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Violations of Human Rights in the Russian Military

Abstract

In 2005, an estimated 450 deaths were caused by injuries due to internal military violence. The degradation inflicted on Russian soldiers within their regime necessitates reformation by the government and implementation of resolutions. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian military has been experiencing heightened levels of personnel decline despite the compulsory draft. The prestige that the Soviet Army of the 1950s received through the late 1980s is dwindling rapidly. Despite the military code of conduct, today's army is afflicted with perpetual violations of human rights. For the future of the Russian military, extensive action must include systemic reconstruction. If modifications fail to be put in place, the system will continue to facilitate massive human rights abuses that will affect the efficacy of the military.

Keywords

Human rights, Russia, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Military

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Violations of Human Rights in the Russian Military

By Cathy Smith

The military reform in Russia is a big hoax. All military reforms in other countries have amounted to the demobilization of the old army and the creation of a new one, which is based on a different recruitment mode, doctrine, etc. This has not been done in Russia. The old army has not been disbanded, no new one has been built, and meanwhile the military are decaying somewhere in between” (Anonymous Russian Officer, Russian Military Reform, 2003).

In 2005, an estimated 450 deaths were caused by injuries due to internal military violence. The degradation inflicted on Russian soldiers within their regime necessitates reformation by the government and implementation of resolutions. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian military has been experiencing heightened levels of personnel decline despite the compulsory draft. The prestige that the Soviet Army of the 1950s received through the late 1980s is dwindling rapidly. Despite the military code of conduct, today’s army is afflicted with perpetual violations of human rights. For the future of the Russian military, extensive action must include systemic reconstruction. If modifications fail to be put in place, the system will continue to facilitate massive human rights abuses that will affect the efficacy of the military.

In terms of prestige, size, and wealth, the military had been a major contributor to the supremacy and power of the Soviet Union. With the collapse, the military has experienced significant breakdowns and economic failure. During the World War II period and thereafter, soldiers qualified under elite status. The ideal of the “Army and the People are one” infiltrated itself into public propaganda with the notion that the army had the capacity to defend and protect a plethora of republics. With the continual decline of military prestige and current resistance to the compulsory draft system, which requires two years of service by men between the ages of 18 to 27, the military system has inevitably weakened. Less than ten percent of those who are summoned for service comply with their patriotic duties, due to the inherent economic and health problems and fear of abuse associated with the military. Those who are affluent often pay bribes to avoid their two years of service. Various exemptions such as pursuing further education, primary family wage earner status, or fleeing the country are utilized to avoid the system.

Daily life for first year conscripts consists of menial and degrading tasks. There are explicit distinctions within the military between ranks; the second year soldiers, known as “Dedy,” have absolute authority over first year conscripts, a status which promotes the frequent usage of hazing; unfortunately, reprimands are seldom. Food distribution is imbalanced, and the rations given are often insect infested, spoiled, or nutrient deficient. Medical access is lacking and, when available, most first year soldiers are denied adequate care or are punished for seeking assistance. The lack of attention given to sanitation is illustrated by poor living conditions and insufficient time for cleansing especially for first year conscripts. Often labor is enforced throughout the night, which causes chronic sleep deprivation. The fear and terror that exist within the ranks has perpetrated a rise in fleeing soldiers and suicide rates. Despite the military code of conduct, which emphasizes justice, fairness, and equal rights for all, human rights violations are common among personnel. Instead of breaking the cycle of violence and creating camaraderie amongst ranks, vengeance for past abuses is the prominent cause of hazing by second year soldiers. One particular case that took place New Year’s Eve 2005 demonstrates the heightened level of torture and demise between ranks:

Andrei Sychyov, a first year conscript, had been forced to squat until he lost all blood flow to his legs and genitals; he then developed an infection and had to undergo several amputations. To date, of those responsible for the violence, only one person has been issued a four-year sentence while investigation of the officers charged with negligence has been dropped.

As demonstrated above, the current system constitutes a dysfunctional military with diminutive forces to offer protection. Without modifications, the military will fail to be effective in maintaining defense and building a secure state. Military reforms are imperative to improving the overall social, emotional and basic health status of soldiers, which will increase military morale, cohesion, and productiveness. Suggested solutions include implementing a nocturnal monitoring system, reprimanding soldiers who commit acts of brutality, weekly health check-ups, better training for officers to deal with hazing, and reconstructing ranks and duties. Accountability between soldiers and generals is essential to thwarting the incessant violence. Studies show that abuse does not occur within every barrack, which means that with the proper techniques for monitoring and leadership, hazing is preventable. In order to gain reform momentum, the public, NGOs such as the Soldiers' Mothers' Committee, and the international human rights sector must continue to challenge government ignorance to hazing. One modification that has taken place is the legal right of draftees to conscientious objection. Abstention from military obligation is replaced with an alternative, extended civil duty. And with optimistic anticipation, the present requirement of two years of service is expected to be shortened to one year in 2008.

The literature provided below is broken down into three main sections: History and Regulations of the Soviet Military; Today's Soldier; and Reforms and Solutions for establishing and conducting a stable, vigorous military. Each section provides valuable resources for conceptualizing the role of the Russian military and the incessant, massive human rights violations that are occurring.

History and Regulations of the Soviet Military

Barylski, Robert V. 1998. The Soldier in Russian Politics. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Annotation: Barylski breaks the book down into three general topics: The Military and the End of the Soviet State, The Military and the New Russian State, and Testing the Russian State's Viability. Barylski examines the rise in Soviet nationalism and explores the reasoning behind the massiveness and prestige of the military. Revolutions gave soldiers a ranking of honor, and established their role as elites amongst the public. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the military plundered with political instability and decreasing budgets, which produced irreversible upheaval. The final section examines the military's current relations with Chechnya. The author concludes with an outlook for the future of the military and what actions need to be implemented in order to recreate a viable, productive military. The book is relevant to understanding the background of the Soviet military and the effects of the Soviet Union's collapse on instability in the military today.

Finch, MAJ Raymond C. 1997. "Fall 1997 Russian Military Draft." *Foreign Military Studies Office*.

Annotation: Although the article is a bit dated, it is considerably useful for evaluating the lack of action by the government to instill a proper and safe military for draftees. To a substantial extent, fears expressed by draftees in the recruitment process in 1997 such as potential hazing, the grave situation in Chechnya, and dreadful living conditions within the barracks, are still present today. The article also evaluates public opinion about the draft, the corruption residing within the military, and potential ramifications for the United States with respect to the demise of the Russian military.

Kozyrev, Andrei. 1992. "Russia and Human Rights." *Slavic Review* 51 (2): 7.

Annotation: Andrei Kozyrev, the former Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, evaluates how the new democratic government of Russia will implement varying shifts in politics and renunciations of double standards towards neighboring countries. Although the article is dated from 1992, it is valuable for understanding the overall human rights agenda of the Russian Federation subsequent to the collapse. The article is a valuable foundational source for comprehending the initial goals of the new, democratic government regarding human rights. In light of the past fourteen years since the article was first drafted, it is applicable for constructive criticism of the failure of the Russian government to put into practice the human rights agenda as in the case of military hazing.

Lohman, Diederik. 2002. "Conscription through Detention in Russia's Armed Forces." *Human Rights Watch* 14 (8): 22.

Annotation: The report provides information on the background of the drafting process for Russian males, and presents first hand experiences of detainees being conscripted for military duty. When a conscript fails to respond to a government summons, or if he refuses to serve, he is essentially blacklisted to police reports. If reported, most often, the conscripts are immediately enlisted into the military without the right for refusal. The report advocates a professional military system, which would resolve the escalating dilemmas of males avoiding the draft. In addition, it gives recommendations on what can be done to curb detainee drafting.

The Russian Federation. 1999 "Draft Russian Military Doctrine." 3: 4 Krasnaya Zvezda and British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC Worldwide Monitoring.

Annotation: This paper is an update of the 1993 doctrine. The paper is useful for gaining a basic knowledge of the Russian military, the goals and procedures of the military, and the guidelines for varying circumstances with the military. The doctrine is in compliance with the U.N. Charter, with the main objective of creating a multi-polar system in mind. With reference to the current military situation, the paper is helpful for deciphering whether a proper army is in place and capable of providing the security outlined in the doctrine.

Today's Soldier

Ball, Deborah Yarsike. 2000. "Social Crisis of the Russian Military." In Russia's Torn Safety Nets: Health and Social Welfare During the Transition, ed. Field, Mark G. and Judyth Twigg. New York: Saint Martin's Press.

Annotation: Chapter 14 is devoted to the social crisis of the military in terms of health issues and societal views of the military. It is reported that almost half of those drafted for service are ill equipped. The chapter examines contributing factors to detrimental health such as AIDS, drug abuse, hazing, poor housing arrangements, insufficient salary and wage arrears, lack of education, and crime. It also addresses the role of the Soviet army, loss of military prestige amongst society with the collapse, and Russia's current role in regards to the military.

Bigg, Claire. 2005. "Russia: Thousands Dodge Military Service as Draft Begins." In *Radio Free Europe; Radio Liberty*. [http:// www.rferl.org/](http://www.rferl.org/).

Annotation: The article is a relatively current account of why young men of age attempt to avoid the draft system. Also mentioned in the article is the problem with raids by local police to catch those who are defying the system. The article is brief but concise in highlighting the problems with the draft system and in analyzing why there is low quality of health by those who are successfully drafted.

Buchanan, Jane and Diederik Lohman. 2003. "To Serve without Health? Inadequate Nutrition and Health Care in the Russian Armed Forces." *Human Rights Watch* 15 (40).

Annotation: The report is divided into four major parts: background information about military service, the right to adequate food, the right to adequate medical care, and steps that need to be taken in order to diminish the rate of abuse and insufficient care of military personnel. The research for the report was gathered from over fifty military units throughout Russia. The report draws specific attention to the lack of overall basic healthcare highlighting the accounts of first year conscripts. Because of the first hand experiences noted, the report is accurate and functional for comprehending the catastrophic experiences of Russian military life.

Donnelley, Christopher. 1999. The Emerging Strategic Environment: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century, ed. Williamson Murray. Westport: Praeger Publishers.

Annotation: Chapter three assesses the crisis in the Russian military and the potential for reform. The author notes that if the Russian military were to collapse it would be disastrous for Russia in the escalation of internal conflict and loss of control over its nuclear power. In addition, there would be grave concerns from the international community, specifically the Eurasian balance of power. The author states that Russia's dilemmas are highly due to the disoriented and fragmented military. The source is a useful reference for conceptualizing the fall of the Soviet Union, the aftermath, the effects on the military, and the consequences on society. Moreover,

the author analyzes crucial parts of the military breakdown and concludes with suggestions for reform.

Glantz, David M., Anne C. Aldis and Roger N. McDermott, eds. Russian Military Reform: 1992-2002. Portland: Frank Cass Publishers.

Annotation: The book is an informative resource for a complete integration of different systems and how they connect within the military: reform after the collapse, barrack life, the current war in Chechnya, development of a security process and legislature, the influence of Yeltsin and Putin on the armed forces, strategies for nuclear force, the role of the military on the War on Terrorism, and possible reforms with reference to economic analysis, modernization, security and the harsh reality for reform. Chapters three and four focus on daily life of soldiers with reference to rule under Yeltsin and Putin. The author gives a precise account of the realities in the barracks and breaks down the seniority of soldiers into four subdivisions depending on the length of service. Each subdivision lists the functions of the pertaining group. Chapter 14 gives a detailed analysis of the prospects for a full economic military reform. The author concludes that substantial reform is unattainable during the current decade, but that the Russian military could re-emerge in post 2010 as a powerful and stable armed force. The book is a necessary read for a comprehensive outlook on the Russian military.

Lohman, Diederik. 2004. "The Wrongs of Passage: Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of New Recruits in the Russian Armed Forces." *Human Rights Watch* 16 (8).

Annotation: The report gives a comprehensive overview of the Russian military in relation to first year recruits and the trials they encounter. The report specifically draws attention to the abuse and torture that is ruthlessly performed on first year privates, including late night shifts, performance of menial tasks, forbiddance of food and health care, stolen salaries by second year privates, and sleep deprivation. In addition, first year recruits are at the general disposal of second year privates for hazing, which includes and is not limited to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. The report gives several examples illustrating the demeanor and lack of camaraderie amongst soldiers. In addition, it offers glimpses of hope for reform and ways to implement new techniques to eradicate the army of hazing practices.

McDermott, Roger. 2004. "Russian Army Abuse: Denials and Rhetoric." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1 (113).

Annotation: The article was written two days after the release of the Human Rights Watch Report 2004 on military hazing. The article summarizes key points of the report and includes its own depiction of the situation. Moreover, it includes comments given by the spokesman for the Main Military Prosecutors Office, who rejects the findings within the report. According to the military, measures have been implemented to reduce the obstruction of rights such as a military hotline and a more intrusive method of monitoring within the barracks. The author ends with a

challenge to the government to acknowledge the problems within the military; otherwise, action will never surmount to viable solutions.

Miller, Steven E. and Dmitri V. Trenin, eds. 2004. The Russian Military: Power and Policy. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Annotation: The book focuses on the overall capabilities of the Russian military now and to what extent there has been reform since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first three chapters are the most relevant to the current situation of the Russian military with regard to social conditions, downsizing, and reform. The book is effective in demonstrating and building a conception of the Russian military today.

Oliker, Olga and Tanya Charlick-Paley. 2002. *Assessing Russia's Decline: Trends and Implications for the United States and the U.S. Air Force*. Arlington: RAND.

Annotation: Chapter six is devoted to the current role of the Russian military. The authors expand on the relationship between Putin and the military. In addition, relevance is given to the notion of military regionalization, in which conscripts are permitted to be located near their families. The stability of the Russian soldier is also discussed in terms of menial pay and lack of care by the military. For example, Russia only allocates four thousand dollars a year for each soldier, while the United States spends forty-five times that amount. Furthermore, due to lack of care, corruption and hazing permeate the army on a regular basis. The authors give extensive detail to the economic downfalls of Russia and how it is internally affecting the stability of the military. The book is resourceful for an overall outlook on Russia.

Speck, Andreas. 2006. "Abuser and Abused: Human Rights and the Russian Military." *War Resisters' International: The Broken Rifle Newsletter*. <http://www.wri-irg.org/pubs/br73-en.htm>.

Annotation: The report summarizes the ongoing violence in the Russian military and gives specific attention to the justification for conscientious objection. Since the legal right to conscientious objection has been implemented, around 3,500 draftees have petitioned under the law of objection. The report also draws connections between violence within the armed forces and the war in Chechnya. The synopsis and statistics given are valuable for relevance to the current situation. The article also provides websites for further information.

The Russian Federation. 2003. "Human Rights and the Armed Forces: Report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee." *War Resisters' International*. <http://www.wri-irg.org/pubs/br73-en.htm>.

Annotation: The report is an overview of human rights violations within the Russian military and the relation to warfare in neighboring societies such as Chechnya. The report is well

developed and provides numerous examples of abuse. The report is essential for a thorough understanding of the present military situation and the occurrence of human rights violation.

Twigg, Judyth. 2004. "National Security Implications of Russia's Health and Demographic Crisis." *PONARS Policy Memo 360, Center for Strategic and International Studies*: 5.

Annotation: The memo makes the case that the health and demographic crises of Russia will inherently not only affect the national security of Russia, but also the security of the United States. The most supportive part of the memo is the first section, which highlights the military dimension of Russia's crisis. It states that due to the ongoing aggression in Chechnya, potential conscripts are dodging the system at all costs. And, according to demographic reports, the failure to successfully draft young men is only going to become more difficult due to the decrease in fertility. Additionally, those who are drafted often have medical issues and health deficiencies, which make them inadequate for proper service. The best-case scenario offered by the author is a military system that presents significant benefits to recruited soldiers and drastically improves the medical and nutritional level of the current military.

Zisk, Kimberly Martin. 2001. "Institutional Decline in the Russian Military: Exit, Voice, and Corruption." In *Russia in the New Century: Stability or Disorder?* Bonnell, Victoria E. and George W. Breslauer. Boulder: Westview.

Annotation: The author highlights several small uprisings and protests in the Russian military during the late 1990s due to economic hardships and alienation. Focus is given to commanding officers and their opinions of why corruption exists, which, according to the officers interviewed, most often reflects that of societal downfalls. The primary goal for reform is one that creates economic stability and a better-equipped army. The author concludes with implications for the current dismal military system. The author speculates that military corruption is grounds for a revolution, but comments that the current possibility of a revolution is inconceivable.

Reforms and Solutions

1997. "Russian Federation: The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service." *Amnesty International*, 46 (17).

Annotation: The report focuses on the lack of response by the Russian government in the case of conscientious objection to the armed forces. As of 1996, men between the ages of 18 to 27, who are refusing to serve the mandated two years and filing for objection, are being refused their rights; in some cases, imprisonment is the end result for draftees. The article gives extensive background to the issue and urges the government to reevaluate the current standings. In addition, it highlights the recent trend of soldiers to flee their duties especially when there is a risk of being deployed to Chechnya. Under International Law, refusal to adhere to conscientious objectors is a serious human rights violation. The article ends with recommendations for the

government and military. The article is comprehensive and a valuable resource for understanding the lack of acceptance by the Russian military for conscientious objectors.

Engleman, Eric. 2003. "Russian Soldiers' Mothers Work Together." Johnson's Russia List. <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/default.cfm>.

Annotation: The Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committee works with draft-age men to collaborate on valid exemptions from military conscription. The Committee defends their work based on harsh statistics that estimate 3,000 soldiers die each year from causes not related to combat. The article highlights several incidents of severe abuse towards first year soldiers and the response and assistance from the Soldiers' Mothers Committee. The author summarizes that despite the criticism from the military, the Mothers Committee, which is supported by the European Union, will persevere with their work to protect and defend "their sons."

Hansen, Flemming Splidsboel. 2006. "Learning' To Offer an Alternative to Military Service: Norm Adoption in Russia." *Demokratizatsiya* 14 (1): 19.

Annotation: The journal article summarizes the history of the plea for conscientious objection to the military. The Duma finally passed a law in 2002, which was then implemented in 2004, permitting the legal rights of persons who wish to abstain from military service may do so in accordance with an alternative, extended term of service to the country. The article is broken down into five major parts, which are conducive to understanding the role of the law. The author traces the origins of the law and outlines why and how it came to be in effect with emphasis on the role of the Duma. In addition, attention is given to the potential stigmatization that goes along with filing as a conscientious objector. The detailed analysis given to the conscientious objection law by the author is beneficial for gaining imperative knowledge about the subject.

Lohman, Diederik. 2006. "Reforming the Military Culture." *Human Rights Watch*.

Annotation: The case of Sychyov is assessed as whether or not it will be the pivotal factor for a reconstruction of the military and the termination of brutality amongst conscripts. The author argues that despite the level of public discontent with military hazing, the Ministry of Defense is failing to implement the proper cautions for controlling violent acts. In addition, the Defense Minister blames society for the violence that is occurring in the military. The author concludes with four steps that could be taken to curb military brutality. The commentary is a useful resource in analyzing the potential outcome of the Sychyov case.

Meinikova, Valentina. 2002. "Annual Report 2002: Solution of Individual Complaints on Human Rights Violations and Other Serious Problems of Human Rights Protection in the Armed Forces." *Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia*. <http://www.ucsmr.ru/english/ucsmr/report/report2002.htm>.

Annotation: The report provides an overview of what the Soldiers' Mothers Committee participates in and advocates for. A portion of the report is devoted to the current military situation in Russia and what the union is doing to protect soldier rights. Different parts of the report address military reform and working with the legislative authority. It is a beneficial report for an in-depth understanding of what the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers does working with soldiers and other areas of human rights violations.

Muraviev, Alexey. 2001. *Russia after Yeltsin*, ed. Vladimir Tikhomirov. Burlington: Ashgate.

Annotation: Chapter ten focuses on Russian military power and the strategic position of the military concerning the former satellite states. It also briefly mentions Russia's new security concept and military doctrine. In addition, the chapter breaks down the different sectors of the military and the responsibilities each section is held accountable for. Attention is given to the role of Putin and how he may change the outlook of the military or fails to restore the once prestigious, world-class system.

Sivaeva, Tatiana. 2000. "Women NGOs and the War in Chechnya." *The Ralph Bunche Institute on the United Nations*. <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/RalphBuncheInstitute/>.

Annotation: The journal article gives a detailed analysis of active women in Russia today and compares different women's movements. The first several pages are the most relevant for understanding the progression of Soldiers' Mothers Committee and why it is deemed such a crucial movement in society. It includes background information about the crumbling of the military and the breakdown of a system once considered prestigious, which set the groundwork for the Mothers Committee to take place and essentially "save" their sons from the cruelty of war life. In addition, the article summarizes the current activities of the Soldiers' Mothers Committee and how local, pro-government media has portrayed it.

Cimbala, Stephen J. *The Russian Military into the Twenty-First Century*. Portland: Frank Cass.

Annotation: Chapter eight examines the human rights movement in Russia with focus on the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg. It highlights the origins of the movement, what the methods are of usage in defending human rights and how the organization monitors violations. It briefly mentions the army's influence on the public and what the potential remnants are if the military fails to improve and further advance. The chapter is a practical resource for comprehending how the movement developed and to what extent it has been successful.

Yablokova, Oksana. 2004. "Russia: Mothers Join the Party." *Transitions Online*.

Annotation: The Russian Soldiers' Mothers Committee has decided to form a political party. The report commented that the committee, at this time, is unsure of the probability of gaining ground for the 2007 parliament elections specifically due to funding. However, the committee's

primary goal right now is to increase public support. If, by chance, the committee would have the potential to be elected, it could prove highly favorable for the human rights sector in terms of eradicating military hazing and instituting a stable armed force.

Yasmann, Victor. 2006. "Russia: Creation of Military Police Could Help Curb Hazing." *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty*.

Annotation: The article briefly summarizes the rise in violence within the military and calls for a reform of the system in which military police are implemented. Military police would be used for observing and investigating crimes, and in general, they would serve as overseers of everyday activities. According to the article, the concept of military police had been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Defense in 2005, but since then, nothing has been done to put such a system into place. Additionally, the article questions the effectiveness of military police without extensive reformation of the entire military structure.