



## The Sociological Analysis of the Russian Military Elite Evolution In the XXI Century

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### Abstract

The report is based on the results of sociological monitoring of graduates of the Military Academy of the General Staff of Russian Armed Forces, conducted in years 2000-2008 (N=885). The following qualitative characteristics of Russian high-ranking officers have been analyzed: socio-demographic characteristics, mentality, values and their motivations in study and service. The following hypothesis is formulated and confirmed: Russian force structures are undergoing the process of change of officers' generations, and "Soviet officers" are replaced with "Russian officers". The difference between these generations is not only of temporal character ("Soviet officers" graduated from military academies and were established as military professionals while the Soviet Union still existed, while "Russian officers" underwent the same process after 1991), but also of mental character (system of values, attitude towards political events inside and outside the country, political orientations, opinion about political and military allies and enemies). Intergenerational and inter-organizational (caused by flow of officers and staff of security services into the military elite) disagreements are reflected in the contradictory and inconsequent way of reforming Russian armed forces during the last decade. Main attention is paid to the analysis of peculiarities of the modern military elite, which is called "Russian", but has Soviet mentality. Research findings gained in 2008 suggested that in 2009-2014 "Russian officers" were going to dominate in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, although "Soviet officers" would also stay among high-ranking officers. Evidence now shows that to be the case and lets expect preserving of that state in future.

### Keywords

Military elite; Armed forces; Russian army; Military Academy of the General Staff (MAGS); Russia; Officers

### Russian Elite of the 2000-2010s

Describing the changes in the ruling elite structure that happened during Putin's two terms as president, both Russian researchers and (following them) their Western colleagues invariably point out the trend of "predominance of servicemen".

For example, in her works Olga Kryshantovskaya (Head of the Centre for the Study of the Elite at Institute of Sociology of the

Russian Academy of Sciences) notes sharp increase in the number of "people with shoulder boards" in the Russian elite (Table 1).

Namely, Kryshantovskaya writes: "All branches and levels of power are being pervaded with servicemen, who constitute from 15 to 70% in different groups within the elite... For example, servicemen made up 35% of deputy ministers of defense appointed between 2000 and 2003. The highest proportion of servicemen holding the posts of deputy ministers can be found in the Ministry for economic development, Ministry for Industry, Science and Technologies, Ministry for Information Technologies and Communications, Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications and Ministry of Justice"<sup>1</sup>.

In subsequent years the described state further developed. A few independent experts note that after Putin's second coming to power in 2012 the share of servicemen and special services officers rose over 30%. Russian journalists Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan used the term "*the new nobility*" (coined by former FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev) to denote that group of servicemen in power and described it in the book "*The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB*" [1].

Agreeing that "the term "militarization" has been widely used to describe the evolution of Putin's regime", Thomas Gomart nevertheless notes that "this is, in fact, a misconception: Of all the security services, it was the military with which Putin feels most ill at ease... they [many security experts] prefer the use of "FSB-ization" or "policization", and even of "special force-ization" [2]. It may however be better to coin a term "*power-ization*", i.e. influx of people coming from power structures.

"Militarization" of governmental structures seems to be based on inflow of army officers. Consequently the armed forces are gaining a more important position in Russia. Some army officers have really managed to enter the highest levels of power (for example the former Head of the General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin), but they constitute a minor part of "siloviki" (sila – power).

Kryshantovskaya points out that "the majority of them have come from subdivisions of the FSB (Federal Security Service, former Committee for State Security – KGB)", while keeping their status of ready reserve officer<sup>2</sup>.

This status implies that an officer is posted to some "external" organization (not in the structure of the FSB), but retains the salary and benefits provided by the parent organization and must give account of their work both to a civil minister who is their immediate superior and the FSB.

Therefore, Kryshantovskaya and other authors use the term "servicemen" in regard to the whole group of "siloviki" (people who have served in power ministries), but first and foremost referring to «chekists» (former Chrezvychajnaya Komissiya ChK – Extraordinary Commission in 1918) – FSB officers.

Furthermore, militarization, or more precisely, "chekistization"

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<sup>1</sup>Olga Kryshantovskaya, Shots: Putin's people. Rossijskaia gazeta, on June, 30<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>1</sup>Olga Kryshchanovskaya, Shots: Putin's people //Rossijskaia gazeta, on June, 30th 2003

**Table 1:** Characteristics of the Russian elite<sup>1</sup>.

Characteristics of the elite	Elite under Yeltsin Year 1993, %	Elite under Putin Year 2003, %
<b>Share of servicemen and special services officers</b>	<b>11,2</b>	<b>25,1</b>
Share of people coming from business circles (who have come to politics directly from private enterprises)	1,6	11,3
Share of president's countrymen (people coming from Saint-Petersburg)	13,2	21,3
Share of women	2,9	1,7
Share of people with a postgraduate degree	52,2	20,9

has also impacted the Ministry of Defence. In 2001 two FSB officers Nikolay Pankov and Viktor Goremykin were employed in the Ministry of Defence and have made a career at a quick pace. Now they hold key posts of State secretary, deputy minister of defense and head of the General Personnel Directorate respectively [3].

While Anatoly Serdyukov (who led the Federal Tax Service of Russia in 2004-2007 [3], and before that had furniture business in Saint Petersburg) held the position of defense minister from 2007 to 2012, both of the afore mentioned FSB officers managed to gain actual control over all officer appointments in the Ministry of Defense. Hence the “new image” of the Russian army is built under the control of Putin’s people for he apparently does not put absolute trust in high-ranking army officers. Moreover political control (in the sphere of distribution of information) is obviously combined with administrative control (exerted through appointments choices); Pankov and Goremykin case represents an example of this. Even after Anatoly Serdyukov’s dismissal those officials carried on performing their duties.

Therefore army generals certainly belong to the Russian elite, but their influence is mainly restricted by the Ministry of Defence boundaries. The Federal Security Service officers – “chekists”, who have integrated not only in governmental and business organizations but also into the Ministry of Defense during Putin’s two terms as president, have obtained real power in the state.

Pavel Evdokimov – a man from the “chekists’ corporation” believes that “chekists’ coming to power indicates collapse of the old national elite. Including the military elite”. The latter turned out to be in decay and unable to fight after the war in Afghanistan, “perestroika”, and the crisis associated with State Committee on the State of Emergency. It took two Chechen campaigns full of bloodshed to enable emergence of a new type of military officers focused on traditional national values. However, by that time chekists had managed to ensure Russia’s new geopolitical, military, strategic, and economic condition”[4].

Therefore, the military elite turned out not to be integrated into political and economic structures of new Russia. Nevertheless, crucial functions assigned to the military (the armed forces) by the political elite underpin the increase in significance of the military in Russia.

**Military academy of the general staff – Alma Mater for military cadres of highest qualification: Its position and role in the system of military education in Russia**

The main source of candidates to join the military elite remains

unchanged. It is Military Academy of the General Staff (MAGS) – the oldest institution of military education in Russia (established in 1832).

From 1832 to 1918 this institution (then known as Imperial Nicholas Military Academy) prepared 5432 officers for the General Staff of the Russian Army. In 1918-1921 while Russia was driven by Civil War there were two academies of the General Staff: Red Army Military Academy in Moscow and “white” Nicholas Military Academy in Kazan, Ekaterinburg and Vladivostok (it moved according to the retreat of general Kolchak’s White Army).

After Soviet power had been established the Academy existed in form of the operational-tactical faculty in the Frunze Military Academy (from 1924 to 1936); later it was transformed into the Military Academy of the USSR Army General Staff (it existed from 1936 to 1991).

In the Soviet Union only one lieutenant of every thousand of military academies graduates could have the honor of studying in the Military Academy of the General Staff. From 1945 to 1991 a total of 5064 officers graduated from it (a very small number if compared to from four to five million people in the Soviet Army).

In the Soviet Union, the military educational system was multi-level and ramified. In 1991, the Ministry of Defense of the USSR had a net of 166 military educational institutions including 18 military academies with a three-year training course (Military Academy of the General Staff with a two-year training course)<sup>3</sup>, three military institutes, seven military faculties of civilian universities and institutes, 48 higher military schools with a five-year training course (command – 6, command-engineering – 8, engineering – 34), 82 higher military schools with a four-year training course (11 higher military political schools), eight secondary military schools (aviation technical) with a three-year training course. 119 soviet military educational institutions, from the total number of 166 were situated on the territory of the Russian Federation.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the system of military education has undergone considerable changes. 77 military educational institutions (16 military academies, 3 universities and 58 institutes) were abolished; other were reorganized. The period of training in all military educational institutions of the first level, i.e. in former higher military schools, was prolonged up to 5 years, and they began to be renamed as military universities and institutes. The period of training in military educational institutions of the second level, i.e. in military academies of branches of the Armed Forces was reduced to two years. The period of training in military education institutions of the third level, i.e. in the Military Academy of the General Staff, remained constant<sup>4</sup>.

From 1992 to 2009 2065 officers graduated from the Academy. It is part of them (many have already retired) who constitute the military elite of modern Russia.

<sup>3</sup>Soviet Military Academies: Armored Forces Academy, Artillery Academy, Air Force Academy, Air Force Engineering Academy, Military Academy of the Soviet Army (Military Intelligence), Military Engineering Academy, Military Medical Academy, Naval Academy, Lenin Military Political Academy, Army Air Defense Academy, General Staff Academy of the Soviet Armed Forces, Frunze Military Academy (Land Forces), Dzerzhinsky Military Academy (Strategic Missile Forces), Radio Engineering Air Defense Academy, Command Air Defense Academy, Signal Troops Academy, Military Logistics and Transport Academy, Chemical Defense Academy

In subsequent years continued reduction in the number of military educational institutions could be noted. As a result of the latest reorganizations the system of military education of the Russian Federation includes 19 military educational institutions (since September 1, 2014): 3 military educational research centers (of the ground forces, air force and the navy), 2 military universities, 4 military institutions and 10 military academies.

Despite all contractions Military Academy of the General Staff has retained its status and continues to qualify Russian military elite.

### **Main qualitative characteristics of officers who have graduated from the military academy of the general staff: General information about the monitoring**

From 2000 to 2008 more than a thousand colonels and generals graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff. They all joined the military elite in the epoch of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000-2008). The majority of them carried on with their service under President Dmitry Medvedev in years 2008-2012, as well as during Putin's first term as President after his second coming to power (2012-2018).

They were assigned the task of taking charge of large military units and forces during the second Chechen campaign (1999-2009)<sup>5</sup> and the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict (08.08.08), as well as while using the "soft power" in the Crimea and in Southeastern Ukraine in 2014.

It is they who directly participate in building the "new image" of Russian armed forces.

What are socio-demographic, moral and professional characteristics of those people? Results of the sociological monitoring, which have been conducted in the Academy for nine years (2000-2008), can help us answer this question to a certain degree [1]. Each year more than 75% of second-year officer cadets of the basic faculty<sup>6</sup> of the Academy were questioned for the survey (information was gathered through written questionnaires). In total 885 of 1039 officer students (i.e. 83.9%) have been questioned.

Validity and representativeness of the survey results is provided by the following: a) each time a minimum of three quarters of the total number of students (officer cadets) were questioned for the survey; b) questionnaires were anonymous (respondents only had to give some general information, not indicating their name or number of the studying group); c) all collected data (students' answers) have been processed using the same technique; d) each year students (officer cadets) were questioned at the same time – in the beginning of June, just before graduating from the Academy.

This makes it possible to say that survey results can be used to describe the general sample – all last-year students of the Academy within the specified period.

<sup>4</sup>On 23 September 1999 President of Russia Boris Yeltsin signed a decree announcing preparation of a counter-terrorism operation in the Chechen Republic and creation of the United Military Group Alignment. The campaign consisted of two phases: September 1999 - April 2002 (active battle phase, which included annihilation of large separatist armed units); May 2002 – April 2009 – guerilla war. Terrorist attacks take place up to now.

<sup>5</sup>The data in the table refers to graduates of the basic faculty only. There are two more faculties in the Academy: the second (special) faculty (for teaching officers from abroad) and the third faculty (for retraining civil and military executives from the power ministries).

### **Service ranks and socio-demographic characteristics**

Service ranks Officers (colonels and major-generals) are usually enrolled in the Military Academy of the General Staff after serving on the strategic level (as brigade and division commanders or on other high-ranked staff positions). After graduation they occupy high command positions in the unit: corps – army – military command – top military officers of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. On the whole officers came to the Academy directly from the troops (63%); 36% entered the Academy having served in central military command authorities. Representatives of the Ministry of Defense made up 82.3% of students; 17.7% came from other power structures (Federal Border Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs etc). Among the enrolled students lieutenant-generals constituted 0.3%, major-generals – 8.5%, colonels – 89%, lieutenant colonels – 2.2%.

**Age:** Colonels under 42 and major-generals under 48 can enter the Academy. <sup>7</sup>Average age of students within the specified period was 41.5 (the maximum of 42.5 was reached 2001-2003, minimum of 40.9 was noted in 2005-2007). From 2004 on a trend towards growing number of students under 35 was pointed out.

**National composition:** National composition of the Military Academy of the General Staff students reflects the national composition of the whole group of the armed forces officers<sup>8</sup>: 80% were Russian, 8-10% – Ukrainian, from 3 to 8% – Byelorussian, approximately 5% were representatives of 20 nationalities (Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Mordvin, Armenian, Georgian, Ossetian, Ingush, Jew etc.).

**Marital status:** 98.5% of officers were married, 63% of them had 2 children, 5% – 3 or more children, 37% – one child. During their term of service the majority of officers moved from one duty station to another many times (from 2 to 16). For most officers going to Moscow (to study at the Academy) was their 8<sup>th</sup> move and entailed spending a significant amount of money.

**Education:** 97% of officers had already got a two-level military education by the moment they were enrolled in the Military Academy of the General Staff: they had graduated from both military schools (institutes, universities) for cadets and military academies of branches and arms of the armed forces, of other power ministries and organizations, or military academies abroad (the East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria).

**Battle experience:** From 26 to 48% of officers (depending on year concerned) had the experience of participating in wars or local conflicts both in the "near abroad" (the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in Karabakh, Pridnestrovie (Transdnestria), Tajikistan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Abkhazia) and "far abroad" (Afghanistan, Angola etc.).

**Preliminary conclusions:** Within the specified period the Academy trained officers who were born in 1956-1971, graduated from military schools in 1976-1991 and then from military academies in 1984-2002. Therefore students of the Military Academy of the General Staff are "Soviet officers" according to their socio-demographic characteristics. They decided on military profession, served their first years (from 5 to 15) in the military, got their first and (for most of the officers) second

<sup>6</sup>Calculated the following way: 2 years of studying in the Academy and a minimum of 5 years of service after graduating from it, taking into account age limitations (retirement age), which is 50 for colonels and 55 – for generals

<sup>7</sup>In 1995 80,5% of Russian officers were Russian, 11,7% - Ukrainian, 3,8% - Byelorussian, 2,1% were made up by representatives of titular ethnic groups of autonomous republics, 1,9% were constituted by people of other nationalities

higher education while the Soviet Union and the Soviet armed forces still existed.

As far as the near future is concerned, first “*Russian officers*”, who were born in 1972-1974 and have almost no experience of serving in the Soviet armed forces will start to appear in the Military Academy of the General Staff from 2009-2012 on<sup>9</sup>.

### Value system and service motivations of the academy graduates

**Study motivation:** For the overwhelming majority of officers (80% or more during the whole specified period) studying in the Academy was based on socially-oriented motives, namely the opportunity to gain knowledge necessary for further service and better career prospects after graduating from the Academy.

Motivation for further service (*after graduating from the MAGS*<sup>10</sup>). The majority of officers had long-term plans of further service: 60-65% were going to serve till reaching pension age, 3-6% – till the end of a five-year term of contract. However pragmatic motives were also present: 6-9% planned to serve till obtaining their own flat, 2-3% – till gaining the right to be paid an increased pension.

From 6 to 17% of officers (depending on the year) had not made any final decision concerning their future service. Most often they named the following reasons for it:

- Lack of clear prospects concerning allocating officers after graduating (due to reduction of forces), which results in uncertainty about one’s course of life;
- Military profession doesn’t give opportunity to provide appropriate living standards for an officer’s family (especially if compared to chances offered by civil service or business in Moscow).

*Set of values* is usually perceived as a system of motives, needs, interests, and other determinants of human behavior.

Results of the study show that *socially-oriented motivations of military-corporative character* dominate the value system of graduate officers. They can be listed in the following way (according to their importance)<sup>11</sup>:

- Military service as an opportunity to do a job one likes (60.2-72.5%);
- Membership of a group of people, for whom such notions as honor, dignity and military duty are of great significance (35.5-48.3%);

<sup>9</sup>Conducting a comparable study in the specified period will be very important and necessary for detecting changes in composition of officer corps.

<sup>10</sup>Russian officers can retire from the army having served a minimum term (usually 25 years) or having reached the age of 40 for captains, 45 – for majors and lieutenant colonels, 50 – for colonels, and 55-60 – for generals. After the retirement they receive a monthly paid pension from 12 to 36 thousand rubles (which is equal to 200 – 600 \$ USD) depending on position and military rank. It makes the majority of retired officers continue working. Few of them manage to find a job where they can use their professional skills. Most of them go to small business and security companies. Officers with higher education in humanities (including social sciences) can teach at universities.

<sup>11</sup>According to the data of the Centre for military-sociological, psychological and legal research of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the share of followers of some political parties among senior officers of the armed forces in general was 7-8% in 1993, 15-16% in 1997

- Involvement in defending motherland (30.9-38.8%);
- Good team and colleagues (12.3-19.2%);
- Continuing family tradition of military service (9.0-16.1%);
- Opportunity to command people (7.1-11.6%);
- Military traditions, rituals, and uniform (2.3-7.2%);
- Disciplined way of life (2.3-7.1%);
- Opportunity to handle military equipment and armament systems (1.1-3.4%) etc.

As for *motivations of material and pragmatic character* (which are mainly connected with satisfying one’s own and their family’s demands), the following of them could be discovered:

- Opportunity to solve housing problems (14.7-26.7%);
- Achieving a high social status with the help of making military career (12.2-23.2%);
- Acquiring useful knowledge and skills (6.3-17.0%);
- Opportunity to provide for oneself and one’s family (3.3-8.1%);
- Chance to visit different countries and regions (1.1-6.5%);
- Opportunity to get free education which will be later used to find a civil job (1,1-4,5%);
- Special military benefits and privileges (1,1-3,4%);
- A way to live through hard times (1.1-2.1%) etc.

Officer cadets’ values comply with the distribution of values of the officer corps on the whole, as shown in [Table 2](#).

*Note:* \* Research finding gained by Sergey Soloviev (N=1800) (See: Soloviev, S. Transformatsiya tsennosti voennoi sluzhby [Transformation of values of military service] // Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya, 9 (1996): pp. 17-25).

\*\* According to our research.

Another peculiarity of officer students’ set of values is their following examples of Russian military leaders and commanders in their professional activity. For the majority of the Academy graduates military commanders of the Great Patriotic War represent examples of fulfilling professional and military duty. Those are first of all Marshalls Georgy Zhukov (20.0-39.5%), Konstantin Rokossovsky (18-23.9%), Alexander Vasilevsky (3.4-9.3%), Generalissimo Joseph Stalin (1.1-5.6%); for marine officers, beside that, Admiral of the Fleet Nikolas Kuznetsov (2.3-7.4%). As far as military commanders of previous epochs are concerned, Generalissimo Alexander Suvorov heads the list (9.0-19.9%).

*Degree of officers’ politicization* is one of the main indicators characterizing political orientations. The majority of graduates are proponents of *derzhavnichestvo* (ideology of Russia’s great-power status) and patriotic views. Although the degree of politicization has increased in recent years (12.9% of officers are followers of some political parties)<sup>12</sup>, on the whole graduates of the Military Academy of the General Staff constitute a *politically indifferent group*.

<sup>12</sup>According to the data of the Sociological Center of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the share of servicemen who regarded themselves as religious was 25% in 1992, 27% in 1993, 37% in 1996, 48% in 1997, 37% in 1998, 32% in 1999, 36% in 2000, and 43% in 2003.

**Table 2:** Trends in values of the officer corps, 1989-2008.

Values	1989*	1993*	1996*	2000**	2004**	2008**
Military-corporative	87	69	67	79	76	75
Material and pragmatic	13	29	33	21	24	25

*Degree of religiosity* is an important indicator of officers state of mind. From 19 to 51.6% (depending on year concerned) regarded themselves as religious (due to peculiarities of national composition of officers’ group the majority of them identified themselves with the Orthodox Church); from 24.8 to 44% said they were irreligious, the rest oscillated between faith and unbelief. It has been discovered that degree of officers’ religiosity grows in direct ratio to their experience of participating in wars or local conflicts.

*Preliminary conclusion:* On the one hand value system of the Academy graduates is on the whole dominated by *socially-oriented (military corporate) ideals and attitudes*. Predominance of values that had been formed while officers served in the Soviet armed forces is obvious. In this regard officer students of the Military Academy of the General Staff largely remain “*Soviet officers*”.

On the other hand there is a *trend towards growing significance of motivations of material and pragmatic character*. It is especially typical of officers who enrolled in the Academy after having served in central military command authorities.

*Assessment of military allies and enemies.* When asked to specify *potential military allies* graduate officers named not only countries of the so-called “near abroad” (such as Belarus (74.2-95.1%), Armenia (10.2-21.7%), Kazakhstan (5.7-18.5%), Ukraine (1.5-5.4%), and CIS in general (2.1-7.6%)), but also countries of “far abroad” – China (1.1-13.6%) and India (1.5-10.2%).

As far as *possible military enemies* of Russia are concerned, the following countries were named (although this topic has not been touched upon in any official documents concerning military safety, defense and force development): USA (49.0-75.3%), NATO countries (21.6-51.7%), China (18.0-28.7%), Japan (8.1-16.3%), Baltic states (7.0-18.4%), Georgia (4.6-10.8%), Turkey (1.2-8.1%).

On the whole it may be concluded that students of the Military Academy of the General Staff are interested in domestic and foreign policy, try to make out their own evaluations and forecast the way politico-military situation in some regions or the whole world is going to develop. The main source of information on such topics (besides lectures in the Academy) is the mass media, including military sources.

### Conclusion

The structure of the military elite, which extends its influence within the Ministry of Defence only, is becoming more “Russian”, for every year “Soviet officers” are being pushed out and a new type of mentality based on pragmatism is being formed. However, the new generation of “Russian” officers inherited mentality of “Soviet officers” based on *derzhavnichestvo* (ideology of Russia’s great-power status) and patriotic views. Improvement of standard of officers’ living and use of financial stimuli combined with appealing to officers’ patriotic sentiment help turn the latter into an obedient tool for realizing ambitious and venturesome plans of the chekist leaders. This is the essence of evolution of the military elite in modern Russia.

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