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To fear or to respect ?

Two approaches to military reform in Russia

- 1 This article aims to analyze the content of military reform in Russia by comparing the authorities' actions to the approach of particular civic groups working for military reform - namely The Soldiers' Mothers movement. The main thesis is that current military reform reproduces the Soviet style vision of the army's role outside and inside the country and contradicts the logic of democratic transition in Russia.
- 2 The traditional role of military institutions during Soviet times can be illustrated by the popular Russian saying: "You are scared of (someone) - means you respect (someone)" ("*Boishsia – znachit uvazhaesh*"). This saying relates respect to a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity in the face of a more powerful, dangerous and superior other.. "Fear-based respect" is common in realism's approach in international relations and for authoritative political regimes and it still prevails in Russian political culture today. Regarding the military's domestic role Russia's official course aims to reproduce the long tradition of society's subordination to the needs of the military sector and institutions.
- 3 A different understanding of military reform is presented by the Soldiers' Mothers (SM) movement, which sees it as necessary to change the very principles of Russia's society-military relations to fit within the democratic tradition. This approach is based on the perception of the military sector (including the army) as one of the social institutions which should correlate with the level of socio-political and economic development of a society. The modernization of Russia's Soviet society culminated with revolutionary changes in the 1980s-1990s, but not all institutions have been fully and irreversibly transformed. The authoritative heritage remains in political, social and cultural practice and certainly plays a role in military affairs. Thus the SM movement aims to challenge and to change the tradition of society's subordination to and sacrifice for military interests of political elites.
- 4 The distinction between the two approaches is based on the differentiation of *military reform* - which is understood as the change of an entire military system, including military-society relations as a consequence of democratic transition in post-soviet Russia - and *reforms of armed forces* - which aim to rearrange the existing structure, weaponry and management of armed forces according to new internal and external conditions and risks.¹ The general public's attitude towards military-society relations is mixed, this creates favorable conditions for the official approach to military reform in Russia.
- 5 The armed forces will be analyzed as a specific social institution within both the Soviet and the 'new Russia' systems. The content of current military reforms and the SM movement's activities will be examined in accordance with the stated hypothesis.

The Armed Forces as a Social Institution

- 6 The vision of the armed forces as a social institution underlines several dimensions of its existence which need to be considered: its functions, its place within the political, social and economic systems, justification/legitimacy of their existence, and performance. Consideration of all these dimensions will aid comprehension of the particularity of military-society relations in any given society including Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.
- 7 Sociologists studying military-society relations indicate *external* and *domestic functions* of armed forces. The main manifested function of an army is the protection of the state and society from external threats. In the domestic sphere armed forces are considered to be an important source of *political socialization*, a unifying mechanism for a diverse society, binding its citizens to the dominant values of a nation-state. This function of armed forces appeared during the formation of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century. Anthony Giddens notes that the military duty by conscription at the beginning of the twentieth century in developed countries was an important factor in the widening of the franchise and the introduction of

general voting. Thus, participation in political life was connected to the compulsory military duty of citizens from the very introduction of mass armies based on draft.² In “Soldiers and Society in Postcommunist Europe: Legitimacy and Change” the authors name five roles of armed forces reflecting their functions - National Security, Nation Builder, Regime Defence, Domestic Military Assistance and Military Diplomacy.³

8 The military profession is a specific one and requires special training, while for the majority of people drafted it will be considered as a temporary occupation. The ability of a modern state to maintain a mass army is largely based on citizen loyalty and their sense of duty to provide state and society with a necessary public good – the sense of security through a system of military service. A long peaceful period after World War II brought a new phenomenon to the developed countries which sociologists named ‘post-military’ society, where military service and experience are the exception rather than the norm for the majority of the population.⁴ This creates a problem with manning a mass army and it is necessary for states to introduce more incentives for citizens to join it voluntarily.

The Armed Forces Within the Soviet System

9 From the inception of the Soviet Union its armed forces were considered essential for maintaining the independence of the Soviet state from hostile international surroundings. The army also carried out a ‘guarding role’ in preserving the unity of the multinational state in the face of inevitable ethnic conflicts. After World War II military power became the cornerstone of the USSR’s claim to superpower status. Since the appearance of the socialist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, the ‘guarding role’ of the army was stretched to the international level. Thus, the main *justification* for the large army was the *protection* of a society with specific values, political-economic and social systems from *external* threats. Military power also was presented as a key element for the important role that the Soviet Union took in world affairs and its support for ‘friendly peoples’ from oppressive regimes in the third world.

10 The Soviet system was not different in respect of the *domestic functions* of its armed forces. The Constitution of the USSR stated that military service was an “honorary duty of each soviet citizen” and the Criminal Code punished conscription evasion by 1-3 years imprisonment. Tight state control and penalizing law resulted in the majority of male population experiencing military service, which was also considered as an *important part of male upbringing*.

11 What was different about the role of the Soviet military was that it developed a widespread system for the preparation of men for the military service and the participation of the rest of society for possible involvement in country-protection activities that influenced almost all social strata, ages and professions. Within this system of civil defence there existed military courses at high school level and via higher education for adult men and women, special sports and military-related professional training within the DOSAAF (Dobrovolnoe Obschetsvo Sodeistvia Armii i Flotu –the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, the Air Forces, and the Navy). Importantly the military service was directly linked to the notion of patriotism and loyalty towards the Soviet state. Not accidentally, the system of patriotic education was called “*military-patriotic education*” (voenno-patroiticheskoe vospitanie).

12 Military service during the Soviet era also played a role as a catalyst for *horizontal mobility*. This was especially true for young men from rural areas where living standards were much lower than in urban areas and their mobility was strictly controlled by the authorities. Military duty brought together representatives of all the nationalities of the SU (of which there were over ninety). Traditionally men undertook their military duty in regions different to that of their origin. As Dimitry K. Simes noted “the armed forces have become an important melting pot of the social system”.⁵

13 Ellen Jones, studying the manning of the Soviet military suggested several explanations for “the apparent Soviet success in promoting acceptance of the draft” by the society: the tradition of conscription coming from the eighteenth century; military duty being considered by the majority of men as more acceptable than any selective scheme; opportunities for less advantaged boys from rural areas; and the special attention paid by the Soviet leadership in promoting popular acceptance of the draft.⁶ Another important reason for the positive image

of the armed forces and military service was the collective memory of the Red Army's victory in World War II, which was specially preserved by the authorities and played an important role in state ideology.

14 Urbanization, rising educational levels across the population, and increased involvement by women in the productive sphere resulted in a lower fertility rate and, consequently, the number of draft-age men by the 1970s. These social changes altered the public attitude to the military obligation, and especially the attitude of the draft-aged youth. Military service came to be considered an unpleasant duty that terminated or interrupted further education, professional training, and socialization.⁷ A decline in the discipline and unquestioning obedience among draftees and the deepening social conflicts caused the growing phenomenon of 'unregulated relationship' in the armed forces called *dedovshchina*. Irina H. Corten wrote that this practice "existed in Stalin's and Khrushchev's times to some degree but became rampant under Brezhnev, especially during the Afghanistan war, with demoralizing effect on the Soviet military establishment."⁸ The war in Afghanistan deepened the crisis within the armed forces and between civilians and the military. The human cost of this war, at first unknown by society, later became unpopular and resulted in military duty evasion by some young men, often supported by their parents.

15 As in any state, the Soviet political elite was master to the armed forces, but the importance of military power to the protection of the Soviet system from external and internal threats (the army's roles of National Security and Regime Defence) gave the military a privileged status. In Soviet times the political and military elites were indispensable twins; even after Stalin's death when the civil features of the political elite were raised, there was still no clear distinction between military and political elites; both became more closed and corporate castes detached from the society.

16 The military-society relationship was based on the client principle, where the society was under obligation to supply the military with unlimited manpower and to make sacrifices for national defense. No form of civic control over military institutions existed while state control over economic life and resources allowed the directing of all necessary funds for military purposes, even in times of economic shortages and stagnation. The military sector was one of the most developed sectors in Soviet times and extended far beyond the official military budget through the industrial, scientific and technological sectors of the economy.

17 Thus, the armed forces occupied an important place in the political, economic and social life of the Soviet state and society. Superpower status and the absence of serious security challenges since World War II justified the existence of a mass army, compulsory military service, a large military budget and the presence of militaristic features in different aspects of peacetime life. Military service benefited certain strata of Soviet society and played a role in its modernization and education, especially in earlier decades. Despite the growing contradictions between the military and society until the collapse of the Soviet system, a domestic source of legitimacy for a large military establishment remained.

***Perestroika* and the Change in Military-Society Relations during the 1990s**

18 During the 1980s and 1990s the combination of external and internal causes changed military-society relations in reforming Russia and seriously undermined the privileged position of the military sector and its immunity from public criticism. This trend did not lead to a rationalised policy of military reform but rather brought contradictions between military and political elites, destroyed the existing legitimacy and deepened the crisis in military-society relations.

19 In the late 1980s Gorbachev declared the concept of new thinking in foreign policy, which included the consequent elimination of the soviet military presence abroad, including a quantitative cut-off of military manpower and armaments. In 1988 Gorbachev officially confessed the war in Afghanistan was a 'mistake' of Soviet foreign policy, and in February 1989 the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan. The end of the Cold War removed the main reason for maintaining large armed forces – protection from external threats. New foreign policy initiated by Gorbachev also demonstrated the efforts of the new political elite to depart from

their close alliance with the military elite and to change state ideology to be more peaceful and cooperative with former foes. This trend was especially irritating for the military caste and for a section of the political elite, resulting in the attempted coup of August 1991.⁹

20 The rejection by the new leaders of power politics based on military might inside and outside the country, criticism of Soviet ideology, including militaristic heritage, and a revision of the main features of the Soviet system inevitably resulted in opening public debate on military-society relations, the role of army and the necessity of compulsory military service. David Holloway wrote: “The changing relationship between state and society has affected the priority given to defence and the position of the military in Soviet society: the allocation of resources to defense is no longer immune from public questioning; and society, far from being the passive recipient of military-patriotic propaganda, has begun to express its own views about the armed forces”.¹⁰

21 The main development of the military sector in the 1990s resulted in a serious cut in the military’s budget; a reduction in military personnel, and the conversion of military and military-connected production. According to different sources, the share of military spending in post-Soviet Russia decreased from 15% of GDP by the late 1980s to 4.7 % in 1992 to its lowest point at 2.4 % in 1998, with a slight increase in 1999 to 3%. In 2003 it was budgeted on a level of 2.64 % and in 2004 at 2.69%.¹¹ The State budget share for ‘National defence’ accordingly decreased from 20.89 % in 1994 to 14.74 % in 2003.¹² To cope with a lack of control over resources there was the conversion of military science and industrial sectors, and the withdrawal of military units from former allies’ territories in Central and Eastern Europe (300 000 servicemen, with families amounting to 1.2 million). This, combined with a general decline in the level of income for the majority of the population, all negatively affected the status and living standards of military professionals. Another important factor that evoked negativism about armed force and military service was war in Chechnya.

22 The worsening of military service conditions, a lowering in its prestige, and a criminal situation within the army indicated a deep crisis for the armed forces as a social institution in the face of abandonment by the elite and sharp criticism from society. High military ranks on the same level as the political elite were able to survive, however lower level military personnel became more impoverished along with the majority of the population.

23 The main change in military-society relations was the appearance of civil groups and movements lobbying for military reform. Civil organizations were able to gain access to previously secret information on military service and started to challenge the impunity of military institutions through public and court investigations of cases of abuse and human rights violations in the army. General public attitude demonstrated a decrease in patriotism, trust of the army as a public institution, and growing resistance to military duty – the combination of which could be described as a general decline in the domestic legitimacy of the armed forces.

Main Concerns in Military Affairs

24 Debates about the necessity of military reforms were present in the political, military and social spheres from the late 1980s and many agreed that there were three main problems that needed to be solved – financing of military needs, the enlistment system, and military service conditions. The consensus on the main issues of concern reflected the general understanding of the changing role and place of the armed forces, but did not mean an agreement on measures and directions of any necessary adjustment in the military sector to the new conditions.

Financing of military needs

25 During the 1990s there was a constant decrease of the army budget without reforms, this led to its disproportionate pay structure, which primarily served payment to high generals. Tcirulis K.N. and Baganov V.A in their review of military reforms in Russia noted that the biggest part of the military budget was provision for servicemen (salaries for military and civil employees, supplies, living facilities, medical care etc), amounting to 85.9% in 1998. Considering this serious disproportion in military personnel and their payment (57% of all servicemen were officers, 30% were draftees, and 13% contract-based servicemen, with there being twice as

many senior officers than junior level officers) they concluded that most of the military budget in the 1990s was spent on salaries for senior officers.¹³

26 The situation demonstrated the growing division within the army personnel between the “elite” of senior and headquarters personnel and “others” - junior in-field officers and other contract-based staff. The difference in provision counts in times not percentages, and the trend is preserved. In November 2004 minister of defence S. Ivanov announced an increase in officers’ salaries, which will affect only headquarters staff, this was ironically called by the media as supplies for “nearest circle” or within “Arbat military union” (a central part of Moscow with governmental offices).¹⁴ In the 1990s and 2000s, a ‘new’ military elite emerged, which successfully lobbied for its interests and reached a high standard of living, while the majority of serving field officers, servicemen, draftees and military pensioners continued to be one of the poorest social groups.

27 Necessary investment for the modernisation of weaponry, changes to military units’ locations and borderlines, the conversion of military industry, Russia’s duty to eliminate certain classes of weapons, and providing support for military pensioners in conditions created by the collapse of the social provision system demanded large resources which political leaders could not provide in the new circumstances. The solution of many of the problems faced by the historically privileged and large military and military-connected public sector needed long-term programs of reforms, all with due consideration of the financial, security, economic and human dimensions of military sector transformation. Clearly such coherent, structured and detailed plans had never existed. Efforts to solve the aforementioned problems were and still are reactions to crisis situations, rather than reason-based, proactive and planned.

28 Aleksey Arbatov, a leading Russian expert in international security issues and Duma deputy, wrote in an article devoted to “Military and political aspects of the defence budget 2003” that the military sector is still closed from the expert civil community, and that an independent expertise mechanism or system for evaluating military expenses did not exist. The military budget presented to the Duma for approval, on Arbatov’s opinion, was just a ‘mockery’ and based on “spontaneous development, influence of different economic, political and divisional interests and power balance between them [rather] than a goal-oriented policy of a state for the solution of certain tasks”.¹⁵

The Enlistment system

29 Compulsory military duty remains the sharpest issue in military reform debates. According to the existing system every man has a duty of military service and could be drafted between the ages of 18 and 27 for two years’ service in the army, and longer for the navy or marines. The new constitution adopted in 1993 granted a right to alternative service, although the law that regulated it was not approved until July 2002 and only came into force in 2004.

30 Today, the Russian army has about 1.2 million personnel with plans for a further cut to 1 million by 2008. Annually the army demands about 400 000 draftees, correlating to 35-40% of the 18 year-old male population, but can barely enlist a half of that figure. The average national level of those men drafted is 10% of the eligible pool. Moscow holds the record for the lowest number of drafted men – about 2.7 % of those eligible, with 60% being classified as having “limited eligibility because of health reasons”.¹⁶ According to official and non-official statistics between 30 000 and 40 000 young men annually dodge the draft.

31 Military statistics constantly address the issue of the predicted demographic gap by 2005, when the number of young men eligible for the draft would drop twice (twofold?). With difficulties in enlisting the necessary number of soldiers, drafting commissions have observed a constant decline in the quality of draftees. Thus, less young men are eligible for the service and fewer meet the physical requirements, without taking into account intellectual or education level, or criminal / drug-use records. All these problems are portrayed by military experts and many politicians as negatively affecting the Russian army’s ability to meet growing demand for trained and educated personnel to deal with modern technology, sophisticated weapons systems, and new security challenges.

32 There is no consensus anymore among the political and military elites, or between elites and society on the way the armed forces should be filled. The representatives of liberal forces such as the parties “Iabloko” (Apple) and the SPS (Soiuz Pravykh Sil – The Unite of Right Forces) suggested a turn towards a professional and contractual army¹⁷, which reflects the popular vision among draft-age men and their relatives, and is also supported by military personnel.¹⁸ The main official counterargument is that Russia could not afford a professional army.

Service conditions

33 The problem of draft evasion is directly connected to another concern that is often discussed – military service conditions. For draftees and their parents the army is considered to be a source of *danger to life and health* and the main reason for dodging the draft is considered to be *dedovshchina*.¹⁹ The use of draftees in armed conflicts, especially considering the Chechnya conflict, is another reason for resistance to the draft. In the 1990s, the Yeltsin government adopted a decree, which determined that draftees could only be sent to war-zones voluntarily, yet this principle has often been violated. At the end of 2004 the current Minister of Defence, S. Ivanov, promised that in 2005 all draftees operating in Chechnya would go there voluntarily. Because of the violation of this principle many young men chose to avoid the draft by all legal and semi-legal means with active or silent support from their relatives. However, military representatives argue that the main reason for draft dodging is a lack of patriotism and growing pacifist and anti-army sentiments.

34 According to surveys conducted by The Levada Center, civilians put priorities within “army reform” in the following order: “determined fight against ‘unregulated relations’ between servicemen” (45%), “considerable improvement of living conditions for servicemen” (44%), “immediate transfer of the army to contractual-base service” (44%), and “decrease of service length” (23%).²⁰ Social guarantees have become considered by servicemen as of great importance, offering necessary protection from changes to service conditions, termination of service, pension period, and disability. It is reported that there are 800 000 disabled ex-military personnel in Russia, 230 000 of which have appeared in the last 6 years).²¹

Civil Society’s Activities towards Military Reform: The Case of the Soldier’s Mothers Movement

35 The Soldiers’ Mothers (SM) movement is one of many civil society initiatives for military reform that appeared in the late 1980s. It is one of a few that has succeeded in gaining nation-wide popularity and respect, having had to live through 17 years of constant opposition to official and military stances, during changing political and economic conditions, with a changing leadership, grass-roots structure, a diverse ideology and unstable financial support.

36 Originally the movement united mothers of soldiers who had died in the Soviet army or who faced violation of their rights and cases of humiliation in the army caused by “*dedovshchina*”. Others were driven by the law adopted in 1988 that denied students in higher education the right to defer. Mothers’ mobilisation in 1989 succeeded in the adoption of the law which enabled all those students who were drafted in 1988 to return to complete their study. During this time the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers was established. In 1990 the first Soldiers’ Mothers organisations were registered as official public organisations in different cities and regions. The movement now claims about 300 organisations over Russia and in some CIS countries.

37 The particularity of the SM approach towards military reform was founded upon concepts of human rights and citizen’s rights. The SM held the view that young men – their sons, those who could be or already have been drafted – are citizens of a democratic country, and consequently the rights of all young men should be preserved, even during military service. The SM believed that the existing army and the conditions of military service undermined basic human rights – such as the right to life and dignity. The SM addressed the problem of the high death rate within the army during peacetime and argued that it was caused by poor living conditions, violations of basic human rights and the dignity of soldiers, bullying and harassment of conscripts by older soldiers, the impunity and lack of accountability of

military institutions, and the aggressive foreign policy. Therefore the SM believed that the casualties and human rights violations resulted from the very performance and nature of military institutions and could only be solved through a course of transformation of the military institutions in Russia.

38 The agenda of the SM movement addressed society's main concerns regarding military duty and its conditions and aimed to destroy the closed, corporatist nature of the armed forces and to establish civil control over military institutions. The SM agenda includes ensuring:

- the release of statistics on death tolls in the army and that all cases of death in peacetime are investigated and the guilty punished;
- the establishment of independent juries and commissions to investigate casualties and human rights violations in the army;
- the granting of amnesty for servicemen who deserted because their lives and health were in danger;
- the introduction of compensation for relatives in cases of soldier death;
- improvements to the living conditions of military service;
- the establishment of civilian control over the armed forces to monitor the conditions of service and to protect the human rights of soldiers;
- abolish the military construction units;
- the cessation of army involvement in armed conflicts, and to apply political, not military means for conflict resolution.

39 Thus, the movement addressed two main sets of issues: the protection of the human rights of soldiers and the protestations against the participation of conscripts in armed conflicts – both major concerns of society on military duty. Presumably, ensuring the protection of the human rights of soldiers and gaining improvement in the conditions of military service would require moderate military reforms and would require both the military and civilian authorities to recognise the existing problem and to co-operate with the movement for reform. The second set of goals directly interferes with the sphere of national interests and defense policy. These issues were traditionally closed for civilians during Soviet times. Pursuing these goals could inevitably lead to stronger confrontations with the authorities and have a very narrow range of legitimate strategies that are able to be employed. From the mid 1990s the SM movement started to lobby for the introduction of a professional army and to guarantee the right for alternative, non-military, service.

40 The SM present their activity as not merely the fulfilment of a mother's duty but also as their civic responsibility, although the idea of it being a mother's duty to protect her son's life seems to be essential for movement's ideology and mobilisation. Russian sociologist Elena Zdravomyslova wrote that the ideology of the movement is based on the conjuncture of two powerful concepts: that of human rights and of motherhood – with these being “the core belief of the essentialist Russian gender culture”.²²

41 One could see different, sometimes opposing opinions of the SM movement. By positioning themselves as mothers in the first instance, SM activists were often perceived as emotional, subjective, and incompetent in military affairs - more concerned with individual cases and not understanding national security needs. However, the constant work of SM organisations created a serious challenge to the impunity of military and governmental authorities. They provided the society with an alternative (to government or military) approach for dealing with cases of human rights abuses in the army; legal advice; the protection of draftees and servicemen, including officers, and composing statistics on casualties. The role of the SM in the routine protection of servicemen and their parents' rights is widely recognised by their supporters and opponents. The SM organised a well-developed system of rights protection and advice provision. It became the most trusted and known organisation working in this field. Deserters, draftees, servicemen, even officers, and relatives visit local SM organisations in times of need. Annually dozens of thousands of people approach the SM for help.

42 Governments since Gorbachev's time have had to tolerate the movement's legitimate demands, but have also tried to subjugate it. Since 1988 all governments have had meetings with SM representatives, replied to their requests and included the SM in governmental

commissions on military reforms and draft commissions. However, there were constant efforts to limit SM activity to areas of ‘mothers’ competence’ – predominantly participation in visits to military units, organising additional supplies to soldiers, and creating a good image of the army through patriotic campaigns.

43 At first military staff were irritated by the SM activity, but by the mid 1990s there was greater cooperation. In certain instances SM and military staff were able to solve serious cases of mass human rights abuses and were even able to investigate cases and punish the guilty parties. Such cases were the exception rather than the rule, as the practice of covering up crimes within the army has remained strong. Nevertheless, SM representatives in most regions of Russia have good contacts if not relations with their local military units and draft commissions.

44 Governments and military authorities tried several times to create organisations similar to SM organisations, albeit always under the authorities’ control. During the Yeltsin presidency Committees of Soldiers’ Parents were created and recently the Ministry of Defense established new Unions of servicemen’s parents. Some local SM organisations have changed their names and joined the governmental project.

45 Official criticism of SM activity has been growing since the second Chechnya campaign started. The Minister of Defence, S. Ivanov, has always referred to the SM negatively, using the label ‘so called SM’. He has criticised the SM for interfering in matters of the state where they do not have the necessary competence, and for supporting criminals – namely people who dodge the draft. He has also accused the SM of having contacts with enemies of the Russian Federation – Chechen terrorists. There have been several reports in the media that SM activities have been subject to tight control from the state intelligence services.

46 In 2004 the SM movement tried to remove its ‘camouflage of their non-political identity’ and create a SM party. The announcement of this plan immediately produced a sharp negative reaction from the authorities. A Duma deputy, former military general V. Alksnis, accused the SM of “performing the political order of the West ...[by] destroying defence ability of Russia.” He challenged the financial resources of the movement’s activities and suggested that an official investigation by the General Prosecutor’s office and the Minister of Justice be set up to look into this matter.

47 In October 2004 the SM started an initiative towards peace talks with representatives of Chechen fighters, this resulted in a furious response from the Russian Federation’s authorities. Despite the negative response by the authorities to the SM’s recent initiatives, a survey of women conducted in November 2004 about the SM showed that 72% of women believed that the “activity of SM benefits Russia”, and only 5% supported the opinions sounded by deputy Alksnis; 65% of respondents positively evaluate the possibility of “SM to be a mediator in peace-talks between Federal forces and Chechen separatists”.²³

Public Moods and Putin’s Plan to Rebuild a “Strong Russia”

48 Many correctly believe that the Soviet Union’s superpower status was based on its military force and the fear of it held by outsiders. The status lost by Russia during the course of reforms and the collapse of the SU is often related by many Russians to a weakening of its military power. Thus, for many politicians and military officials the task of rebuilding respect towards Russia is considered to be a matter of rebuilding Russia’s military might. The logic of a ‘strong Russia’ became a motto of Putin’s presidency in internal and external matters and is to a certain extent based on public expectations.

49 A public opinion poll conducted in May 2002 demonstrated that 52% of respondents believed that “Russia lost a status of great power” during Gorbachev’s time, compared to 32% during Eltsin’s presidency.²⁴ Research done in 1999 showed that 76% of Russians believed that Russia “should aspire to the role of great power,” but only 34% agreed that “the respect should be based on fear”, and 59% felt that respect towards Russia “should be free from fear”. Men prioritized military expenses in second place after the health service (49% and 59% respectively), while women prioritized quite differently: 65% - health service, 58% - education, 38% - military expenses. In general, Russians believed that the primary goal of Russia for the next 5-10 years should be “to build normal, stable life” – 73 % (70% men, and

76% women), rather than the “rebirth of Russia as a great power” - 18% (21% of men, 16% of women).²⁵

50 Other research shows that Russians see a difference between the status of a “great country” and that of a “great power”. A survey conducted in January 2002 demonstrates that Russians consider Russia to be “a great country”, rated after the USA, but in front of Japan, Germany, the UK, and China. However the respondents indicated various criteria for a country’s “greatness”: “high living standards” (67%), “developed industry”(66%), “human rights respect” (34%), “high educational level of population” (31%), and only in 5th place, the “possession of nuclear weapons” (30%). The latter having almost doubled from 17% recorded by a survey carried out in October 2001.²⁶ Nevertheless, another important feature of the public mood can be observed; the remaining and sometimes increasing sense of hostility towards Russia from other countries. In 1994 this feeling was indicated by 42% of respondents, and by 66% in 2000. Grading attitudes of Western people towards Russia, respondents put in first place “sympathy” (24%), and only 8% indicated “respect”, whereas many indicated negative emotions; “contempt” (21%), “concern” (12%), and “fear” (5%).²⁷

51 Polls show that the sense of military threat has increased among Russians from 1998 to 2005. In 1998 only 33% of respondents felt that such a threat existed whilst 59% did not, in 2005 only 44% of respondents did not have a sense of military threat. Popular evaluation of the Russian Federation army’s ability to defend the country slid from a 60% holding positive views in 2000 to only 52% having faith in the army’s ability in 2005. Negative evaluations of the army’s ability varied from their lowest level of 30% in 2002, to their highest at 38% in 2005.²⁸ Even though Russians do not consider military power to be a defining attribute of Russia’s greatness anymore, that feeling of inferiority and insecurity could produce support for pro-militaristic and power-gain plans of the government and politicians.

52 Public opinion polls of 2004 show that the army occupied third place among trusted institutions, albeit at a low level (28%) after the presidency and the church. The majority of respondents (increasing from 53% in 1998 to 71% in 2003) supported the elimination of the draft and the introduction of contract enlistment. In 2004 support for the continuation of the draft rose to 40% its highest since 1998, while 54% remained in support of contract enlistment. The polls demonstrate that women, more than men, support contractual service – 58% to 50% - and only 36% of women compared to 44 % of men supported the continuation of the draft system in 2004.²⁹

53 Putin’s government approached the issue of military reform but has adopted the tendency of ‘reforming without reforms’. The Military Doctrine of Russian Federation (2004) states that the army could be used not only against external threats but also to “prevent and interrupt inner conflicts”.³⁰ Putin’s presidency demonstrates a considerable increase in high level politicians and governmental figures with military experience or experience of the special services (about 20%). The first civilian Minister of Defence, S. Ivanov could hardly be considered a civilian due to extensive experience in the KGB and military intelligence service. The efforts to rebuild a ‘strong Russia’ includes a return to the many forms of military-patriotic education that existed during Soviet time. Thus, military training in high schools was reintroduced, as were military-sport games and in April 2005 a special TV channel called “Star”, devoted to military-patriotic education, was officially launched.

The Results of Military Reforms

54 Many analysts argue that after many years of debate on military reform there has not been much done in practice. There are several changes which are claimed by officials as military reform: a decrease in military personnel from 2.9 million in 1992 to 1.2 million in 2004; the introduction of contract enlistment; the development of apartment certificates programs for officers; an increase in military staff payment and equalizing them to the payment level of state sector employees; the disclosure of some lines in military budget; the introduction of civil control, and the introduction of alternative service.³¹

55 Although in reality current reforms introduced little change. The government’s promises to abolish the draft, to decrease the length of service , and to improve service conditions were

used during election campaigns but were not fulfilled. The draft remains to be the main method of enlistment. The contractual service introduced in the mid 1990s gradually led to an actual decrease in the number of contracts in the last few years. The law on alternative service, which came to power in 2004 was discredited from the beginning and, under current legislation, is considered by many analysts as a punishment.

56 Crimes, “*dedovshchina*”, death in peace-time army service, diseases, and poor living conditions still remain in the Russian Army. According to official statistics released by the Minister of Defense in November 2004, during the year 11,624 crimes were reported, there were 932 deaths of servicemen, 423 of which occurred during service and 24.6% of the deaths were suicides.³² Many crimes in the army are not investigated, and civil control over what the military authorities have reported presents vague ideas rather than the reality. Better provision in the army is mostly reserved for high ranking officers, while servicemen, even those in war zones receive much lower and often belated salaries. The apartment certificates program has demanded a high level of investment, but its effectiveness is already questioned.

57 The decreased number of eligible young men and continued draft dodging led to unpopular efforts by the political and military elites to abolish students’ deferments in 2004. Not surprisingly this initiative was supported by many deputies, the Minister of Higher Education, and even the Russian orthodox clergy. The issue was emotionally discussed by the society during 2004, and SM Committees even called for an all-country referendum on the issue. Finally the government did not dare to abolish deferments, probably because it also faced political crises in January 2005 caused by unpopular reform of social privileges initiated by the new pro-presidential parliament and government.

58 An official document from the Ministry of Defense on achievement in military reforms stated that it has introduced a “system of public control over RF Military Forces activities ... [that] completely corresponds to [the] demands of democratic political system”. The same document expressed negativism about civil activities in this direction. It stressed that the “effectiveness of civil control over [the] military sphere depends on special deep knowledge in military affairs, without which even good-willed creativity in this sphere will be superficial or even distorted perceptions and opinions about [the] state of affairs in the army, could have even ugly forms or would be under influence of pacifist myths about “sinfulness” of all military people at general.”³³

59 Civil experts believe that the task of setting up civil control over the military is far from complete. A. Arbatov wrote the “lion portion [sic] of information about armed forces, their structure and staff, location and plans of deployment, programs of reform and rearming kept in mystery from society and representative institutions – parliament, press, public organizations and research centers. Absurdly, even that information which is classified. Russia should release to international organization according to agreements.”³⁴ The very content of the military reform developed in 2002 for the period of 2001-2010 was never published in the open press.³⁵

60 We could conclude that during the 1990s there were no coherent military reforms in Russia but rather sporadic reactions to crisis situations in the armed forces and populist moves under public lobby. The main direction of the reform was to preserve or to rebuild Russia’s military power, to enable it to protect the country from external and internal threats *without radical transformation*.

Conclusion

61 During the 1990s the Russian Federation’s armed forces lost domestic legitimacy, creating a major problem in the recruitment to the armed forces whilst Soviet-era conditions persisted. The basis for a social contract, or at least its acceptance between society and the military as well as between society and elites concerning the functions and effectiveness of armed forces was eroded during political and economic reforms. There were no perceived external dangers anymore, while developed individualistic attitudes destroyed the sense of citizen duty amongst the younger generation.

- 62 The underlying issue of all the debates on military reform was and still is how financial and human resources should be mobilised to maintain a strong military power in new political, social and economic conditions where society is no longer prepared to make sacrifices for the political and military elites' goals, whilst the elites no longer possess the necessary tools to oblige the society to follow.
- 63 The military reform constantly discussed and often proclaimed for almost two decades turned out to be an effort to modernize Russian military institutions without serious changes. The core issue that demanded military reform – serious societal transformation - seems to have been ignored or not fully understood by politicians and the military elite. This could be explained by two reasons:
- 64 the very principals of elite formation and function, including relations between the political and military elites, remained the same and there has been no clear division between military and political powers;
- 65 relations between society and the elite (both political and military) did not change, and society remains to be seen as an object rather than as a subject of politics.
- 66 Alexander Gol'ts suggested that the explanation of this phenomenon could be found in the Russian tradition of militarism, when society has subordinated itself to military institutions, and sees the heroic only in military service and actions. Thus, the majority of people would not mobilize against the existing draft system but would rather use bribery, and other half-legal means to avoid being drafted.³⁶
- 67 We may conclude that the transformation of the power system in Russia, including military-civil relations, has been more in form than in content. The majority of high-level politicians and deputies have been trained within the Soviet political system with specific cultural and behavioral traditions, and they reproduce those known practices in new forms. The main features of the Russian political and military elites are a lack of accountability, elitism as a behavioral manner and populism rather than real understanding and the protection of society's needs.
- 68 The paradoxical result of current military reform is that Russian citizens consider the army and military institutions to be a threat to their well-being and not as a guarantee from external and internal dangers. The modern Russian army raises a fear without respect amongst Russian citizens.

Notes

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Endnotes

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19 Data of survey by All-Russian Center for Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM) on 1 April 2004. See table 2 in the annex.

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Abstract

The article analyzes the content of military reform in Russia by comparing official course to approach of Soldiers’ Mothers movement. The main thesis is that current reform has reproduced the Soviet vision of the army’s role outside and inside the country – based on fear. SM sees the necessity to change principles of society-military relations within democratic tradition based on respect. The paradoxical result of official military reform is that Russians consider the army to be a threat to their well-being but not a guarantee from external and internal dangers. Modern Russian army raises a fear without respect among its own citizens.

Keywords : Russian Army, Russia, Military Reform, Soldiers’Mothers

Research Fields : Sociology