

## Towards a professional army Changes to the structure of the officer cadre and the manning system of the Russian Armed Forces

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The structure of the Russian army's personnel has undergone a major transformation in recent years. The Armed Forces are no longer a down-sized continuation of the Soviet-era mass army, but are gradually becoming a *de facto* professional army in which conscription, now employed on a diminishing scale, will primarily constitute a first step towards a continued professional military career. The cornerstone for the process of professionalisation has been laid by a personnel reform which cut the number of officer posts by nearly half and considerably restricted the recruitment of new officers, thus restoring traditional proportions to the structure of the officer corps. The plans to ultimately implement a manning system based predominantly on contract service are a natural consequence of these changes. The ongoing professionalisation of the Russian Armed Forces should be treated as a conscious effort which is mainly necessitated by global trends: despite the demographic changes taking place, Russia could still maintain an army with a declared strength of one million soldiers, most of them conscripts.

### A professional army as an attribute of a global power

As the Cold War ended, it became much less important for European countries to maintain mass armies and related systems for universal mobilisation in the event of war. At the same time, defence solutions such as these have become less popular with the public. This phenomenon has also affected Russia. In itself, major structural changes to the Russian army were not required; it sufficed to downsize the Armed Forces by reducing the number of conscripts drafted into compulsory military service. However, the global social and political changes coincided with the rapid development of microelectronics, leading to the emergence of a new generation of tools and methods of combat. The considerably higher costs of acquiring the new generation of weapons and military equipment, combined with the longer training periods needed for soldiers to learn how to use them, created a need for soldiers with better qualifications, and especially better technical knowledge; as a result, the professionalisation of most modern-day armies has become inevitable.

Compared to the armies of the leading Western powers, the Russian Armed Forces continued for a relatively long time to operate within the mass-army structures inherited from

the Soviet Union. Financial constraints were the main reason for this. The Russian army's arsenal included relatively few state-of-the-art, complex means of combat, which it could not afford; professionalisation was thus not an urgent necessity. Professionalisation was also opposed by some of the commanders, in particular those responsible for the Russian forces' extensive backup units; this was the part of the army which prospered most in post-Soviet circumstances, and for whom the conscripts were mainly a pool of free labour. The progressing growth, in nominal and real terms, of military spending (from US\$6 billion in 2000 to US\$60 billion in 2011<sup>1</sup>) provided the basis for modernising the Russian army and, as a result, led to a confrontation between those who favoured keeping the old order in place and the advocates of change, representing the new generation of Russian military who had earned their stripes as officers in the latter period of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, or even after the break-up of the USSR. The Russian leadership, which perceived the armed forces as Russia's main attribute as a world power and therefore wanted them modernised, ultimately sided with those who advocated professionalisation. Professionalisation of the army should be regarded as an element of the broader efforts Russia has undertaken to restore its dominant position in the post-Soviet space (the Commonwealth of Independent States area) and its status as a global power. Because of the transformations that the leading Western armies underwent in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the US and British armies had become professional even before the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent technological developments only consolidated the changes), Russia was in fact forced to follow suit in order to keep its status as one of the world's leading military powers.

## Personnel transformations proving the end of the mass army

In the period from 2008 to 2011, the structure of the officer cadre of the Russian Armed Forces changed radically. The cadre's size was cut from the original 355,000 posts to 220,000 posts (while in fact only 150,000 original posts were kept in place; the remaining 70,000 will be new posts in the so-called Aerospace Defence Forces to be created to 2016)<sup>2</sup>. Most of those dismissed from active service were officers serving in the backup units and in the central command and control structures of the Ministry of Defence. As a result, the structure of the officer cadre regained its traditional proportions, with the lowest officer ranks of lieutenants and senior lieutenants accounting for the largest number

**Changes in the education system and considerable pay rises are making the officer cadre of the Russian Armed Forces increasingly elitist.**

of posts (before the changes, senior officers at the ranks of lieutenant colonel and major were the most numerous, accounting for more than half of all posts; see Appendix). At the same time as the officer cadre was downsized, recruitment to officer schools was temporarily suspend-

ed, and the number of military universities was reduced six-fold; the remaining ten universities will resume recruitment on a much smaller scale this summer. In 2012, officer schools will admit around 8,000 new students (before 2008, they admitted 25,000–30,000 each year)<sup>3</sup>; if the trend continues as planned, this will mean that the target number of officers in the Russian army will stabilise at around 200,000. Stricter criteria for promotion have also been implemented, which has resulted in a significant improvement of the quality of the cadre. An elite system of military education is developing, and future servicemen can prepare for military service in cadet schools, which means that in future, graduates of these institutions will account for a majority of officers in Russia. The elitist nature of service in the officer cadre of the Russian Armed Forces is also emphasised by the considerable pay

<sup>1</sup> Figures based on data on expenses in the 'National defence' chapters of federal budget bills ([http://www1.minfin.ru/ru/budget/federal\\_budget](http://www1.minfin.ru/ru/budget/federal_budget)) and information on Russian military spending published by SIPRI. According to SIPRI analysts, the Russian Federation's military spending has increased by 82.4% in real terms between 2001 and 2010. Table 4A.1, 'The 15 countries with the highest military expenditure in 2010', SIPRI Yearbook 2011, Oxford University Press 2011, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Соотношение категорий воинских званий в структуре Вооруженных Сил до 2008 года. Соотношения численности офицеров по штатно-должностным категориям. Presentation by the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Nikolai Makarov, Moscow, September 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Interfax-AVN, TASS, 20 February 2012.

rises introduced in January 2012, whereby the original salaries were increased by two and a half times (after the changes, the lowest officer salaries now amount to around US\$2,000 per month)<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the Russian army has become one of the best-paying employers in Russia, next to the energy sector<sup>5</sup>.

The most serious consequence of the downsizing and restructuring of the Russian army's officer cadre is that the capacity for mass mobilisation has been reduced. According to the benchmarks in force before 2008, the Russian army had 1,350,000 posts (including around one million manned posts) in peacetime, and a capacity to increase its size to 4.2 million soldiers through mobilisation in wartime<sup>6</sup>. With the new structure of the officer cadre, it will be possible to mobilise soldiers in numbers corresponding to not more than 30% of the peacetime force (1 million soldiers). A considerable expansion of the officer cadre in wartime would require either a mobilisation of retired officers (unlikely and increasingly infeasible as time passes), or a larger number of new officers (the recruitment of which would take time, due to the nature of the training process, and would require a prior expansion of the training facilities). However, the mobilisation system has also been adapted to the new, smaller number of officers: it now envisages maintaining a limited number of reserve soldiers on pay, who are required to maintain an adequate level of training in the periods between their periodic military exercises.

## Essential changes to the army manning system

A mixed manning system based on contracts and conscription has been in place in the Russian army since the 1990s. Non-commissioned officer (NCO) posts requiring specialist training have been manned in the contract system since the beginning (until the first half of the 2000s, general military posts were not treated as such). Around 100,000 NCOs on contracts served mainly in backup units (medical, logistical, etc.). Line posts under senior NCOs (involving command of combat units) were usually manned by junior officers (typically reserve soldiers who had graduated from civilian universities, but also professional soldiers just out of military school, awaiting nominations to officer posts), whereas the posts of junior non-commissioned officer were filled by conscripted soldiers. The first attempt at professionalising the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (limited to 81 first-line units) was made in the years 2004–2007. By 2008, around 100,000 new posts of contract NCOs and privates were created and maintained (out of a planned total

of 125,400). However, the conditions offered (in particular, lower-than-expected salaries and housing problems) impeded the continuation of this mode of recruitment. The implementation of the next programme, which aimed at assigning contract soldiers to all non-commissioned

**Officer corps have been downsized and restructured which has diminished the army's ability to carry out mass mobilisation.**

officer posts in the Land Forces and the Navy, as well as the posts of sailors serving on warships (a total of 180,000 posts by 2015), was stopped when the structural and organisational transformation of the Russian army started in late 2008, and a large number of previously-created contract posts were re-manned with conscripted soldiers.

The above changes to the structure of the officer cadre contributed to the gradual disappearance of the previously widespread practice of manning senior NCO posts with junior NCOs. Due to the character and duration of the training process (among other factors), this gap could not be filled with conscripted soldiers, and so it became necessary to create a professional cadre of NCOs in the Russian army. As the armed forces received more and more new-generation weapons and military equipment, it also became necessary to pay

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rg.ru/2011/12/08/oklad-site-dok.html>

<sup>5</sup> Среднемесячная номинальная начисленная заработная плата работников организаций по видам экономической деятельности; <http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat/rosstatsite/main/population/wages/>

<sup>6</sup> 'Укомплектованность Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации до 2008 года.' Presentation by the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Nikolai Makarov, Moscow, September 2011.

more attention to the recruitment of professional privates. Starting from 2011, the creation of new contract posts resumed (thus *de facto* putting into practice the objectives of the 2009–2015 programme). However, the recruitment procedures were changed (selected military academies launched courses for prospective contract NCOs, whereas previously it had sufficed to serve six months of compulsory military service to become a contract soldier), and a plan was announced to increase the number of contract posts in the Armed Forces to 425,000 in 2016<sup>7</sup>, which largely confirmed the earlier projections.

The pay rises introduced as of January 2012 have been conducive to the achievement of those objectives, and have made their accomplishment highly likely. The lowest pay of a contract private currently corresponds to US\$850 per

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month, which is a strong motivating factor in the choice of a military career, especially in the poorer regions, considering the fact that the average salary in Russia is around US\$600 per month<sup>8</sup>. Reports from the Russian regions since the end of January this year (i.e. since the first payment of the higher salaries) suggest that the number of applicants interested in contract military service has increased exponentially, and exceeds the current recruitment needs<sup>9</sup>.

It is quite likely that around 50,000 new contract soldier posts will be created each year to 2016<sup>10</sup>, especially considering the fact that during a similar period up to 2008, 25,000 new posts were manned each year, with much weaker incentives in place and despite frequent shortages of applicants. Moreover, the army has managed to keep 186,000 contract soldiers (figures of September 2011<sup>11</sup>), even though large numbers of contract non-commissioned officers were dismissed from the dismantled backup units (as many as 60,000 'old-type' NCOs on contracts could have left the service; just before the reform started, at the peak period in early 2009, the total number of contract soldiers in the Russian army had reached 207,000).

### Smaller conscription of a new kind...

In 2008, the duration of compulsory military service in Russia was reduced to 12 months (from 24 months), which had the natural effect of doubling the number of enlisted conscripts (see Appendix). However, the peak lasted for only two years; the number of enlisted conscripts then started to decrease, and in 2011 it reached the same level as before the duration of service was reduced to 12 months, i.e. 135,000<sup>12</sup>. At that time, fewer than 100,000 conscripts were sent to military service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and the remainder ended up in other military formations (mainly the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Meanwhile, more than 240,000 soldiers conscripted in the autumn of 2010 left the Russian army to become reservists. The significant one-off reduction of the number of conscripted soldiers only covered the Armed Forces units controlled by the Ministry of Defence, while in the remaining forces the numbers of conscripted soldiers remained unchanged. If the initial, partial information on the upcoming spring round of conscription (April–June 2012) is taken into account, it seems likely that the number of conscripts in this round will be similar to that in the autumn round, or no larger than in the spring 2011 round<sup>13</sup>. That would mean that in mid-2012, 200 to 280,000 conscripted soldiers will do their compulsory military service in the Russian Armed Forces (compared to 400,000 in mid-2011; see Appendix). According to the targets revealed in February for

<sup>7</sup> Interfax-AVN, 15 February 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Среднедушевые денежные доходы по субъектам Российской Федерации 2009; [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/urov/urov\\_11sub.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/urov/urov_11sub.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Interfax-AVN, 26 January 2012.

<sup>10</sup> TASS, 12 September 2011 and later.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Interfax-AVN, 10 January 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Interfax-AVN, TASS, 26 January 2012.

the structure of the Russian army's manning system, the number of conscripted soldiers in compulsory military service will decrease to 145,000 by 2020<sup>14</sup>.

Reducing the number of conscripted soldiers has revealed the little-known fact that the officially published data on the numbers of soldiers in the Russian Armed Forces (1 million soldiers; see Appendix) refer not to the number of actually serving soldiers, but rather the number of posts in the Russian army (a similar situation occurred before the personnel reforms launched in 2008, and is typical of armies that continue to use conscription)<sup>15</sup>. Assuming that the current manning system remains in place, filling the vacant posts would require at least 300,000 soldiers to be drafted in the spring round in 2012, and that

<sup>14</sup> TASS, 19 February 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Interfax-AVN, 12 January 2012.

**The idea to extend the duration of compulsory military service again has been rejected, and the range of available legal options to obtain an exemption from, or deferral of conscription has been extended systematically; this means that the Russian army has de facto started moving away from conscription as the main element of its manning system.**

number would only cover the needs of the units controlled by the Ministry of Defence. Drafting such numbers of conscripts into military service seems unlikely, not only in the context of the above information and plans, but also because the army's organisational capacity has been reduced as a result of downsizing the backup units. The Ministry of Defence and the government have categorically ruled out the idea of extending the duration of basic military service again (as a result of which fewer new conscripts would be

needed)<sup>16</sup>, and in addition, the range of available legal options to defer or avoid military service was extended in 2010 and 2011<sup>17</sup>. All this means that it should be considered a fact that the Russian army has started to move away from conscription as the main element of its manning system.

<sup>16</sup> Interfax-AVN, 22 December 2011, 15 July 2011.

<sup>17</sup> On the legal options to obtain exemption or deferral, see Interfax-AVN, 11 January 2012, Interfax-AVN, 13 October 2011 and 15 July 2011, among others.

The lower numbers of draftees, combined with the progressing liberalisation of the Russian laws on universal defence duty, have also changed the nature of conscription. A growing proportion of conscripts are university-educated, and even more importantly, specialists who have prepared themselves to serve in the army within the structures of the all-Russian paramilitary association DOSAAF, which has lately been operating increasingly effectively<sup>18</sup>. Both categories of conscripts in fact volunteer to do military service with future career prospects in mind (including the option of becoming a contract soldier). As obtaining a deferral of military service is not difficult, the number of conscripts coerced into military service is decreasing. The reduced scope and changed nature of conscription have directly contributed to a decrease in cases of draft dodging and the incidence of *dedovshchina* (the brutalisation of new conscripts by those with greater seniority in service), which rises and falls in proportion to the number of conscripts drafted into service (a record number of cases of *dedovshchina* was reported in 2009–2010<sup>19</sup>).

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Pinchuk, 'Армии нужны профессионалы, Красная звезда' 27 January 2012. [http://nvo.ng.ru/news/2012-01-27/2\\_recruits.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/news/2012-01-27/2_recruits.html) In 2010, DOSAAF trained 84,000 future conscripts, and 110,000 in 2011. Interfax-AVN, 29 September 2011.

<sup>19</sup> TASS, 4 February 2012.

### ... for reasons unrelated to demographics

The number of conscripts is being reduced, even though a social and demographic situation in which a successful universal draft would be possible still prevails in Russia. An army could be maintained with the declared number of soldiers, i.e. one million, based primarily on conscription, irrespective of the demographic changes taking place. In 2011, 11.6 million men of draft age (18–27) lived in Russia<sup>20</sup>, of which no more than 3.7 million had done compulsory military service in any of the country's armed formations during the previous decade<sup>21</sup>. This means that nearly 8 million Russians have been available for draft. Even allowing for those who are exempted from or otherwise unable to do military service,

<sup>20</sup> Calculated on the basis of 'Распределение населения по возрастным группам, Предположительная численность населения по Российской Федерации до 2030 года'; <http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat/rosstatsite/main/population/demography/>

<sup>21</sup> Calculated on the basis of the Russian President's Decrees on draft into military service, see Appendix.

usually for health-related reasons (around 30% of those reporting to the draft commissions each year are exempted or granted a deferral<sup>22</sup>, although considering the widespread corruption in the bodies in charge of organising conscription, it is difficult to say how many of them have genuine health issues), as well as the number of professional soldiers, manning

**Russia has reduced the scope of compulsory military service in a situation in which it would have been able to maintain an army based primarily on conscription. This means it was a conscious and purposeful change to the Armed Forces' manning system, and not a decision necessitated by demographic factors.**

the vacant military posts would not pose a problem. Russia will not experience a shortage of potential conscripts in the future, either. Irrespective of the negative demographic indicators, another 7 million young Russians will be available for the draft between 2011 and 2020<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, the Russian Armed Forces will not even experience an increase in the number of soldiers of non-Russian nationalities. A comparison of figures in the recent censuses shows that the proportion of those who consider themselves to be Russian in

the Federation's entire population has increased from 79.8% in 2002 to 80.9% in 2010, and the second largest group (around 5%) consists of citizens who do not claim any nationality (they are referred to as Soviet people), and for whom Russian is their first language<sup>24</sup>. In view of the above, reducing the scale of conscription should be regarded as a result of a conscious and purposeful change to the manning system of the Armed Forces, rather than a situation necessitated by demographic factors.

## Conclusions

Recently, a decision was taken in Russia to stop maintaining a mass army of the kind which would be useful if the country needed to directly defend its territory against a stronger external force, and to focus instead on creating a highly professionalised army similar to the leading Western armies. This presumably means that the country's strategic nuclear forces are now deemed a sufficient deterrent, and that the conventional forces – the core of the Russian Armed Forces – are regarded primarily as a means to pursue Russian interests abroad.

It is highly likely that the objectives defined for the professionalisation of the Armed Forces will be achieved. This process is taking place in a favourable financial situation, while at the same time it is being necessitated by the changes already made to the structure of the officer cadre. It appears that the structural and organisational reform of the Russian army carried out in 2009–2010 has removed all the major obstacles to professionalisation.

The increasingly elitist nature of officer service in the Armed Forces will be conducive to the development of a new officer corps with higher qualifications and, in the case of cadet school graduates, a higher level of ideological motivation. The officer cadre will increasingly develop closer links with the power elite, but on the other hand it will become increasingly alienated from the rest of society.

Moving the centre of gravity of the Russian army's manning system from conscription to contract service will considerably enhance the army's professionalism, but at the same time, it will in the longer term undermine the Russian leadership's ability to continue the current historical narrative, in which the tradition of the World War II-era mass Soviet army remains a basic constituent of the common identity of the Russian people.

<sup>22</sup> Interfax-AVN, 30 September 2011; TASS, 15 July 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Calculated on the basis of 'Предположительная численность населения по Российской Федерации до 2030 года', <http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat/rosstatsite/main/population/demography/>

<sup>24</sup> 'Информационные материалы об окончательных итогах Всероссийской переписи населения 2010 года: Национальный состав населения Российской Федерации, Население Российской Федерации по владению языками', [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm) Итоги Всероссийской переписи населения 2002 Том 4, 'Национальный состав и владение языками, гражданство', <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=17>

## APPENDIX

### 1. The number of soldiers in the Russian Armed Forces in early 2012 (approximate figures)

Posts: 1 million

Soldiers actually serving (excluding students of officer schools and reserve soldiers in training): 700,000, of which:

- generals and officers: 220,000;
- non-commissioned officers and privates in contract service: 200,000;
- conscripted non-commissioned officers and privates: 280,000.

The Air Force, the Navy, the Airborne Troops, the Strategic Missile Troops and the Aerospace Defence Forces have high manning levels – more than 90% of posts are manned. Around 65% of posts are manned in the Ground Forces.

A large number of reserve soldiers (possibly totalling 100,000 for all Russia) are summoned each year to serve two months of training, often involving participation in military exercises. Unlike the draft figures, the exact numbers of reservists called for training are not disclosed.

### 2. Original and target numbers of officers (excluding posts in the Aerospace Defence Forces, the formation of which is to be completed in 2016), in thousands.

	generals	colonel	lieutenant colonels	majors	captains	senior lieutenants and lieutenants
2008	1.1	25.6	87.6	99.5	90.4	51.0
2012	0.6	7.7	12.7	25.0	42.0	62.0

### 3. Numbers of conscripts drafted into service in the Russian army and the other military formations in Russia in the years 2002–2011 (before 2007 for 24 months, and since 2008 for 12 months), in thousands

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
spring round	161.7	175.0	166.0	157.7	124.5	133.5	133.2	305.5	270.6	218.7
autumn round	174.2	175.8	176.3	140.9	123.3	132.3	219.0	271.0	278.8	135.8
TOTAL	335.9	350.8	342.3	298.6	247.8	265.8	352.2	576.5	549.4	354.5



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