

# RUSSIAN MILITARY REFORM IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2008 RUSSIA-GEORGIA WAR

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*“The army has 1.4 million men, but there is no one to wage war.”*

-Russian President Vladimir Putin<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov’s reforms marked a serious effort to make real change in Russia’s military. The ability to implement these reforms resulted largely from strong, committed leadership at the top and the impetus given by Russia’s performance in the 2008 war with Georgia. Ultimately, Serdyukov was removed from office when his efforts ran into strong opposition from entrenched interests within the military establishment. The opaque nature of the military and its ability to manipulate the political leadership in an atmosphere of little public oversight suggests that prospects for democratization in Russia are dim.

Over the past few years, the Russian military has undergone what is arguably the greatest transformation that the country’s armed forces have seen in decades. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, various reforms have been attempted, only to end in failure or minimal change. Based on past experience with reforms, it seems that the success of military reforms is largely dependent on a few factors: a stimulant for reforms, sufficient financial backing, as well as the political will, capability, and capital to implement reforms. Thanks to a confluence of such factors – including the

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Thornton. 2011. *Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces*, Strategic Studies Institute, June, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1071> (accessed May 7, 2012): 11.

August 2008 war with Georgia that created the “perfect storm” – recent military reforms have been much deeper than those seen in previous years, despite a long-standing clear need for such changes.

With the ousting of the leader of these reforms, former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, the future path of these developments remains unclear. Given the backing of Russia’s top political leadership, Russia’s military is likely to continue on the path of reform; however, future reforms may have a more limited scope than those undertaken by Serdyukov. Considering the many deep-rooted problems facing the military, any serious limitations to the reform effort will not be in Russia’s best interest in the long run. A look into military reform efforts and Serdyukov’s ousting also provides some insight into the level of democratization within Russia. Very simply, within democracies, there is a system of checks-and-balances. In Russia, in addition to a power structure highly skewed towards the presidency, there seems to exist an internal balance of power based on a wide system of (largely corrupt) entrenched interests. The historical autonomy of the military as well as the nature of Serdykov’s ousting – to be discussed later in the article – suggests a balance highly-skewed in favor the military, in such a way as would not be permitted in a functioning democracy.

This article will first provide the background, including the political atmosphere which stymied previous reforms, moving on to consider the factors that changed to make some reforms possible. In order to provide an understanding of the nature of, and need for, these reforms, this analysis will then offer an assessment of the Russian military performance during the five-day war against Georgia. Next, the article will delve into the specific aspects of the military reforms, highlighting the actual or expected success of each component. Finally, the article will conclude with an assessment of the prospects for the future of military reform, as well as the insights into democratization within Russia that can be gleaned from the reform efforts discussed.

### **Military Reform: A History of Attempts & Failures**

Russia’s attempts at military reform are not particularly new. Over the years, the civilian leadership has regularly pledged to modernize, down-size, end conscription, and tackle other necessary reforms; former Russian President Boris Yeltsin was making these very promises in the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> What is also not new is the incredible need for reform. The First Chechen War (1994-1996) made this apparent; for instance, despite the existence of 70 divisions that were supposedly battle-ready, the military

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<sup>2</sup> Charles K. Bartles. 2011. “Defense Reforms of the Russian Defense Minister Anatolii Serdyukov,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24: 55.

could initially gather only relatively ineffective “composite” units that had never even trained together.<sup>3</sup> The same problem came up again a little over a decade later; despite the existence of a total of 203 ground divisions, it was estimated that only 90,000 troops were actually combat effective.<sup>4</sup> Over the years, other problems – outdated technology, structural inefficiencies – would also arise, only to be swept under the rug or lead to mere “window dressing” efforts at improvement. Therefore, despite nearly non-stop reforms since 1992, the main problems inherited from the Soviet era remained more than a decade later.<sup>5</sup>

The first round of Russian reforms began in 1993, following the division of the Soviet Army and Navy between the newly independent republics. While the Russian military was, in a sense, being built from scratch, it had inherited many of the problems of the Soviet military. Recognizing the impossibility of resolving the multitude of problems at once – particularly in the volatile environment at the time – the Ministry of Defense and General Staff proposed the creation of “Mobile Forces.” These “Mobile Forces” were an experiment to test a new organization and standardization that, it was hoped, could then be rolled out across the Army. These “Mobile Forces” would be composed of independent motorized rifle brigades to be equipped and manned at 95-100% of their full strength. However, not even the experiment itself was sufficiently resourced; the funding allocated to this experiment was enough to implement less than half of the planned changes.<sup>6</sup> Not only was the military under-funded for the planned level of reforms, but these reforms also fell afoul of the tenuous political situation at the time. Upon coming to power, Yeltsin had other priorities – namely market reform and consolidating his own power base – that far outweighed the need for military reform. Yeltsin failed to even prioritize the need for a new constitution in 1992, an arguably far more critical need than military reform at the time.<sup>7</sup> While the fall of the Soviet Union provided some of the impetus for reforms, ultimately, the lack of political will and financing ensured that the reform efforts were derailed.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Richard Weitz, 2010. *Global Security Watch: Russia*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International: 136.

<sup>4</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Gayday, Aleksey. 2011. “Reform of the Russian Army,” in Mikhail Barabanov, ed. *Russia’s New Army*. Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies: 18.

<sup>6</sup> Gayday, Aleksey, “Reform of the Russian Army,” 12.

<sup>7</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin. 2009. *Russian Military Reform: A Failed Exercise in Defense Decision Making*. New York, NY: Routledge: 17 & 64.

<sup>8</sup> Margarete Klein comes to a similar conclusion when looking at the history of Russian military reform, asserting that “different components of military reform often failed because of internal opposition within the military, lacking political will to force reforms through the security establishment and insufficient financial means to support the reform process.” Margarete Klein. 2012. “Towards a ‘New Look’ of the Russian Armed Forces? Organizational and Personnel Changes,” in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren and Carolina Vendil Pallin,

The First Chechen War (1994-1996) further revealed the weaknesses of the Russian military, thus providing yet another opportunity for reforms. The conflict was such an obvious failure for the administration that by March 1996, the majority of the population wanted an immediate withdrawal from the region and Yeltsin's popularity rating dropped to 5 percent.<sup>9</sup> The First Chechen War disaster placed military reform higher on Yeltsin's priority list, yet even with presidential backing, military reform efforts became the victim of power struggles and economic hardship. For instance, throughout Yeltsin's administrations, various structural changes would be made based not on an analysis of true security needs, but rather which service branches – including the Interior Troops and Presidential Guards – would boost Yeltsin's own power.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the difficult financial situation also served to hinder reforms. The Ministry of Defense found itself in particularly difficult financial straits, as it was unable to even pay all its personnel. In 1996, employees of the military-industrial complex even took to picketing government buildings for unpaid wages. The 1998 economic crisis served only to exacerbate the situation and dealt yet another major blow to the possibility of substantial military reform.<sup>11</sup>

The weaknesses revealed through the Second Chechen War<sup>12</sup> and the disastrous handling of the Kursk submarine sinking precipitated further efforts to reform. Shortly after the 2000 Kursk tragedy, President Vladimir Putin gave a speech in which he asserted that, “discussions of military reform have been going on in our country for quite a while—but, unfortunately, there has been little headway in this respect. I hope very much that we will be able to secure positive changes.”<sup>13</sup> While change was on the agenda, it seems that Putin would first need to consolidate enough power to take any significant steps forward. Additionally, Putin

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eds. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*, New York: Routledge: 29.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Bowker. 2004. “Conflict in Chechnya,” *Russian Politics under Putin*, in Cameron Ross, ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 255 & 259.

<sup>10</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin, *Russian Military Reform: A Failed Exercise in Defense Decision Making*, 104.

<sup>11</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin, *Russian Military Reform: A Failed Exercise in Defense Decision Making*, 91 & 101.

<sup>12</sup> Although the war revealed the many shortcomings of the Russian military, it was also viewed quite favorably by the public. While only 2/3 of the population opposed military involvement in Chechnya in 1995, the same percentage supported such action only four years later. Not only was the war widely considered a necessary response in retaliation for recent terrorist attacks (among other reasons), but the government also strongly controlled media reports regarding the war. As a result of such factors, and Putin's strong response during this time, Putin's popularity with the public soared. Emil Pain. 2005. “The Chechen War in the Context of Contemporary Russian Politics,” *Chechnya From Past to Future*, in Richard Sakwa, ed. London: Anthem Press.

<sup>13</sup> Zoltan Barany. 2007. *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 127.

would need to be cautious (at least initially) in implementing reform; after all, the military establishment was a critical support base. A full 80 percent of military personnel voted for Putin in the elections, compared to a little over 50 percent of the general public. It was worthwhile to not upset that support base.<sup>14</sup> However, Putin would find it possible to make small changes, laying the groundwork for greater reforms later. It seems unlikely that someone (even as increasingly popular as Putin) could have taken on the kind of deep reform needed early in his career, at least without jeopardizing his own position. This is due to the fact that one of the other great impediments to reform has been the military establishment itself. Therefore, anyone taking on military reform would need the power and popularity to circumvent deeply entrenched interests.

### *Military Opposition to Reform*

Although reforms have been sidelined for a variety of reasons over the years, one of the largest impediments to reform has been the military establishment itself. The military leadership has opposed many of the changes proposed by the civilian leadership, due in part to deeply established interests. Rather than seeing many of these reforms as a necessary (albeit difficult) step in the right direction, such reforms have instead been equated with a loss of privilege, including – perhaps most importantly – a means of padding ones' own pocketbook. If the structure of the system were changed, the budget overhauled, or any other major reform implemented, it could threaten those within the military establishment who were stealing literally billions of rubles from the state.

Russia's military budget more than doubled from 2001 to 2007, growing from R218.9 billion to R573 billion.<sup>15</sup> Yet despite the substantial increases in the budget, comparatively little change was seen in terms of equipment and weaponry. Upon investigating, the Audit Chamber reported in 2007 that an incredible R164.1 billion had simply been stolen from the Ministry of Defense. Another report further revealed that the Ministry of Defense "accounts for 70 percent of the budgetary resources used for purposes other than those officially confirmed."<sup>16</sup> With almost 30 percent of the Ministry of Defense resources simply being siphoned off, and an even greater amount misused or misappropriated, it is no wonder that it would take longer for new equipment and other necessities to reach troops. One critic quipped, "If we continue re-equipping the armed forces at such

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<sup>14</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin, 119.

<sup>15</sup> Dale R. Herspring. 2010. "Putin, Medvedev, and the Russian Military," *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect Future Uncertain, fourth edition*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 266.

<sup>16</sup> Dale R. Herspring, "Putin, Medvedev, and the Russian Military," 269.

rates, it will take hundreds of years to achieve the goal.”<sup>17</sup>

Not only have many benefitted from stealing from the state, but it is all too common for officers – of both high and mid-rank – to use conscripts as a source of free labor for their personal projects. Soldiers may be used to build the private homes of officers, or have their labor bartered in exchange for cash or other goods that make their way to officers. Unlike volunteers, who feel less at the mercy of their commanders, conscripts have fewer means of protecting their interests while in the military.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to these “perks,” entrenched military personnel would have little incentive to instigate reform, and very strong incentive to push back against any major initiatives to alter the system.

These abuses have been allowed to progress in part due to the high degree of autonomy traditionally given to the military, which enjoys a level of power unseen in democracies. Russia’s system has been described in a variety of ways: quasi-democracy, semi-authoritarian, superpresidential. Whatever the title, one thing is clear: in this system, the legislative branch has traditionally been allowed relatively limited insight into and minimal say over the inner workings of the military apparatus. In the words of noted analyst Roger McDermott, “Unlike in a liberal democracy, where committees exist to test and scrutinize government proposals and demonstrate accountability and openness, in the Russian political system defense officials are not subject to such vigorous checks and balances.”<sup>19</sup>

This lack of oversight can be seen quite clearly where the defense budget is concerned. Historically, the defense budget has been extraordinarily secretive; as of 2006, 44 percent of the military’s expenditures were completely classified. According to Pavel Zolotarev, then president of the *Foundation for the Promotion of Military Reform* and a general in the reserves, the budget structure “does not allow either parliamentary or civilian oversight of the military sphere... The impression is created that somebody has, as it were, deliberately set the goal of not allowing anyone else to understand all the nuances of appropriations for defense and security needs. Meanwhile one budget exists, as it were, for the government and so that it can be shown to people. But the Defense Ministry has its own—internal—budget... These two budgets do not intersect.”<sup>20</sup> Clearly, in such an environment, where civilian leaders are not even provided with a legitimate budget, it would be difficult to implement reforms even if the political and economic circumstances were favorable. However, in the right environment, military opposition could be overcome to a certain

<sup>17</sup> Quote found in: Dale R. Herspring, “Putin, Medvedev, and the Russian Military,” 267.

<sup>18</sup> Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military*, 140-141.

<sup>19</sup> Roger McDermott. 2011. *The Reform of Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges and Policy Implications*. Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation: 131.

<sup>20</sup> Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military*, 119-120.

extent in favor of reform.

In 2008, Russia began implementing what numerous Russian military experts have called the greatest transformation of the Russian military since the 1918 creation of the Red Army.<sup>21</sup> Reaching this point took a confluence of various critical factors, including a powerful and directed civilian leadership, the availability of financial resources, and a trigger for reform; this time, the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

### *Establishing Civilian Control over the Military*

Given the strength and opposition of the military establishment, it would have been incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to move forward with truly ground-breaking reform unless power and influence was first pulled away from the military's top leaders. Russian military expert Dmitry Gorenburg argued that Putin understood just that, and so therefore moved forward slowly to relieve them of influence over time. Putin proceeded gradually by first putting civilians in charge of the Defense Ministry – Sergei Ivanov in 2001 and Anatoly Serdyukov in 2007 – then taking away the power of the General Staff.<sup>22</sup> Note that civilian control in this case does not equate to improvements in democratization, as in this case it meant enhanced control by the executive branch. After all, other critical stakeholders in a traditional democracy – including parliament and civil society – played a very limited role within these reform efforts.<sup>23</sup> This lack of inclusiveness was apparent throughout the long process in which reforms were implemented.

In 2004, the Defense Law was formally modified to establish the defense minister and the Defense Ministry as above the General Staff and its chief. This new law entrusted the Defense Ministry with operational command and control of the armed forces. While the law excluded any reference to the official duties of the General Staff, it seemed as if the General Staff might be expected to prepare threat assessments and reports on military doctrine.<sup>24</sup> With the General Staff subordinate to the Defense Ministry, the appointment of civilian ministers – particularly that of Anatoly Serdyukov in 2007 – became incredibly important for spearheading change. Interestingly, the same system that had aided the military

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Barabanov, Konstantin Makienko, and Ruslan Pukhov. 2012. "Military Reform: Toward the New Look of the Russian Army," Valdai Discussion Club, July, available at [http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military\\_reform\\_eng.pdf](http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military_reform_eng.pdf) (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg. 2009. "Russia's New Model Army: The Ongoing Radical Reform of the Russian Military," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 78*, September, available at: [http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm\\_078.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_078.pdf) (Accessed October 13, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Bennita Renz. 2012. "Civil-Military Relations and Russian Military Modernization," in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*, New York: Routledge: 198.

<sup>24</sup> Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military*, 136.

establishment before would now work against it. Once Serdyukov was in place, he was able to sideline opposition, ignore criticism, and move forward with reforms in a way that would not be possible under a liberal democratic governing system.

Putin's selection of Serdyukov to fill the role of defense minister had initially been a surprise; Serdyukov was the first truly civilian defense minister, as he had no ties to either the Armed Forces or Russia's Security Services (Ivanov had at least been a former general in the Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR), rather, his past experience was within the tax ministry. He had been appointed the director of the Federal Tax Service in 2004 until his appointment to the Defense Ministry. While at the tax ministry, he gained Putin's admiration for his handling of the Yukos case and for increasing revenues.<sup>25</sup> As an outsider, Serdyukov was generally independent from the entrenched interests of the military and had the support of a popular president to back his reforms.

One of Serdyukov's first goals was to reduce the officer strength by 200,000. Rather than going along with reforms, then-Chief of the General Staff General Yuriy Baluyevsky attempted to thwart these efforts. Serdyukov had Baluyevsky replaced by General Nikolai Makarov, who had been the head of the Siberian Military District. Notably, Makarov had no previous power base in Moscow and was therefore completely dependent upon his appointers for his position, and therefore willing to move forward with whatever reforms were supported by Serdyukov and Putin. Over time, Serdyukov conducted a "thorough purge" of the Ministry of Defense, bringing in outsiders with no links to the entrenched military interests.<sup>26</sup> Within the first three years of Serdyukov's appointment, he retired or fired senior officers from the top 34 positions on a total of 44 occasions; additionally, only three officers within the top 34 posts remained in their posts.<sup>27</sup>

Not only did Serdyukov purge the upper echelons, but he used a variety of somewhat unorthodox methods to ensure the success of his programs. For instance, Serdyukov came through a back entrance into the naval Nakhimov School in St. Petersburg during an unannounced inspection in 2007. Upon finding unsanitary conditions, including fungus on the walls and damp rooms – exactly the kind of conditions upper military leadership wanted to hide – he promptly fired the chief of the college.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, during meetings, Serdyukov would dig into the details and demand answers to issues that had previously been ignored. According

<sup>25</sup> Bartles, "Defense Reforms," 61.

<sup>26</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 13-16.

<sup>27</sup> Roger McDermott. 2011. *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges and Policy Implications*. Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation: 142-143.

<sup>28</sup> McDermott, *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces*, 17-18.



to Russian defense analyst Ruslan Pukov, a typical exchange might go as follows: “To the Deputy Minister of Defense he asked: ‘How many testing ranges are owned by the MOD? How much land do they cover?’ Getting no response, Serdyukov continues: ‘Who permitted the construction of private cottages on the territory of these ranges, such as Senezhsky? Report!’”<sup>29</sup>

Serdyukov would also strike at another one of the other regular challenges faced by military reformers: the budget. In previous years, military reform was stymied in part by the lack of funds. However, under Putin, military expenditures had increased substantially. Realizing that increasing resources would be a necessary component to reforms, Putin used rising revenues from the oil-driven expansion of the economy in the 2000s to expand the military budget.<sup>30</sup> Russia’s military expenditures rose from \$29 billion in 2000 to more than \$51 billion in 2007. By 2011, expenditures rose to \$64 billion, making Russia the third largest military spender in the world.<sup>31</sup> However, it was realized that much of this was still lost to corruption. In an effort to cut down on the loss of funds, Serdyukov brought in his own team of inspectors, all individuals who had never before worked for the military and were separated from the entrenched interests that were feeding off the state via the military apparatus. Following these changes, one Ministry of Defense insider grumbled that, “inspections are now being conducted by people who have neither slept on armor nor toasted to friendship with the people they are auditing.”<sup>32</sup>

Serdyukov’s entrance had an electric, and near immediate, effect on the Russian military. However, the reforms may not have gained as much traction if not for one more critical event: the 2008 war with Georgia. While some opposition elements within the military were still capable of delaying further reforms early in Serdyukov’s tenure, this changed largely with the war in Georgia, which again highlighted how badly reforms were needed.<sup>33</sup> The event seemed to be the final ingredient – along with directed resources and strong, engaged leadership – in the “perfect storm” that helped to bring about reform.

Despite the fact that at Russia could declare the war a success, this conflict also clearly revealed many of the shortcomings of the Russian military. Therefore, within four months of this apparent victory, Russia’s

<sup>29</sup> Ruslan Pukhov. 2008. “Serdyukov Cleans Up the Arbat,” *Moscow Defense Brief #1*, Moscow: The Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies: 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory P. Lannon. 2011. “Russia’s New Look: Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24: 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> Figures presented in constant 2010 USD for comparison. The SIPRI Military Expenditures Database, available at: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/> (Accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Isabel Gorst. 2011. “Russian Military Budget Sapped by Corruption,” *Financial Times* (May 24) available at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/961668be-8628-11e0-9e2c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2CixAwsVN> (accessed November 19, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 13-16.

Defense Ministry announced a complete restructuring of the military.<sup>34</sup> As the Georgian war provided some of the impetus for the transformation of the military, the following section will provide an analysis of Russia's military campaign in Georgia. As noted previously, the reforms were not developed solely in response to the Georgian experience, but are instead the product of years of military thought. However, the Georgian war does help provide some critical context for understanding and assessing the latest reforms.

### **War with Georgia**

The relationship between Tbilisi and Moscow has long been strained, owing largely to the competition in recent years to control Georgia's semi-autonomous regions, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjara. Georgia's leaders had become particularly wary of what seemed to be Russia's de-facto annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. By August 2008, Moscow was providing two-thirds of South Ossetia's budget revenue and had given 70,000 of 80,000 residents Russian citizenship. Additionally, many of the residents in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia used Russian rubles and received Russian pensions.<sup>35</sup> The Russian military presence was another major point of contention; although Russia announced the official removal of its troops in Georgia in November 2007, hundreds of military personnel remained in the region as "CIS peacekeepers." As Russia seemed to be increasing its influence in the region, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was also attempting to fulfill his campaign promise to recover these regions that had fallen largely outside the control of Georgia's central government.<sup>36</sup> These naturally competing priorities served to further worsen the rocky relations between Moscow and Tbilisi.

The war may have been inevitable, given that Russia had reportedly been preparing for war with Georgia for around 2.5 years.<sup>37</sup> Not only had Russia been building its clout in the regions, but it looks as if Russia had long been preparing its military for operations in the region. In May 2008, Russia deployed troops to repair an important rail line that would later be utilized to move troops and equipment through the war. Then in April 2008, Moscow deployed an additional 1,000 troops to the 2,000-troop peace-keeping force in Abkhazia. Additionally, Russia's North Caucasus Military District (NCMD) conducted exercises with 8,000 troops through July and

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<sup>34</sup> Lannon, "Russia's New Look," 27.

<sup>35</sup> Weitz, *Global Security Watch*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Weitz, *Global Security Watch*, 135-137.

<sup>37</sup> Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton. 2011. *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*. Strategic Studies Institute, June, available at <http://www.strategic-studiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1069> (accessed May 3, 2012): viii.

early August.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Russia may have shipped military equipment to Abkhazia through the spring of 2008, including air defense systems, howitzers, and multiple launch rocket systems.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, despite the planning, the timing of the actual outbreak of war seems to have come as a surprise to the Russian military.

On August 7, 2008 – notably after weeks of provocation by the Russian-backed South Ossetian military – the Georgian military launched an attack on South Ossetia. Yet incredibly, when the attack occurred, key Russian officials were simply unavailable thanks to the popular August vacation period. Then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was attending the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics when the first shots were fired.<sup>40</sup> The Defense Minister could not be reached via telephone for more than 10 hours, reported *Moskovski Komsomolets*. Additionally, many other officers were also away on leave and the Directorate building was in the process of redecoration. Finally, the head of the Defense Ministry's Main Operations Directorate had not yet been replaced since his removal in July; as he had been removed, the former head of the Operations Directorate initially refused to return to the office to help with the crisis, only capitulating upon receiving a personal phone call from Putin.<sup>41</sup> Despite these initial setbacks, the Russian military was soon operating in the region, largely due to preparations made over the previous months in expectation of a conflict.

Russia therefore soon responded with a counter-invasion into South Ossetia, followed by attacks on Georgian military forces in both Abkhazia and Georgian territory as far south as Gori. Over the course of five days, an estimated 35,000-40,000 Russian and allied forces<sup>42</sup> (complemented by substantial air and naval forces) came up against 12,000-15,000 Georgian forces.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the campaign, Russia employed Soviet era tactics of mass-mobilization, moving large forces in column formation to overwhelm the smaller Georgian army.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Russian troops relied

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<sup>38</sup> Marcel De Haas. 2010. *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*. New York: Routledge: 147.

<sup>39</sup> Authors Cohen and Hamilton note that Georgian sources claimed to have observed these transfers, but do not provide an assessment of the reliability of these claims. However, given the level of Russia's military preparation for conflict in the region as well as Russia's rapid response, it seems likely that Russia did move military equipment into the region at this time. Source: Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 5, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Volunteer forces from the North Caucasus, as well as forces from South Ossetia and Abkhazia (included in the force numbers above), played a substantial role in the war as well. The Abkhazian forces were a well-organized fighting force; the South Ossetians, meanwhile, seemed to depend on insurgency tactics, including small hit-and-run engagements and blending into the local population. Source: Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 28.

heavily on massive artillery and aircraft barrages (as opposed to precision targeting).<sup>45</sup> Overall, Russia depended primarily on a massive use of force to overwhelm a significantly smaller (though more professional and technologically savvy) opponent. The quick, five-day war ended in victory for the Russian forces; the Russian troops remained in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the August 12 ceasefire agreement and Moscow soon after recognized the independence of both regions.

Overall, Russia achieved its primary objectives through the military campaign. For one, the war ended Georgian sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, leaving Russia the primary power broker in the region. Secondly, Russia managed to assuage its own fears regarding further NATO expansion into the post-Soviet space.<sup>46</sup> Russia has long harbored suspicions of NATO encroaching upon its sphere of influence. Even in its 2010 Military Doctrine, Russia labeled NATO a “Primary External Military Danger,”<sup>47</sup> specifically in regards to NATO’s potential expansion.<sup>48</sup> To Russia’s great dismay, then-United States President George Bush had actively lobbied for both countries to begin a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) before the April 2008 NATO summit. In line with Russia’s expectations, the war served to make NATO members less keen to actively move forward. Although NATO members publicly affirmed Tbilisi’s right to the MAP, many privately expressed reservations of deepening ties with Tbilisi at the risk of becoming embroiled in another conflict between Russia and Georgia.<sup>49</sup>

If one were to measure Russia’s military success in the war only by achieved objectives, it would seem as if the Russian military was fully adept. However, although the military was effective enough to win the war against Georgia, the five-day conflict unveiled deep problems within the military and provided some of the impetus for deep, arguably unprecedented reforms. Therefore, it is worthwhile to analyze the campaign itself to review the strengths and weaknesses to understand the necessity and the nature of the reforms. Some of the greatest shortcomings were revealed through the ineffective command and control, deficiencies with

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<sup>45</sup> De Haas, *Russia’s Foreign Security Policy*, 150.

<sup>46</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Notably, NATO is only characterized as a “danger” and not a “threat.” According to this very fine military distinction, a Military Danger is considered a state of relations that could lead to the rise of a military threat. A Military Threat, meanwhile, is “characterized by the real possibility of causing a military conflict.” Source: Lannon, “Russia’s New Look,” 46.

<sup>48</sup> The 2010 Military Doctrine further states that, “The West’s aspiration [is] to endow the military potential of NATO with global functions, [which is] realized in violation of the norms of international law, [and to] bring the military infrastructures of the country-members of NATO to the borders of the Russian Federation, including through expanding the bloc.” Translation provided by: Lannon, “Russia’s New Look,” 45.

<sup>49</sup> Weitz, *Global Security Watch*, 151-152.

the military personnel, and technological challenges.

### *Ineffective Command & Control*

Russia's war against Georgia may represent the first instance of Russian ground, naval and air troops fighting together as a substantial force since the end of World War II. While the operations can be considered to be joint, it seems as if these branches coordinated together only on a superficial level. For instance, Russian forces faced rather basic problems with coordination, such as lack of interoperability of radios between army and air force units.<sup>50</sup> Sergei Skokov, the Chief of Staff of the Ground Troops during the First Chechen War, compared that conflict to the war in Georgia, explaining that "[during the 'problem in the North Caucasus'] there was not a single command and control organization, formation or military unit that had been prepared and was ready that instant to begin to accomplish its missions... the same again occurred in Georgia."<sup>51</sup>

In addition to structural problems, lack of effective coordination was also due to poor intelligence. Rather than bombing important targets to aid ground troops, the air force all too frequently bombed completely irrelevant targets. It seems as if the forces may have been using outdated Soviet maps to select targets. Therefore, the air force bombed various airfields that had been out of use since the fall of the Soviet Union, while completely ignoring new, important bases. The new military base at Gori, for instance, was only damaged after Russian ground forces entered, but those forces had not been aided by air strikes in preparation of their arrival. Ironically, much of this intelligence was available through open sources and the location of the bases was widely publicized.<sup>52</sup>

On a tactical level, the Russian military employed rather outdated Soviet methods. Soviet ground forces would move in column formation, relying on size and speed to overcome the Georgian troops. The front troops would fight, while the rest of the formation would push forward. Such tactics had their own unique set of benefits and drawbacks. On the negative side, the tactics – moving forward with no attempt to flank the Georgian unit or establish fire position support – resulted in higher

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<sup>50</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 35-37.

<sup>51</sup> Quote found in: Keir Giles. 2012. "Russian Operations in Georgia: Lessons Identified versus Lessons Learned," in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*. New York: Routledge: 11.

<sup>52</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 38-39. Interestingly, it seems as if ground and air forces had been remarkably well coordinated by comparison during the Second Chechen War, which began in 1999. The air force and artillery were primary parts of the military's operational strategy as they were used heavily to conduct barrages in an area prior to ground troop advancement. Source: Olga Oliker. 2001. *Russia's Chechen Wars: 1994-2000*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND: 57-58.

casualties. However, the constant move forward added speed and shock to the attack. Additionally, it has been suggested that such tactics may have been most appropriate given the limits to Russian technology. As will be discussed in depth later, Russian technology lacked basic modern navigational systems; as such, it has been argued that the use of tight, simple formations may have been the most appropriate for maintaining the integrity of the troop formation.<sup>53</sup> Even so, these tactics have widely been viewed by many experts as a relic of 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare that is less effective for the kind of asymmetric warfare that is typical for 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict.

### *Deficiencies in Military Personnel*

Russia's victory was based largely on two factors: solid preparation leading up to the war (as discussed previously) and a strong superiority in numbers. Overall, the Russian army enjoys a budget more than thirty times greater than the Georgian budget, and its total force size is forty times that of the Georgian military.<sup>54</sup> Although only a portion of Russia's forces were utilized in the campaign, they still employed vastly superior numbers. Although Russia enjoyed numerical superiority, the war highlighted three major deficiencies related to Russian military personnel: a shortage of well-trained troops, the nonexistence of sufficient first-line units, and deficiencies within the leadership structure.

Although Russia has an official policy that bans the use of conscripts in war, a full 30 percent of the soldiers in Georgia were conscripts, who have relatively poor training for war.<sup>55</sup> Even some of the professional troops lacked sufficient training. For example, Russian pilots receive a mere 40 hours of training annually in the air while their NATO counterparts receive 120-150 flight hours of training every year by comparison. The loss of various aircraft has also been partially attributed to this poor level of training (as well as insufficient technological capabilities, as will be discussed in the following section).<sup>56</sup> Additionally, according to the Chief of the General Staff Makarov, less than 20 percent of Russia's units were battle-ready; the rest were full of only officers without privates.<sup>57</sup> This structure was actually by design, as the Soviet Union created these cadre units to allow the military to expand its forces quickly in the event of major

<sup>53</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 28-29.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Klein. 2008. "Military Implications of the Georgia War: Russian Armed Forces in Need of Reform," in Hans-Henning Schroeder, ed. *The Caucasus Crisis: International Perceptions and Policy Implications for Germany and Europe*. Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs: 14.

<sup>55</sup> Klein, "Military Implications of the Georgia War," 13. Also cited in: Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 31-32.

<sup>56</sup> Klein, "Military Implications of the Georgia War," 14.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 32.

war. However, Russia found itself deploying personnel from cadre units for this relatively minor war with Georgia, indicating that even Russia's front-line units were not available to deploy to war "as is." Finally, the leadership structure proved to be severely lacking in some areas. For instance, many of the cadre unit leaders proved to be completely incompetent; Makarov lamented post-war that they "were forced to handpick colonels and generals from all over Russia" to replace the incapable commanders.<sup>58</sup> The Russian military also lacked leadership at what would be the noncommissioned officer (NCO) level in Western militaries. According to reports, the tanks required reactive-armor<sup>59</sup> canisters to be filled prior to use; however, this task could not be performed unless an officer of captain ranking was present. However, officers of such level would often be busy with other responsibilities, leaving the ground force tanks entering into battle with empty reactive-armor canisters. In Western militaries, this task would be filled by the NCO instead of a higher-level officer.<sup>60</sup>

### *Technological Challenges*

A mere 10-15 percent of armaments were deemed to be modern in late 2008; as such, Russian troops entered into the conflict incredibly ill-equipped.<sup>61</sup> Many of the tanks and armored vehicles proved so old that an estimated 60-70 percent broke down over the course of the conflict, many of which impeded the arrival of following forces.<sup>62</sup> The deficiencies in Russian technology were particularly notable when compared to the smaller Georgian force that – despite a considerably smaller comparative budget – boasted significantly more updated technology. Georgian tanks, for instance, were equipped with GPS, night vision, thermal imaging, modern IFF (identification, friend or foe) systems, and were prepared for poor weather conditions. Russian tanks, by comparison, lacked such modern technologies.<sup>63</sup> The Russian Air Force was also in a poor state. The Su-25 attack jets deployed in the conflict, for example, had been in service for three decades with few updates. Each of these planes lacked modern

<sup>58</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> There are various types of reactive armor, although the principle is generally the same for all. The armor is composed of blocks of explosives between two metal plates that are held on the outside of the vehicle. When a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead strikes the tank, this armor will disperse and deflect the warhead jet, thereby reducing the warhead's ability to penetrate the vehicle. Source: "Appendix F," Global Security, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/23-34/Appf.htm> (accessed May 9, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 19-20.

<sup>61</sup> Estimate of modern armaments given by Chief of the General Staff Army General Nikolai Makarov during December 2008 while at the Academy of Military Sciences. Comment sourced from: Keir Giles, "Russian Operations in Georgia," 12.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 34.

<sup>63</sup> Klein, Margaret, "Military Implications of the Georgia War," 14.

computerized targeting, and relied on older bombs and rockets instead of precision-guided munitions.<sup>64</sup> The Russian Airborne Troops (VDV), who performed comparatively well in the conflict,<sup>65</sup> also utilized Soviet-era weaponry and lacked the most basic of reconnaissance capability. The VDV's reconnaissance capability fell essentially within the line of sight.<sup>66</sup>

Russian forces did not just lack modern sophisticated technologies, but also some of the more basic communications and defense systems. Again, such problems were not new; in 1999, Vladimir Shamanov had called for basic equipment such as tactical radios for troops in Chechnya. As of a decade later, such needs had not been fully met.<sup>67</sup> Among the surprising deficiencies in the Georgian conflict was the fact that regular radio contact was lacking between different units and that officers occasionally needed to use their personal cell phones to call command posts or their headquarters.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, soldiers were poorly attired for the harsh environment of war. According to one commentator, "[Russian] soldiers and commanders in this conflict... look like Ossetian volunteer militiamen, that is, they are dressed as if everyone dresses however they feel like dressing."<sup>69</sup> Such challenges with attire were not merely a visual problem, but one of personal safety for the soldiers. Soldiers lacked much of the personal protection equipment available even to the smaller Georgian forces; various reports tell of Russian soldiers pulling the body armor and helmets off of Georgian soldiers in order to enhance their own protection.<sup>70</sup> Armored personnel carriers were not sufficient either; Russian troops would often sit on top of armored personnel carriers because sitting inside was reportedly more dangerous due to the lack of sufficient armor.<sup>71</sup> All told, the Georgian conflict served to highlight many of the deficiencies of the technology available to the Russian forces. Despite a vastly more expansive budget, the Russian forces found themselves working with

<sup>64</sup> Klein, Margaret, "Military Implications of the Georgia War," 14.

<sup>65</sup> The 2008 conflict with Georgia has been considered the largest operation for the VDV since 1979, when Airborne Troops were sent to Afghanistan. The troops proved to be generally both fast and capable, despite other limitations. For instance, it took two battalion tactical groups less than 24 hours to prepare and travel an estimated 2,000 km from Pskov to a Beslan airfield. Additionally, the Airborne Troops effectively opened a "second front" in Abkhazia, an action that has been credited as contributing to Georgia's decision to end hostilities quickly. Source: Anton Lavrov. 2011. "Reform of the Airborne Troops," in Mikhail Barabanov, ed. *Russia's New Army*. Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies: 35-36.

<sup>66</sup> Lavrov, Anton, "Reform of the Airborne Troops," 37.

<sup>67</sup> Keir Giles, "Russian Operations in Georgia," 15. Vladimir Shamanov was the Commander of the Army of the North-Caucasian Military District as of August 1999. "Vladimir Shamanov," Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, available at: [http://eng.mil.ru/en/management/types\\_of\\_troops/more.htm?id=10330371@SD\\_Employee](http://eng.mil.ru/en/management/types_of_troops/more.htm?id=10330371@SD_Employee)

<sup>68</sup> Klein, "Military Implications of the Georgia War," 14.

<sup>69</sup> Quote sourced from: Keir Giles, "Russian Operations in Georgia," 15.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy*, 150.



Soviet-era weapons that regularly broke down and were inferior to many of the technologies available to the smaller Georgian military.

### *Overall Assessment*

The Georgian war highlighted many of the shortcomings of the Russian military. The Command and Control structure proved lacking as various branches within the military failed to coordinate effectively in their operations. Additionally, the military found itself utilizing Soviet-era mass-mobilization techniques that likely increased the number of casualties faced by their forces. The personnel – from privates to officers – proved lacking in capabilities, stemming largely from the lack of training and overreliance on conscripts. Finally, the deficiencies in the technology also became overly apparent, as Russian forces used Soviet-era weaponry that frequently broke down mid-conflict. While many of these challenges had been recognized years previously, the war helped provide some of the impetus for undergoing deep-seated reform that began in 2008.

### **Military Reforms**

Russia's military reforms were unveiled on 14 October 2008 by then-Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, who claimed that these were the most radical reforms seen in the military since the end of WWII. The reforms were intended to transform the very nature of warfare for the Russian military. In brief, the primary elements of the reform included efforts to:

- Shrink the armed forces to 1 million by 2012;
- Eliminate 200,000 officer positions to make the military less top-heavy;
- Eliminate under-strength units until all were fully manned and at permanent battle-readiness;
- Streamline command structure by replacing the divisional structure with flexible brigades under four strategic territorial commands;
- Improve training and enhance the military education system; and
- Modernize weapons systems.<sup>72</sup>

Each of these necessary reforms will be discussed in further detail below, specifically in regards to the altered overall structure of the Russian military, changes to personnel at all levels, and plans for upgrading force technologies.

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<sup>72</sup> Reuben F. Johnson. 2009. "Russia's Military Reform Plans Face Resistance," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 27 March, available at <http://www.janes.com/products/janes/defence-security-report.aspx?ID=1065927857> (accessed May 4, 2012).

*A Military Structure for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare*

The overall structure of the Russian military, while effective enough for winning the war with Georgia, proved largely inefficient for 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Russia has maintained a Soviet-era “bloated” command structure that is built to control thousands of military units. The majority of these units, however, are “skeleton units” that are manned by only a small group of personnel; each of these units is intended to be able to be filled quickly with conscripts and reservists should Russia require quick mass mobilization. Not only is Russia unlikely to face war under such conditions, but the way that these units are maintained undermines their efficiency. After all, as previously mentioned, one of the primary complaints from the upper leadership during the Georgian war was the lack of battle-ready units as well as the incompetence of the cadre unit officers.

While this sort of mass-mobilization-focused military structure was appropriate during WWII, it is not the type of warfare Russia has faced (or is likely to face) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> Such a military would be appropriate if Russia faced a real threat from NATO or China, for example. However, a major military conflict with either seems highly unlikely, at least for the foreseeable future, despite Russia’s labeling of NATO as a military danger and Russia’s very real opposition to NATO enlargement (as seen in part by Russia’s reaction to Georgia’s potential accession). The labeling of NATO as a “danger” seems all the more absurd when one considers that France, a NATO member, agreed to sell the Mistral amphibious assault ship to Russia. After all, it would be very odd indeed for Russia to purchase such technology – and particularly for an enemy state to sell it.<sup>74</sup>

The primary reasons for Russia’s stated opposition to NATO seem to be for internal, political reasons rather than military, including: post-imperial trauma, the difficulties of coming to terms with a post-superpower status, and the challenges of admitting comparative weakness to the U.S. and NATO.<sup>75</sup> Former Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Evgeniy Primakov has also indicated the recognition that NATO does not pose a real threat to Russia, explaining that, “the expansion of NATO is not a military problem, it is a psychological one.”<sup>76</sup> But even with this lack of explicit

<sup>73</sup> Bartles, “Defense Reforms,” 56.

<sup>74</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg. 2010. “New Attack on General Staff and Military Reform.” *Russian Military Reform*, 26 January, available at <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2010/01/26/new-attacks-on-general-staff-and-military-reform/> (accessed October 9, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Leonid Polyakov. 2002. “Military Reforms in Russia,” in Janusz Bugajski, ed., *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations: 80.

<sup>76</sup> Lannon, “Russia’s New Look,” 48. In regard to China: Even if China were to pose a major military threat to Russia in the future, a structure of mass-mobilization still seems untenable

recognition about some of the changes in the external threat environment, there has been at least a tacit recognition as these reforms have called for a smaller military. After all, if Russia is still expected to need to mobilize its citizenry against traditional threats such as NATO, it is unlikely that a paring-down of the force could have occurred. From this, it seems that Russia expects to face new types of threat. It seems as if Russia's threats are more likely to emanate from its south, most notably the potential breakaway provinces of Chechnya and Dagestan, another conflict with Georgia, or challenges posed by groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> In short, the sorts of conflicts for which Russia must be prepared for call for a completely new type of military structure: one that is smaller, more flexible, and more professional.

Under the new structure, Russia aimed for this goal in part by abandoning its divisions for brigades by December 2009. The traditional division had about 13,000 personnel, while a brigade maintains around 5,500.<sup>78</sup> Each brigade was planned to be equipped with its own weaponry and other required assets for combat (under the division structure, all assets would be held at the division level and then assigned to lower levels as required). The smaller size and control over its own assets would allow brigades to operate independently, and should therefore give these units significantly more flexibility and allow for a substantially shorter deployment time.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, each brigade should have significantly increased flexibility and ability to respond in asymmetric and unpredictable combat situations that are more characteristic of modern conflicts.<sup>80</sup> All told, Russia has been rather successful at moving towards this goal; the conversion from 203 divisions to 83 brigades was reported as complete by December 2009, taking just over a year. Additionally, each brigade was reportedly at "permanent readiness" at this time.<sup>81</sup>

Another challenge faced by the military in the Georgian war was the

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as the Chinese forces modernize. Rather, Moscow may expect that nuclear deterrence would prove to be the deterrence to any major conflict with Beijing. Source: Mark Galeotti. 2009. "Force Projections – The Future of Russia's Military Reform," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, December, available at <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Intelligence-Review-2010/Force-projections--The-future-of-Russia-s-military-reform.html> (accessed May 5, 2012).

<sup>77</sup> Lannon, "Russia's New Look," 30.

<sup>78</sup> Galeotti, "Force Projections," Page 2. The brigade structure has long been a part of other Western militaries. The US and UK, for example, took up the brigade as the basic army unit in the 1990s. Source: Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 21-22.

<sup>79</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 21-22.

<sup>80</sup> Lannon, "Russia's New Look," 39-40.

<sup>81</sup> Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 23-24. The meaning of "permanent readiness," however, seems up for debate. It has been defined by the Chief of General Staff Makarov as "ready for combat within an hour" after receiving orders to deploy. However, others have said it means brigades would be capable of leaving the barracks within an hour, to be in combat within 24 hours. Still others have suggested that "permanent readiness" really means that brigades are fully manned and not reliant on conscripts. Source: Thornton, *Military Modernization*, 23-24.

lack of effective joint operations between the military units. Part of this challenge likely stemmed from the fact that under the Soviet structure, the service branches maintained most of the control. Under the new structure, Russia also altered its Command and Control structure. Russia's six military districts were to be downsized into just four Command areas: East, West, South, and Central. Each command now not only directs ground forces, but also has operational control over the Air Force, Navy, Interior Ministry troops, Emergency Situations Ministry, and the Border Guards within their area of command. The only units that will continue to be centrally controlled from Moscow include the Strategic Missile Troops and the Space troops. The creation of these four Commands was complete as of October 2010, surprisingly ahead of the original December 2010 deadline.<sup>82</sup> Presumably, these changes will mean that joint operations will be the product of actual cooperation in the future, and not simply joint superficially.

### *Designing a Professional Fighting Force*

When it comes to personnel and staffing, the Russian military required alterations at all levels: it was top-heavy with officers, had a dearth of mid-level leadership, and was bound by an overreliance on non-professional conscripts at its lowest levels. Such problems were notable in the Georgian war. As previously noted, around 30 percent of the soldiers put in conflict were conscripts who were not supposed to be sent into battle. Additionally, the ground forces lacked sufficient leadership at the mid-levels to fulfill jobs typically addressed by non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in Western armies, and yet the ground forces there also had an overabundance of incompetent cadre officers that required replacement. While Serdyukov managed some positive reforms to improve leadership within the military, challenges remain and it seems as if the Russian military will remain dependent on poorly trained conscripts for years to come.

For every officer in the Russian military prior to reforms, there were only 2.5 soldiers. (In other words, 355,000 out of 1.1 million soldiers were officers.) For a military preparing for mass-mobilization, such a structure would make sense; the officers would lead units as they filled up following a draft. However, Russia no longer requires an army prepared for mass-mobilization. Consequently, Serdyukov planned to scrap 205,000 officer positions by 2015 and, according to Chief of the General Staff Makarov, 150,000 cuts had been made by December 2009.<sup>83</sup> Serdyukov's success

<sup>82</sup> "Russian Military Districts," Global Security, available at: [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-md.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-md.htm) (accessed December 7, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Klein. 2012. "Towards a 'New Look' of the Russian Armed Forces?" in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*. New York: Routledge: 35.

with this effort would be limited, however; by 2011, Serdyukov had altered the planned number of officers upward again, to 220,000.<sup>84</sup> While this was still an improvement from when Serdyukov began his reforms, it still did not completely resolve the situation of a top-heavy military force.

Staff alterations were not only focused on decreasing the numbers of personnel, but also on changing the composition of the military. Reforms focused on creating a much higher percentage of junior leadership in the rankings.<sup>85</sup> This reform should therefore also help with the distribution and specialization of duties. Previously, officers were in charge of combat leadership and oversaw trivial details: both training privates on rifle assembly and escorting soldiers to the bathhouse would fall under their purview.<sup>86</sup> The new structure will allow others, notably those under the new NCO system, to take up the roles normally and necessarily delegated to junior leadership in most other militaries.

While the officer level will be cut significantly, it was planned for the military to build up its mid-level leadership with a new corps of non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Reformers hoped to attract decent candidates for the new program with a healthy salary (the same as that of an active general) and substantial training. It was planned for NCOs to be “earmarked” for command positions over specialties, including motor rifle, reconnaissance, motor transport, and so forth.<sup>87</sup> In order to ensure that these NCOs are more likely to be professional, there is a higher bar for application. For instance, a soldier may only apply for an NCO position after 12 months of service. Additionally, these candidates must have a high school degree, pass an entrance exam, make it through a selection process, and then enroll in a 34-month-long academy. At the end of this time, NCOs will be required to serve for 5 years.<sup>88</sup> It is also hoped that with a more professional force, these leaders will also be able to cut down on the rampant hazing (*dedovshchina*) in the military.<sup>89</sup> The greatest challenge still may be recruiting qualified talent, however. The first course for NCO training had to be postponed for lack of qualified applicants. Initially, it was planned that NCOs would be trained at six higher military training centers beginning in February 2009. However, due to a dearth of suitable candidates, the plans to open six centers fell apart. Rather than

<sup>84</sup> Roger McDermott. 2011. *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges and Policy Implications*. Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation: 340.

<sup>85</sup> Klein, “Towards a ‘New Look’ of the Russian Armed Forces: 36.

<sup>86</sup> Roger McDermott. 2009. “Russian Military Plans New NCO Training Center,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6: 163 (8 September) available at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35456&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=7b8f3f0a00](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35456&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=7b8f3f0a00) (accessed May 10, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> McDermott, “Russian Military Plans New NCO Training Center.”

<sup>88</sup> Bartles, “Defense Reforms,” 79.

<sup>89</sup> Bartles, “Defense Reforms,” 79.

opening multiple centers, the Ryazan NCO Training Center was opened in December 2009, almost as an experiment. Yet even this more manageable goal could not be attained: out of the expected 1,700 recruits, only 248 qualified candidates filled those positions.<sup>90</sup> Recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified NCOs has remained a challenge within the military throughout the reform process and it remains to be seen how effectively Russia will be able to attract talent in order to fill its ranks with new NCOs.

The military has often attempted to attract more contract, professional soldiers, but thus far all previous efforts have failed to recruit and maintain a professional, competent contract force. The fact that the Russian military finds recruiting difficult is no surprise. After all, the pay is not known for being particularly generous and problems with brutality and hazing within the army – largely by officers against lower-level soldiers – are both endemic and well-publicized. According to the Military Prosecutor's Office in 2005, more than 7,000 soldiers faced beatings by their fellow soldiers. Although this number dropped to 2,000 in 2009, such incidents are still far too common.<sup>91</sup> Such problems also account for the unusually high level of draft-dodgers. According to a 2011 poll by the Levada center, 54 percent of respondents said that they would not want their son to serve in the army; 44 percent of those said their preference was due to the hazing carried out by officers on the lower-ranking soldiers.<sup>92</sup> Forty-five percent of respondents in a separate poll indicated that the draft should be avoided if possible, likely due at least in part to the problems with hazing.<sup>93</sup> As such, draft dodging is incredibly commonplace; up to 45,000 dodgers have been reported before for the spring draft in Moscow alone.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the mass attempts to avoid conscription, Russia still depends heavily on the draft. Around 700,000 conscripts are estimated to be serving in the Russian military.<sup>95</sup> If Russia is to fully professionalize its forces, it will need to depend less on these conscripts. This can only happen if Russia manages to make the service a more attractive option for its citizens. Improving the leadership structure, offering better pay, and tackling hazing are important steps towards reaching this goal. While the reforms are positive changes and address these issues in various manners, it is unclear whether they will be substantial enough to significantly change

<sup>90</sup> McDermott, Roger, *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces*, 202-208.

<sup>91</sup> Klein, "Towards a New Look," 37.

<sup>92</sup> Jason P. Gresh. 2011. "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24: 189.

<sup>93</sup> 2002 poll carried out by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center. Source: Alexander Golts, "Conscription," in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds. 2012. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*. New York: Routledge: 217.

<sup>94</sup> Year of draft dodging numbers unavailable; Gresh cited a 2009 article, "Odnogoden k Stroevoy," by Nikolai Poroskov in *Vremya Novostey* as the source. Gresh, "The Realities," 198.

<sup>95</sup> Bartles, "Defense Reforms," 78.

recruitment rates. All told, Russia is expected to remain heavily dependent on conscription for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, Russia will face increased challenges on conscription, primarily due to unfavorable demographic trends. It is estimated that 700,000 men reach draft age each year; out of this number, only an expected 550,000 will be eligible, after exemptions and deferments. This number is only expected to drop with time. The birth rate faced a precipitous drop in the late 1980s-early 1990s due to the collapse of the Soviet Union; as such, the number of conscripts available each year is expected to fall to 300,000 annually.<sup>96</sup> These rates would clearly not be sufficient for a replacement force, as the current term of conscription is one year.

Considering the lagging quality of troops and the declining numbers available for recruitment or drafting, various Russian experts have agreed that, “perhaps for the first time in its military history, the Russian Army cannot count on a guaranteed numerical superiority over the enemy, and therefore needs to raise its technological level.”<sup>97</sup>

### *Technological Modernization*

As seen from Russia’s war with Georgia, Russia’s military technology has long been in dire need of an upgrade. An estimated 80 percent of Russian weaponry was outdated as of 2008 and left over from the Soviet era.<sup>98</sup> Much of the technology was simply no longer usable. As such, modernizing the military’s technology has been a primary goal. In 2006, Vladimir Putin announced a modernization program costing \$189 billion for the 2007-2015 timeframe, 45 percent of which was to go towards modernizing or replacing the military arsenal.<sup>99</sup> In line with the continued reforms, the percent of modern weapons and equipment was planned to increase from 10 percent in 2008 to 70 percent by 2020.<sup>100</sup> The military budget has increased substantially, rising 27 percent to \$50 billion from only 2008 to 2009, representing a 10-fold increase in overall defense spending since 2000.<sup>101</sup> While Russia has moved towards upgrading its forces, the country

<sup>96</sup> Mikhail Barabanov, Konstantin Makienko, and Ruslan Pukhov. 2012. *Military Reform: Toward the New Look of the Russian Army* (Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club, July), available at: [http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military\\_reform\\_eng.pdf](http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military_reform_eng.pdf) (accessed November 23, 2012): 8 & 12.

<sup>97</sup> Mikhail Barabanov, Konstantin Makienko, and Ruslan Pukhov, *Military Reform: Toward the New Look of the Russian Army*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Klein, “Military Implications of the Georgia War,” 13-14. This estimate differs slightly from that given by Nikolai Makarov, who estimated that only 10-15% of weaponry was up to date as of 2008. Makarov’s numbers from: Keir Giles, “Russian Operations in Georgia,” 12.

<sup>99</sup> Klein, “Military Implications of the Georgia War,” 15.

<sup>100</sup> Klein, “Towards a New Look,” 42.

<sup>101</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 62. Forty percent of the spending towards modernization is geared towards the ground and airborne troops, 20% to the air force, 20% to strategic nuclear forces and space troops, and 15% to the navy. Source: Roger McDermott.

faces major obstacles to becoming a fully modernized military, including accessing sufficient financial resources for the size of reforms, boosting internal development capabilities, and overcoming domestic opposition to foreign military acquisitions.

Even though the budgetary increases have been substantial, they are not necessarily sufficient for all that Russia wants to accomplish. To provide some idea of Russia's ability to modernize to the extent it wants, it may be helpful to make a comparison: Russia is aiming to keep a force 20 percent smaller than that of the U.S. military, but on a budget that is 1/15 that of the U.S. defense budget.<sup>102</sup> Not only is the budget smaller, but the Russian military has far more to change. While the budget has been increasing over time, there have also been pressures decreasing the amount of funds for military modernization. For one, the global financial crisis forced a 15 percent cut in the 2009 budget.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, the de-facto budget is actually even smaller thanks to corruption, as much of the budget is drained due to outright theft. Graft remained a large problem despite the existence of six separate budgetary oversight bodies, which had presumably become corrupt themselves. Serdyukov attempted to tackle this problem as well, notably through increased transparency (by phasing out closed bidding) and through a new oversight body composed of personnel found from outside the military's entrenched interests.<sup>104</sup>

Another challenge to modernization is the limited capability of the Russian defense industry. Despite the fact that Russia is the world's second largest weapons supplier, accounting for 23 percent of arms exports globally,<sup>105</sup> the Russian defense industry remains generally incapable of producing 21<sup>st</sup> century equipment. Rather, much of the latest equipment is based on outdated designs that were created ten to fifteen years ago.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the expected "mainstay" of the armored forces until 2025, the T-90 battle tank, is based closely upon a 40-year old design for the T-72. These challenges are likely complicated by the increasing obsolescence of

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2009. "The Restructuring of the Modern Russian Army," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22: 493.

<sup>102</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 62.

<sup>103</sup> "Briefing: Russian Reform Act," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 27 September 2010, available at <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Defence-Weekly-2010/Briefing-Russian-reform-act.html> (accessed May 6, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Bartles, "Defense Reforms," 66-67. While this financial inspectorate should hopefully help with some of the losses to corruption, it too is a politicized body. It seems as if Serdyukov has also used this body to eliminate opposition to reforms and push aside leaders that "fall out of favor" with higher leadership. Source: Bartles, "Defense Reforms," 66-67.

<sup>105</sup> "Global Arms Exports: Present Arms," *The Economist*, 23 March 2011, available at [http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/03/global\\_arms\\_exports](http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/03/global_arms_exports) (accessed May 10, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 60.



Russia's industrial plants, which are more than 30 years old on average.<sup>107</sup> It seems as if Russia's industrial complex is finding it increasingly difficult to build truly new and upgraded weapons systems. The long-awaited Bulava missile is one example of this. Russia has long attempted to build a new submarine launched intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) via its Bulava-30 program, which started in 1997. As of October 2010, the Bulava missile had undergone 14 tests, with only seven of them being successful.<sup>108</sup> Only in December 2011 was it announced that the Bulava ballistic missile was ready for active service.<sup>109</sup>

Complicating modernization measures further, Russian leadership has found it politically difficult (though not impossible) to acquire equipment abroad that cannot yet be produced domestically. Various proponents of Russia's traditional defense industry have argued that Russia should invest only in its own capacities and not "subsidize" foreign firms.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, when Russia purchased unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Israel in 2009, the authorities had to publicly stress that the purchase was small and only intended to fill a need in the short term, while Russia's defense industry would develop its own version.<sup>111</sup> Russia is also on target to purchase two French-made Mistral-class amphibious assault ships.<sup>112</sup> To make this purchase palatable, Russia worked to turn this into a license-production agreement under which it would be able to produce some parts or all of the ships domestically after the initial purchases.<sup>113</sup> Such a production agreement would make the acquisition significantly more acceptable to opponents who argue for Russia's self-sufficiency in military acquisitions. Overall, it looks as if Russia is moving toward the technological modernization of its forces, albeit at a rather modest pace. It seems as if the defense industry itself may lag behind the modernization of the forces; however, in the meantime, Russia can acquire a limited amount of equipment abroad. At the same time, while Russian leadership has managed to make these acquisitions palatable, it remains to be seen how much else Russia will be able to acquire given the opposition that could arise at the prospect of further purchases.

<sup>107</sup> Galeotti, "Force Projections."

<sup>108</sup> Julian Cooper, "Military Procurement in Russia," in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 185.

<sup>109</sup> "Russia's Bulava Missile Set for Duty: Medvedev," Nuclear Threat Initiative, 3 January 2012, available at <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/russias-bulava-missile-set-duty-medvedev-says/> (accessed May 10, 2012).

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Blank. 2012. "A Work in Regress?" in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition*. New York: Routledge: 161.

<sup>111</sup> Galeotti, "Force Projections."

<sup>112</sup> "Russia's Mistral Order on Budget, On Track," *The Voice of Russia*, 1 June 2013, available at: [http://english.ruvr.ru/news/2013\\_06\\_01/Russia-s-Mistral-order-on-budget-on-track-5668/](http://english.ruvr.ru/news/2013_06_01/Russia-s-Mistral-order-on-budget-on-track-5668/)

<sup>113</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military*, 62.

## Conclusion

Russia's war against Georgia in 2008 served to reveal some of the major shortcomings of the military, including problems with the overall structure, deficiencies in its personnel, and technological obsolescence. While many of these needs had been recognized over time, entrenched military interests, combined with other political and economic factors, were always strong enough to limit the changes. However, this war also came at an opportune moment for introducing change: the political leadership at the time was powerful, capable, and forward-thinking enough to begin to transform the military in ways that have not been seen in decades.

President Vladimir Putin installed a civilian defense minister, Anatoly Serdyukov, who had no ties to the military and so went about reform efforts with true gusto. Although Serdyukov faced major opposition, he was able to sideline it initially thanks to higher support from above. While the lack of democracy helped lead to the high level of autonomy and power enjoyed by the military – one of the primary barriers to reform in the past – this very lack of checks-and-balances in the Russian system was used ultimately to support quick, sweeping changes under the right conditions. Strong political leadership – particularly presidential leadership<sup>114</sup> – was able to introduce true reform efforts when the conditions were right.

At the same time, Serdyukov's power for transformation has proven to be limited. On November 6, 2012, Serdyukov was fired as the Defense Ministry was caught up in a corruption scandal involving state-controlled military contractor Oboronservice. Oboronservice stands accused of selling valuable properties to private businesses at a loss of around 3 billion rubles (equivalent to nearly 100 million USD).<sup>115</sup> While the theft at Oboronservice is the official reason for Serdyukov's firing, many Russian analysts seem to agree that this is unlikely to be the true reason for his downfall.

Various analysts have speculated that Serdyukov's firing is due to the fallout he had with his powerful father-in-law Viktor Zubkov – a close friend to Putin and a former prime minister – following a marital affair.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> As Russian scholar Alexei Arbatov commented in a 2004 interview, the “president's power is unmatched... it was entirely up to [him] whether true military reform takes place, or whether the military bureaucracy continues pretending that reforms are under way.” Certainly other critical factors had to come into play for change to occur, as is mentioned in this article, but the backing of powerful leadership cannot be overlooked. Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military*, 163.

<sup>115</sup> “Investigators Seize Documents in Russian Defense Department,” RIA Novosti, 25 October 2012, available at: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20121025/176917762.html> (accessed November 7, 2012). “Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov fired by Putin,” BBC, 6 November 2012, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20218216> (accessed November 7, 2012).

<sup>116</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg. 2012. “The Firing of Anatoly Serdyukov,” Russian Military Reform, 6 November, available at: <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2012/11/06/the-firing-of-anatoly-serdyukov/> (accessed November 8, 2012); Pavel Felgenhauer, “Putin has Fired his

However, it seems unlikely that a personal rift over a marital affair would be allowed to risk the reform process. It seems more likely that opposition within the military gained enough strength to have Serdyukov ousted. Prominent Russian military expert Roger McDermott, among other observers, had largely attributed this top-level shuffle to plans that Serdyukov had for future weapons procurement.<sup>117</sup> Apparently there was an intensifying battle over the distribution of 20 trillion rubles (\$635 billion USD) for weapons procurements through 2020. Serdyukov reportedly angered the well-connected military leaders in this sector by requiring higher quality goods at lower prices, while refusing to sign new contracts for months.<sup>118</sup> Whatever the case, one thing is clear: Russia's military remains opaque.

The lack of transparency in the military and Serdyukov's ousting also provide a bit of insight into the cogs of the Russian system and potential for democratization within the country. The Russian system has been labeled by various analysts as "super-presidential," indicating a system heavily skewed in favor of the president; while Putin does wield a high level of power, other forces still have the ability to push back. Serdyukov's ousting in particular indicates that even reforms supported by the Russian president can eventually be stymied when they come up against other powerful entrenched interests, such as those found in the military. Even Putin, upon becoming president, felt the need to consolidate power before moving forward with changes that he clearly felt necessary early in his leadership, as evidenced by his strongly pro-reform speech following the 2000 Kursk disaster.

Despite apparent presidential support for change, the military managed to stymie reforms for years and maintain a unique level of autonomy until Serdyukov's entrance. As such, Russia may be viewed as having an internal "balance of power" (as opposed to a democratic system of checks-and-balances). This internal "balance of power" appears to be based largely upon a corrupt system of kick-backs, deeply entrenched

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Defense Minister," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 9, Issue 205, 8 November 2012, available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=40079&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=61d59c04c59fe37b653bbc86c4f4b13e](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40079&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=61d59c04c59fe37b653bbc86c4f4b13e) (accessed November 8, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Roger McDermott. 2012. "All the President's Men: Putin Reshuffles the Top Brass," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 9, Issue 208, 13 November 2012, available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d-0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews%5Bany\\_of\\_the\\_words%5D=serdyukov&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=40099&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=fa49a56e38ced-1fa0e151808e288c897](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d-0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=serdyukov&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40099&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=fa49a56e38ced-1fa0e151808e288c897) (accessed November 15, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russian Ex-Defense Minister's Confidant Charged," Associated Press, 23 November 2012, available at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeq-M5iOM8ErTUAWAW9wj7sngNK3ILDmg?docId=8abbae50819048fb83f1dd8f914d7613> (accessed November 23, 2012).

interests, and personal connections. Serdyukov's reforms seem to have gone a step too far, by threatening the bread-and-butter of the defense procurement industry. In this case, Serdyukov's methods of sidelining the military interest proved to be unsustainable in the long run and the power balance reverted back in favor of various entrenched interests within the military establishment.

Such a system does not bode well for the future of democratization within the country. In such a system, individual voices are not heard, and the best interest of the people is often not the primary goal behind the decisions of the upper-echelon. Rather, the most powerful can meet their own interests, often at the expense of the broader population. Notably, even when changes were implemented with the intention of making improvements for the broader good – such as tackling *dedovshchina*, or getting a handle on the budget – these moves were done in a rather undemocratic manner. After all, a democratic environment requires open participation by numerous members of society, a factor notably absent in the reform efforts.<sup>119</sup> By comparison, the efforts were largely driven and backed by the executive branch, allowing Serdyukov to sideline opposition in ways that would not be possible in a liberal democracy. As such, the lack of openness and democratization within the military is not necessarily a direct inhibitor of broader democratization within the country, but rather one of the factors demonstrating the general state in which powerbrokers operate.

Democratization issues aside, while Serdyukov did make headway in the right direction with reforms during his tenure, reforms are far from finished. While changes to the command and control structure are largely complete and effective, the reform efforts dealing with military personnel are nowhere near finished. After all, the military has maintained its over-reliance on conscription, *dedovshchina* continues to be a huge problem, and the military has still found it difficult to recruit qualified personnel, particularly for necessary NCO positions. The moves towards technological reform have been mixed. On the positive side, the Defense Ministry prioritized some purchases of equipment and weapons based on need rather than the patronage system – hence the purchase of the *Mistral* from France,

<sup>119</sup> While this article focuses more heavily on the actions taken by the reformers, author Bettina Renz writes specifically on the lack of involvement by specific civilian actors. The lack of democracy can be seen not only in who was involved in the reform process, but who was absent. Throughout the process there was a lack of public involvement and understanding of the process (due in part from poor communication of reforms), a still-remaining limited level of legislative oversight, and danger to Russian media journalists investigating military corruption. Renz argues, likely correctly, that transforming the military into a body that is accountable to society at large is unlikely to happen in isolation and without broader changes to the overall political system of Russia. Bettina Renz. 2012. "Civil-Military Relations and Russian Military Modernization," in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds. *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*. New York: Routledge: 196, 204.

for example. However, considering that opposition to defense procurement plans has been cited as one of the potential reasons for Serdyukov's ouster, Russia's future military purchases seem unlikely to be based as strongly on need and cost considerations. Finally, although Serdyukov attempted to reign in corruption through many means during his watch, funds clearly continued to be siphoned off from the state throughout his tenure. At the same time, corruption was of such magnitude that it was unlikely to be wiped out of the military. In 2011, Russia's Chief Military Prosecutor Sergei Fridinsky said that a fifth of the military budget was stolen annually.<sup>120</sup> If this is the case, it does represent a slight improvement from the 30 percent loss found in 2007, however, it is clearly far from optimal. Considering the funds necessary for capital-intensive activities such as technology modernization, asserting control over the budget and lost funds is critical to further efforts in this area. Therefore, while Russia took some strides in acquisition, making necessary procurements will become increasingly difficult unless Russia's leadership is able to reduce the scope of the deeply rooted system of corruption within the military. This seems to be an unlikely prospect given the current state of affairs.

Despite the setbacks and failures, Serdyukov's efforts can still be considered the greatest reform undertaking of the military in decades. As such, the reforms were an important first step in tackling the deeply-rooted problems that have long plagued the military. As previously emphasized, it looks as if Putin supported these reforms from the beginning, otherwise, they would not have been permitted to progress to the extent that they did, particularly considering the upset to the military establishment. Therefore, Serdyukov's ousting is unlikely to halt reform efforts completely. However, the nature and extent of the reforms under Sergei Shoigu – Serdyukov's replacement – is likely to change.<sup>121</sup> After all, although Shoigu was installed by Putin, he is still a four-star army general and is therefore tied to the military establishment.<sup>122</sup> As such, the progress of reforms will

<sup>120</sup> Source of corruption numbers: Isabel Gorst, "Russian Military Budget Sapped by Corruption," *Financial Times* (May 24, 2011) available at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/961668be-8628-11e0-9e2c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2CixAwsVN> (accessed November 19, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> Some analysts have concluded that changes to reforms within Shoigu's time in office – including some structural changes – represent a shift towards reversing Serdyukov's reforms. This author agrees with a second school of thought that has concluded that such changes are not a reversal of reform (aside from real efforts to appease the procurement industry), but rather closer to fine-tuning in a way that maintains reforms. However, that is a topic for another paper. For further reading on the subject, the following articles are recommended: Dmitry Gorenburg, 2013. "Is Shoigu Reversing Serdyukov's Military Reform?" *Russian Military Reform*, 11 February, available at: <http://russiamil.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/is-shoigu-reversing-serdyukovs-military-reform/>. Additionally, a recommended interview with Director for the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies Ruslan Pukov in: Denis Ryabokonov, 15 May 2013. *Defense and Security*.

<sup>122</sup> "Putin Sacks Defense Minister Serdyukov," *RIA Novosti*, November 6, 2012, available

probably be more limited, or at least less headline grabbing. Reforms will likely continue thanks to continued political support from above, although – due largely to strongly entrenched military interests – not to a degree or at a pace that would be in Russia’s long-term best interest.

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at: <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20121106/177221338.html> (accessed November 21, 2012). Most recently, Shoigu served as a Moscow Region governor; prior to that, he headed the Emergency Ministry, where he was regularly commended by cabinet members for his efforts there.