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Military Education in the Russian Federation

ABSTRACT

In 2008, before the conflict with Georgia began, no one was able to predict the readiness or effectiveness of the Russian Army. A few years later – during the military campaign in Syria, the Russian Armed Forces confirmed their standing as one of the best armies of the world, demonstrating a high level of technical potential and combat training. Between 2008 and 2012 Russia’s military education became one of the best and most prestigious forms of education in Russia. The main purpose of this article is to show the changes that have occurred in the Russian military education since the beginning of military reform (in 2008) to 2012. The main research problem is to answer the question: how have the changes in military education and in the training system strengthened Russia’s military potential?

Keywords:

military education, Russian Federation, military power, training system

Since the programme of military reform was implemented by Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Anatoly Serdyukov in 2008, the Russian Armed Forces have ceased to have feet of clay. The process of modernizing the troops is scheduled to end in 2020, but it can now be observed that to a considerable extent Russia has developed its military potential. It has a nuclear arsenal, a large defence budget, increasingly better trained and motivated soldiers, tested war technology

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and an increasing percentage of modernized military hardware. The reform was not stopped even by a change in the post of Minister of Defence. Strong Russia, which is increasingly departing from democratic standards, arouses concern in the international arena. In spite of the war with Georgia, annexation of Crimea and involvement of the Russian Armed Forces in fighting in eastern Ukraine, none of the world powers has taken decisive confrontational action in relation to Russia. Vladimir Putin has already attained his goal to a large extent. The Russian Federation has again become a state whose opinion must be reckoned with by European states and the United States. The military education reform was an important factor of the modernization of the Russian Armed Forces.

Military education along with the training programme constitute a process which is aimed at acquiring and developing military capabilities by soldiers. According to many theoreticians of military science, the level of military education is the crucial element of the state's military potential. One of the advocates of this sort of thinking is Klaus Knorr, according to whom the state's military potential and the importance of military strength should be measured by expenditures that the state is able to allocate for the armed forces and the actual skills of soldiers (Knorr, 1962). Bolesław Balcerowicz counts the following as part of the state's military strength: the nation's spirit and will to combat, education, martial strategy, armed forces, defence preparation and military alliances (Balcerowicz, 1999). Andrzej Czarnocki stresses, however, that military potential is made up of the size and quality of the army, its armaments, the deployment and morale of soldiers (Czarnocki, Pietraś, 1988).

The goal of this article is to trace the changes in Russian military education from the point of commencing the military reform in 2008 to the point when the Ministry of Defence was taken over by Sergey Shoygu in 2012. The principal research issue that the author raises is to find an answer to the question: to what degree have the changes in military education and the level of the soldiers' training strengthened Russia's military potential?²

A measurement technique was used in the study. The level of education and training of the soldiers of the Russian Federation was subjected to detailed analysis. Their value was estimated based on statistical data and information indicated in the literature of the subject. The value reflected to what degree they strengthened or attenuated Russia's military level. A scale from 0 to 1 was adopted. Granting

² It was presumed that the army's military potential in the Federation is affected by 4 factors: the level of the military budget (in line with Knorr's suggestion); the military education system (in line with Balcerowicz's suggestion); the size and quality of the army and the condition of armaments (by Czarnocki). The impact of the education system is investigated in this article.

the criterion of 1 point meant that “it absolutely strengthened” a given factor, and 0 – “it absolutely attenuated”. The points in between show the degree of adaptation to the above requirements (0.1 – it attenuated almost entirely; 0.2 – it attenuated to a very large degree; 0.3 – it attenuated to a large degree; 0.4 – it attenuated mostly; 0.5 – it strengthened in half of the cases; 0.6 – it strengthened mostly; 0.7 – it strengthened to a large degree; 0.8 – it strengthened to a very large degree; 0.9 – it strengthened almost entirely). The score gained in a given period could be compared in the further research process.

1. RUSSIA’S MILITARY EDUCATION ON THE EVE OF THE MILITARY REFORM BY ANATOLY SERDYUKOV

The military education system plays a crucial role not only in the process of professionalizing soldiers, but also in disseminating patriotic values. The education level and content determines the combat preparation of future soldiers. Strong army needs suitable recruits. It is the issue that most armies of the contemporary world struggle with. Young men often choose another career path or are unprepared for service in uniformed forces – due to lack of education, ill health or a criminal record. Rigorous requirements relating to recruits result, among others, from the technological advancement of armament systems. Lack of interest in service in the army in the long run lowers the state’s combat readiness and thus diminishes its military potential.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian military schooling was in a deep crisis. The level of teaching was too low, and the syllabuses not adapted to the reality of the 21st century. There was a shortage of undergraduates in military schools. 80–90 per cent of graduates of military institutes did not take on work in the army. That bad *status quo* resulted mainly from the following: lack of clear systematic approach to the organization of military schooling; poor interest of young people in military degree courses; social impoverishment; a decline in morale and the loss of a sense of security by the Russians. The education standards offered by most Russian training establishments did not meet the requirements set to reserve officers in Russia. To adapt Russian military schooling to western standards, it was necessary to strengthen and modernize the material and technical facilities as well as infrastructure of educational institutions, equip them with modern hardware, improve the quality of the education process and foster university research (Miller, Trenin, 2004).

In 2007, 65 establishments of military education at upper level operated in the territory of the Russian Federation. According to the reformers, that number was

too large since military colleges allocated most of their assets for the maintenance of educational resources – they kept unnecessary jobs. Officer training was copied in establishments of military education of various sorts. Changes did not occur because the knowledge of western education standards was too little. There were no funds for that as well (Lenin, 2009).

To recapitulate, the military training system in 2007 decreased Russia's military potential. There was a lack of recruits, competent lecturers and material guarantees as well as modern models of education. The breakdown of the military education system into 65 institutions ruined a sense of belonging to one military organism – the armed forces. It caused internal disputes and unnecessary rivalry between individual units. The education system did not make the Russian Army a monolith. The fact related to the high ineffectiveness of the education system also lowered the army's standing as a pressure group in the political system.

In 2007, the military education system was rated at 0.3 pt, that is recognized as “attenuating the army's potential to a large degree”. Massive shortages were discerned regarding recruits, lecturers, material guarantees and modern models of education. The level of education was fairly low, military strategies from the Cold War times were still taught in many units. Also, the level of training of a conscript soldier was very low.

2. THE MILITARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE COURSE OF THE MILITARY REFORM

The aim of Serdyukov's reform for military education and the process of training soldiers was to centralize the system of staff training. There was a plan to transform 65 military colleges into 10 integrated colleges (Barabanov, 2010). Three military educational and scientific centres, six academies and one university were to be established. The new educational units were to solve the problem of soldiers' education and conduct research. Moreover, instruction centres were supposed to form in line with the territorial criterion rather than the sort of troops. According to the reformers, the change of the education system was necessary to achieve the plan of creating a corps of professional non-commissioned officers. For in the future the Russian Army was to be composed of professional soldiers to a large extent. However, a decision was ultimately taken to switch to a mixed army model (Pukhov, Barabanov, Kamienko, 2012).

As early as before commencing the conflict with Georgia, President Dmitri Medvedev issued a decree on the closure or consolidation of 65 military higher

education institutions. Although there was initially an objective to create 10 new institutions, in time the number was raised to 16. The curriculum changed as well. Focus was given to the practical side of training. The skill of using a foreign language started to be required from the staff members. The reformers stressed that the complexity of contemporary crisis situations causes the fact that soldiers and military personnel should possess even greater practical capabilities (Braun, 2012).

The reform of the military education system made thousands of officers redundant, for schools were conducting limited recruitment. According to then Chief of Staff Sergei Makarov, to attain full combat readiness it was imperative to streamline the education system, which meant a change of the guidelines, instructions, regulations and teaching aids. To create a corps of professional sergeants, Serdyukov took a decision to send 5000 junior officers who did degree courses in the period 2009–2010 to serve in the rank of sergeant. The Minister of Defence also ordered the reorganization of the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School so that fully trained pilots could finish the course in 2012. Paramilitary training courses for youth in school age were also organized to enliven military schooling. Within the actions in favour of increasing the appeal of a military career, in March 2010 President Medvedev decreed the formation of eight “presidential schools of junior officer cadets” for soldiers’ children and orphans. The first one was opened in Orenburg in October 2010 for 800 students (Nichol, 2011).

From the outset Serdyukov’s reform met with opposition from part of top-ranking officers, veterans, members of military organizations and representatives of the war and industrial trade. In their view, a severe reduction of establishments of military schooling attenuated the potential for shaping social competences of lower and middle military staff. There were closures or plans to close down schools that enjoyed high prestige (among others, Zhukov Academy in Tver). According to the generals, the closures of universities and formation of integrated units was done with prior preparation. It caused a switch from one extremity (a large number of military schools and research institutes) to another (too few units). Qualified personnel was irreversibly lost (Arbatov, Dvorkin, 2013). It soon transpired that the facilities being closed down along with the adjacent properties were sold against the law, into the hands of stooges. Defiance was also aroused by the Bologna system introduced into military colleges in accordance with Ekaterina Prezhevoi’s decision – the head of the Department of Education of the Russian Federation. Military colleges commenced operating from 2011 as three-cycle studies (bachelor’s, specialization, master’s). According to opponents, it led to a decline in the level of knowledge and preparation of cadets. The opposition managed to send the schooling reform for reconsideration by the State Duma.

However, positive results were obtained after a change at the position of Minister of Defence (Taburetkin, 2014).

The generals and also physicians, university students, councillors and residents of Sankt Petersburg also defied the transfer of the Military Medical University from the city centre. References were made not only to tradition and the role which the medical school had played in the past, but also to the fact that 200,000 patients receive treatment there. It possessed unique hardware and employed top-class specialists. The transfer of the University would signify the loss of personnel and destruction of the legendary school, because the new location was 16 kilometres away from the nearest metro station. Furthermore, the relocation was to cost 39bn roubles. The opponents underlined that changing the situation of the University would enrich the reformers gathered around Serdyukov, who “fixed” the tenders. The transfer of the college was to be taken care of by the “LSR Group”, directed by a friend of the Minister of Defence – Lev Vinnik (Taburetkin, 2014). The group of protesters was supported by the Union of Scientists, whose representatives took heed of the fact that in the state it was the first military medical university, which, along with the buildings, forms the city’s scientific, historical and architectural property. The scientists held that “removing the Military Medical University from the historical centre could disturb multifaceted scientific, medical and educational work in this exceptional institution” (Nikitin, 2012).

To sum up, in the course of the military education reform serious changes started to pass in the military schooling system. In that period (2008–2011) it was rated as “one that mostly attenuates the state’s military potential”. The education system was rated at 0.4 pt. Progress was discerned against 2007: training institutions were shrunk and unified, training for professional sergeants was introduced and the education system was changed. In that period the final effects of the reforms being introduced were not visible yet. The consolidation of the schools and training centres occurred slowly. There was also a very large opposition group, which was averse to the reform of military schooling. There was also a possibility that the changes Serdyukov was phasing in would be withdrawn in the near future.

3. THE MILITARY EDUCATION SYSTEM AFTER SERDYUKOV’S DISCHARGE

In November 2012, Anatoly Serdyukov was dismissed from the post of Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation. His place was taken by many years’ Minister of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters (in the period 1994–2012) and since

May 2012, Governor of the Moscow District – General Sergey Shoygu. He was a very popular person in the army, and his election was recognized as a success of military groups. He was marked by loyalty to Vladimir Putin, who treated him as a “reserve candidate” that could take over any ministry in the state. Assuming the new office, Shoygu decided to revoke the most controversial reforms of his predecessor, thereby he obviated protests in the military circles. Yet he admitted that the further modernization of the armed forces was vital.

Shoygu abandoned the centralized system of schooling. Nowadays 26 military colleges and their 9 branches operate in the Russian Federation, which are annually finished by about 2000 officers. The new Minister of Defence also reversed Serdyukov’s most controversial decisions, among others, those about the transfer of the Medical University and the closure of prestigious schools, thereby he tranquilized the moods in the army. He resolved to maintain uniform standards of teaching, however. The level of soldiers’ training rose after the decision was passed that the posts linked with special knowledge and skills be intended for professional soldiers only. In education great emphasis was placed on raising combat capability. Military schools had had no difficulty with recruitment since 2012, because a military career became more appealing. Shoygu resolved to reduce conscription in 2015. It was not related to a lack of applicants, as 2.5–3 candidates competed for one place in military colleges. The Russian Ministry of Defence has also announced that within the next few years it plans to almost double the number of soldiers and sergeants seeing professional service (up to 535 thousand people). As a military expert, Alexander Golts emphasizes that limitations in recruitment are caused by an excess of young officers. According to him, the excess of graduates from military higher education institutions led to the fact that young lieutenants were appointed to the post of sergeant (Telmanov, 2014).

The level of education has greatly been impacted by military manoeuvres, which involved soldiers from many units. The Zapad-2013 manoeuvres were held in mid-2013, among other things, which not only had political significance, but also were the opportunity to test the soldiers’ skills and military hardware. 22 thousand soldiers from Russia and Belarus, 70 tanks, around 70 aircraft and helicopters and numerous warships participated in the exercises (Głowacki, 2013). Exercises were also held “by surprise”, among others, in the Southern Military District in February 2013. Over 7000 soldiers were suddenly woken and sent to manoeuvres. Similar drives were organized in March for the Black Sea Fleet. Roughly 20 unheralded inspections and exercises with the participation of foreign and Russian personnel were held from 2013 to 2015. New skills of Russian soldiers are tested in current antiterrorist operations in Syria.

Nonetheless, big issues with corruption in the military education system kept occurring, and the curriculum deviated from top standards. Moreover, Shoygu restored the old training system in which officers' instruction was to last 8 years, not as Serdyukov aimed – it required graduation from a military college and completion of numerous professional development courses. It could lead to the emergence of an excessive number of graduates for whom there would be no work (Gorenburg, 2013).

Since Shoygu seized the Ministry of Defence, the combat capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces have had opportunities to be put to the test in battle. The annexation of Crimea, hybrid war in Ukraine and warfare in Syria have indicated that the Russian soldiers are better and better geared to the nature of contemporary war.

Taking into account the thorough analysis of the decisions taken by Shoygu and their positive reception in the military circles, there was a decision to rate the education system at 0.7 pt, that is, it was credited as “strengthening the military potential to a large degree”. Such a high rating was first of all affected by putting emphasis on enhancing soldiers' combat capability and increasing the number of military manoeuvres. Minister Shoygu succeeded in reconciling the generals' thinking in Soviet terms about soldiers' quantitative advantage with qualitative thinking. An example of that is encouraging military education institutions to give focus on the training process.

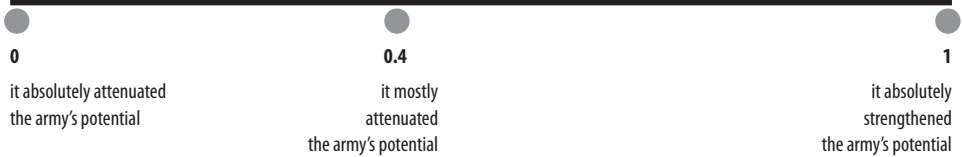
4. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the article was to point out to what degree the changes in military education and the level of soldiers' training have strengthened Russia's military potential. 3 periods were taken into consideration – prior to Serdyukov's reform (2007), in the course of it (2008–2011), and since Shoygu seized the office of Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation (following 2012). The results obtained are shown in the diagrams below.

Prior to Serdyukov's reform



In the course of Serdyukov's reform



In the course of Serdyukov's reform



Taking into account the military education system, we note that the army's potential has been strengthened considerably – from 0.3 in 2007 to 0.7 after 2012. It was impacted by the military education reform originated by Serdyukov, which was first of all aimed at tailoring military instruction to 21st century standards. More emphasis has been put on the frequency of conducting exercises and manoeuvres, and also the curriculum has been geared to western standards. Although Shoygu has withdrawn from the plans to centralize military schooling, the number of military colleges has been curbed by 2/3, which has enhanced the quality and competitiveness of universities and colleges. Not all issues of the military education system have been eliminated – cases of corruption and violence to cadets keep spreading. The number of practical classes is still scarce for economic reasons. Doubtless, within the last 8 years a great change has occurred in Russia in respect of military instruction, which has unequivocally strengthened the state's military potential.

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