

ALL SOUND IDEAS ABOUT MILITARY REFORM DESERVE TO BE SUPPORTED AND FURTHER DEVELOPED

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At present, Russia's expert community, including specialists from various fields, as well as her various military agencies, are actively discussing proposals concerning a new system of military training offered by higher educational establishments, which will exempt their graduates from conscription into the armed forces. Unfortunately, the proposals released so far do not touch upon a number of very important military and social aspects of the issue under consideration. Moreover, the new proposals are, in fact, a call to begin military training reform from scratch, totally ignoring all the previous efforts at reforming the system of manning Russia's armed forces. It should be said that the history of those efforts deserves proper attention in its own right.

The meeting of the Collegium of RF Ministry of Defense which took place on 21 January 2014 once again drew attention to the various issues of military service, especially among the students and tutors of higher educational establishments, because on that day, the Collegium, among other things, discussed a number of new approaches to military training offered by higher educational institutions. From the students' point of view, the main positive feature of the new proposals is that such training may, to some extent, exempt them from conscription into the armed forces¹. The proposals drew so much interest that the mass media, including the Internet, began to respond to them even before the release of the corresponding official documents².

Some of those responses were critical. Thus, a lot of misunderstanding was caused by the fact that even the title of the report submitted by Lieutenant General Vasily Tonkoshkurov, Chief of the Main Organizational-Mobilization Directorate (MOMD) of the General Staff, slapped together two issues, giving the first priority to a subordinate issue (the military training of students) and relegating the general issue (the provision of the armed forces with militarily trained mobilization resources) to second place. Both issues belong to the domain of Russia's military personnel policy. How-

ever, they are also related to a more general issue as to how to prepare specialists, including those with highest qualifications, to be employed in Russia's national economy, state civil service and other socially important structures and sectors.

It would have been much better if the Chief of the MOMD had begun with explaining to the Russian citizenry what was so wrong and worrisome in the current system from the points of view of the general public and the military, and only then had offered ways of solving the problems and defined the essence of the forthcoming reform. Instead, General Tonkoshkurov said that for him, as a military man, the thing that counted most was the fact that the proposal had been initiated by the Commander in Chief in his latest message to the Federal Assembly.

Another fly in the ointment was put by the press: newspaper reports revealed that the proposal had already been approved by the 'power vertical' and, moreover, had been discussed with and accepted by the governing bodies of higher educational establishments. As far as the details of the forthcoming switch-over to the new system are concerned, it is said that they will be worked out by a 'task force' 'comprised of members of the military and the rectors and principals of [Russia's] leading educational establishments'.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it should be noted, to begin with, that judging from the text of General Tonkoshkurov's speech, he put special emphasis on the quality of Russia's military-trained mobilization pool and not on creating, in the Russian Federation, a special institute of reserve service compatible with those existing in many foreign states. The issue of creating a mobilization reserve in Russia has the focus of an active discussion in recent years, but the case at hand is the enrollment, in the armed forces' reserve, of military-trained graduates from higher educational establishments. What will be the purpose of their inclusion in the reserve?

1 V. Tonkoshkurov. *Vystuplenie na kollegii Minoborony 21.01.2014 g. po voprosu 'O formirovanii sistemy voennoi podgotovki ctudentov vysshikh uchebnykh zavedenii i obespechenii potrebnostei Vooruzhennykh Sil voenno-jbuchennymi mobilizatsionnymi resursami'* [Speech at the meeting of the Collegium of the RF Ministry of Defense on 21 January 2014, entitled 'On the Issue of Further Developing the System of Military Training for the Students of Higher Educational Establishments and Meeting the Armed Forces' Demand for Military Trained Mobilization Resources'] // *Voенno-promyshlennyi kurier* [The Military-Industrial Courier], No 5, 5 February 2014.

2 A. Nikolsky. *Minoborony predostavilo plan voennogo obucheniia studentov-rezervistov* [The Ministry of Defense Makes Public Its Plan of Military Reserve Training for Students] // *Vedomosti* [The Gazette], 22 January 2014.

In the words of the proposal submitted by the MOMD	In the words of mass media reports
'to ensure the accumulation of a military trained reserve and to grant the young people receiving a higher education at Russia's higher educational establishments an opportunity to freely choose one or other method of executing their constitutional duty to defend the Fatherland'.	'to offer military reserve training for those students who will express their wish to go through such training while receiving education at a higher educational establishment, and thus to become exempt from military service under conscription'.

The issue of manning Russia's Armed Forces on a voluntary basis is by no means a new one. Since November 1992, when the first RF President, Boris Yeltsin, signed the RF Government's decree on switching the RF Armed Forces to voluntary manning on a contract basis (it should be noted that this decree is still valid), there have been a lot of administrative decisions taken and failed. Gradually, the Decree has lost its most essential elements – the deadline for and the terms of the switchover to voluntary manning under contract. Conscription has been preserved, including for higher education graduates, which has given rise to corruption. Moreover, there has been a lot of bullying of such conscripts. Worst of all, these poorly trained servicemen have been intensively used in combat actions in hot spots, etc. At the same time, the army has been worried by their unreadiness for active service, as well as by the resulting proliferation of law violations.

As far as the manning of the RF Armed Forces is concerned, the current numerical situation is as follows. Their overall numerical strength, characterized by President Putin as 'optimal' (without offering the criterion of optimality) and consolidated by Dmitry Medvedev' presidential executive order, amounts to 1 million. In reality, according to official government statistics for 2013, the RF Armed Forces are at about 82.7% of their approved manning levels.

The number of officers is quite sufficient. The scheduled number of officers in active service is 220 thousand. Around 16 thousand officers do not perform any service duties, but are entitled to money allowances while waiting for their future to be clarified and housing be granted. Even when these officers are, at long last, to be retired, the ratio between officers and other ranks (NCO&OR) in the RF Armed Forces will still be sufficient or even redundant even in comparison with the armies of foreign states. The aforesaid 'undermanning' of the RF Armed Forces should be fully attributed to the shortage of NCO&OR: soldiers (sailors), sergeants (petty-officers), and *praporshchiks* and midshipmen. It should be said that this shortage

should be eliminated only by the recruitment of highly skilled professionals capable of tackling complicated state-of-the-art equipment and weaponry being supplied to the armed forces in ever greater numbers.

Bearing in mind that nowadays Russia faces no explicit military threats to her security even in spite of this manpower shortage of her armed forces, there has arisen a question as to whether the RF Armed Forces are actually experiencing any manpower shortage at all. Regrettably, this question is definitely beyond the scope of this paper.

It should be noted in this connection that Russian boys are faced with the armed forces manning problem not once but twice: first, when they are being registered for future conscription, and second, after finishing high school. Most of the boys enroll in higher educational establishments in order to receive an education, but for some their enrollment can serve a second purpose – that of evading conscription, because students are entitled to postponement thereof. Higher education graduates face a different problem, the problem of finding employment, starting businesses, etc. Most of them resent post-graduate conscription – it should be borne in mind that some students begin to work part-time during the final year of their academic studies, become good specialists, and, upon their graduation, would be welcomed with opened arms into the profession by their employers. A year of service under conscription for such post-graduates means a lamentable gap in their careers and a sheer loss of money. Moreover, it should be noted that Russia's defense capacity is hardly increased by post-graduates being drafted into her armed forces because their stay in the army is very short and their level of motivation for military service is low.

Below, we present the results of our brief analysis of the MOMD's proposals, which takes into account both the situation existing in the Russian Federation and the previous recommendations concerning military reform. The first major attempt at reforming the manning system of the Russian armed forces, made during the first presidential term of Mr. Putin, consisted in the proposals prepared at the IET and submitted by Yegor Gaidar directly to President Putin. In his turn, the President addressed those proposals to Prime Minister Medvedev, who transmitted them down the chain of command to the ministers in charge of defense and security matters as well as to top military commanders. The IET proposals were discussed at a meeting of the RF Government and widely debated in society. That is why the reform attempt is worth mentioning here.

The 2001 and 2014 proposals are analyzed by us against the background that had come into being by the end of 2013. The new proposals are characterized

Table 1

Characteristics	Non-implemented 1992–2001 system	Existing system, 2013	Proposed system
The extent of the duty to defend the Fatherland	Russia's Constitution and laws extend this duty to all male citizens who are fully fit for military service and who do not have reasons for their military service to be replaced by alternative service, in peace-time – in accordance with RF legislation, in time of war – on a mandatory basis. Female citizens – on a voluntary basis or in accordance with their voluntarily taken obligations		
Training for service in officer positions	At military educational establishments (at military schools and institutes), at the military chairs of civil higher educational establishments, and at special short-term courses		
Training for military service in NCO&OR positions, related to the required military occupational specialty	For all – at training units – under conscription or on a voluntary basis (as a rule, not far from the place of residence) – only for training purposes, not for peace-time service	For all – at training units and the training detachments of line units – under conscription, with transition to established positions upon the conclusion of training, on an extraterritorial basis	For the majority – at training units and the training detachments of line units – under conscription. For students of higher educational establishments, on a voluntary basis – military training and periodical re-training
The possibility of and the procedure for switching over to active military service in peace-time upon the reception of military training	For all – on a purely voluntary basis	On a mandatory basis under conscription	For many – under conscription, for military trained graduates of higher educational establishments – enrollment in the reserve
The possibility of choosing alternative service	Potentially exists for everyone		
The principle of manning NCO&OR positions in regular forces – in peace-time	On a voluntary basis, upon the conclusion of a contract (all such positions are contract-based).	Either on a mandatory basis under conscription or on a contractual basis	For the majority – either under conscription or under a contract, for military trained students of higher educational establishments – enrollment in the reserve
Mandatory military service in peace-time	None	Except for graduates of higher educational establishments with military chairs, upon being trained thereat	Not mandatory for higher education graduates who have received military training
The duration (term) of military service	As specified in the contract	Under conscription – 1 year, including the time of training, or the time specified in the contract	Under conscription – 1 year on the regular basis, if the conscript has refused to be trained in a military specialty, or the time specified in the contract
Corruptogenity	Minimal	At the time of admittance to a prestigious higher educational establishment with a military chair and at the time of being enrolled therein	For higher education students – at the time of expressing their wish to be trained for an officer or NCO occupational specialty
Discoherence in the conscript pool	Minimal	Determined by the fact of admittance / non-admittance to a higher educational establishment and by the existence / non-existence of a military chair thereat	Determined by the fact of admittance / non-admittance to a higher educational establishment and by the existence / non-existence of vacant officer training places
Budget expenditures	On tuition, catering, etc. during the period of training	On paying the monthly money allowances (MA) of the trainees, that are below the average monthly wage (AMW)	Must be determined after the introduction of amendments to existing normative legal acts
Family expenditures	Minimal	Compensation for the difference between MA and AMW	Compensation for the difference between MA and AMW
Perils of military service in peace-time	Minimal	Determined by residence in barracks, bullying, etc.	Similar to those currently faced by all conscripts, except for students

on the basis of the Chief of the MOMD's speech, while the earlier proposals – on the basis of the IET's publication¹, which offers a justification and explanations of the significance of the 2001 proposals, as well as an analysis of the response to them on the part of the leadership of Russia's Armed forces and other troops. The response was sharply negative, because the IET proposals included the total abolition of conscription. They envisaged that the only peace-time duty of all Russian youths should be to receive military training and take the oath. Then they should be free to choose between voluntary service under a contract and becoming a military-trained reservist. The comparison is illustrated in *Table 1*.

The IET proposals were opposed not only by senior military commanders, but also by corrupt military and civilian officials at all levels who were selling exemptions from conscription, by corrupt lawyers, medics, etc.

The destiny of the IET proposals is well known. They were distorted. And after being distorted, they were submitted to the Commander in Chief in the autumn of 2003. Conscription was preserved for a great majority of Russia's youths, and all the drawbacks of compulsory military service remained intact. The duration of military service was set at one year – too long for the conscripts to be happy, and too short to be effective from a military point of view. Permanent-readiness units alone were switched over to a contractual basis. As the authorities simultaneously reduced the money allowances of contract personnel, the numerical strength of even those units fell below normal levels. Moreover, ever-increasing numbers of conscript soldiers were shamelessly forced to sign a contract. By late 2007, the corresponding Federal Targeted Program had completely failed.

Bearing in mind the sad fate of the previous initiatives designed to partly abolish conscription, the RF Ministry of Defense is eager to introduce the new one without procrastination. 'Service' under the new system will begin at 'elite' higher educational establishments as soon as autumn 2014. The full transition to the new system will be completed after the year 2015.

Although the proposed system of military training for students is characterized as 'voluntary', this will be true of only those students who are enrolled in the new training system upon expressing their wish to become 'reservists'. But will there be enough vacancies in the reserve for all of them? Three types of military training at higher educational establishments are being consi-

dered for introduction. They are as follows: 2.5 years to get an officer rank; 2 years – to get a sergeant rank; and 1.5 years – to become a trained private (or sailor). The course of training will be completed by a call-up for three-month-long military training. The students trained under this system will become exempt from active duty, including the universally hated military service under conscription. The rest of the students, as well as all the other male persons within the military conscription age limits, will be subject to 1 year of compulsory military service.

Whether or not the new military training system will be able to cope with the number of volunteers remains unclear. It is said that the number of military chairs at 68 prestigious higher educational establishments will remain unchanged. Perhaps these military chairs will become the testing grounds of the new system. Proposals and suggestions coming from the governing bodies of these higher educational establishments will be analyzed and taken into account. They will certainly be made, for example, by the Rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations who already has 'a surplus of applicants for training at the military chair over the number of training places available'. Something will definitely be said by the Rector of Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU), who speaks on behalf 'of all BMSTU students that are fit for military service but do not want receive a military rank at the military chair for the purpose of serving as an army officer thereafter'. And the Rector of Moscow State University has expressed a similar concern for humanities students, and particularly for 'specialists with knowledge of rare languages'. It is not clear how these ideas can be reconciled with the plans to find for such students some unspecified military occupational specialties closely related to their academic disciplines. However, it seems that the initiators of the new system have a primary concern that is different from that of the worried rectors. According to the Chief of the MOMD, the new system will enable 'students of higher educational establishments to continue their education without interruption, to receive adequate military training and the basic practical skills in their chosen military occupational specialty, to fulfill their constitutional duty to defend the Fatherland while obtaining a higher education, and to increase their chances of getting a job, including in the civil or municipal service, after completing their higher education'.

The latter part of this quotation reveals the social identity of the new system's lobbyists. They are influential officials who do not want their children to go active duty, although Russia has a law that makes completion of military service a necessary precondition of civil service or government employment.

1 E. Vatolkin, E/ Liuboshitz, E. Khrustalev, V. Tsymbal. *Reforma sistemy komplektovaniia voennoi organizatsii Rossii riadovym i mladshim komandnym sostavom* [The Reform of the System of Manning Russia's Armed Forces by Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates]. *Vypusk nauchnykh trudov No 39P* [Essays in Scientific Research, No 39P], Ye. T. Gaidar and V.I. Tsymbal, Eds. // IEPP, Moscow: Moscow. 2002.

Apparently, in the first phase of the reform, the number of training units subordinated to the RF Ministry of Defense will not grow. Such units have a different purpose – to train personnel for Russia’s standing army. They cannot focus exclusively on making military specialists out of students during short military training stints.

The MOMD’s report presents the initial contingent of trainees broken down by category: 10 thousand future reserve officers; 15 thousand sergeants; and 28 thousand privates. The total number of students undergoing military training is 53 thousand – much less than the total number of higher education students. During the launch of the new system, the rest of the students as well as the other members of the conscript pool will serve under the current system. Maybe, they will be drafted into the RF Armed Forces along with those who have not received a higher education and, like them, are mostly reluctant to serve in the military and take part in the peace-time tasks of the RF Armed Forces. Another category of RF citizens to be justly worried by the new system are people in professional occupations that do not require a higher education, but only a specialized secondary education.

It is reasonable to ask: what would be the attitudes of ordinary people towards the new initiative put forth by the authorities?

The proposed system has both minuses and plusses. It goes without saying that higher education graduates drafted into the RF Armed Forces (at a rate of up to 60,000 per annum) have greatly ‘gentrified’ the mores and improved the skills of Russia’s NCOs and other ranks. Former students were able to master the most complicated equipment and machinery much faster than their comrades who had not received higher education. Such people will disappear from the line units of the RF Armed Forces, as if gone with the wind. Their absence from the ranks is a big minus.

But the plusses definitely outweigh this disadvantage. The main advantage of the new system is that it will accelerate the absorption of graduates into employment, thus facilitating Russia’s economic development. From the point of view of officials, the main advantage of the forthcoming reform will, most likely, be abolition of the draft for their sons, who will thus be able to uninterruptedly continue their careers begun as part-time student jobs.

The advantage of the new system for the country as a whole is that its adoption means a step in the right direction – toward a complete switchover of all Russian armed forces to volunteer military service on a contractual basis.

Many parameters of the new system are similar to those proposed in 2001. Thus, the line units of the RF Armed Forces will be manned exclusively on a contractual basis, which means that students, like anybody else, will not be drafted therein. Courses in military science will be taken by students at their higher educational establishments, while their practical training will take place at the military training camps of the RF Armed Forces. The military training camps offer two options: a three-month stint and three one-month stints. All these aspects of the new system faithfully copy the proposals put forth by the IET in 2001.

Thus, the sound ideas of switching the RF Armed forces to voluntary military service on a contractual basis will be materialized, however gradually. It should be mentioned that Russia remains the only member of Group of Eight (G8) that still preserves conscription. Do we really want to be an exception to the general rule adopted by the rest of the civilized world? Moreover, the delay in a switchover to volunteer military service has already cost Russians dearly. This holds especially true for people from families that cannot afford to redeem their children from conscription by giving bribes to officials. ●