develop over the next few years – particularly if they get doctrinal changes that suit their purposes; changes that stress NATO and the US as the “enemy” and which therefore demand more and better equipment as the root to a better military. For these officers the only aspect of reform that really appeals to them is to have more and more up-to-date technical assets. It remains to be seen whether they will also seek to change the terms of conscription so that there will be enough experienced personnel to man the equipment.

About the author

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About the Russian Analytical Digest

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