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***Russian Main Military-Political Directorate:
Applied History and Theory of Victory***

Executive Summary Policy Memo

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This monograph is the second of three research reports, from a project exploring the mission, structure and concept of operations of the Main Military Political Directorate (MMPD) of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), and the implications for policy and strategy.¹

Russian military theory and practice envision this new organ, established in 2018, as a pivot of active informational defense and counter-offense against Western hybrid warfare (HW). The MMPD itself claims the top role in informational warfare (IW) towards and during the kinetic stages of war. Despite the importance of the MMPD to the Russian military and the intellectual labor and organizational energy invested in it, Western knowledge about this new organ to date is relatively pedestrian. This project aims to begin filling this void.

The first monograph was confined to the genesis stage of the new organ. It described the conceptual background against which the decision to reestablish the MMPD was taken, and outlined its official tasks, order of battle, structural shape and contours of operations, as the Russian political-military leadership initially saw them. The following monograph will highlight the MMPD's efforts to overcome its main professional challenges pertaining to the force buildup,

¹ The Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI) is a U.S. Department of Defense organization that works with structures throughout the U.S. Government and with public and private think tanks around the world to develop a common understanding of Russian decision-making and way of war that supports the Coordinating Authority's integration that lead to integrated planning, assessments, and action recommendations. This memo is an executive summary of the larger RSI monograph, which includes scientific apparatus and is based on the forthcoming book manuscript. Please cite as follows: Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, *Russian Main Military-Political Directorate: the Applied History and Theory of Victory* (The RSI MMPD Monograph no.2, July 2021).

concept of operations and organizational structures, and the implications of these endeavors for a broader dynamic within the Russian strategic community.

This monograph highlights the formative experiences and historical frames of reference, which condition Russian professional thinking on the MMPD today and are likely to continue shaping it in the future. The main goal of this monograph is to trace current trends in the professional knowledge development process and critically discuss them.

How is the MMPD developing professional knowledge? How is it learning? What is the role of applied history (*prikladnaia istoriia*) in the emerging theory of victory (ToV) of this new organ? Since 2018 the MMPD has been in the process of refining its concept of operations, building its order of battle, training its cadre and developing an arsenal of means. As part of this innovation process, the MMPD's seniors have made frequent references to historical lessons from the Soviet and foreign past in the fields of agitation and propaganda (*agitprop*), ideological education and psychological operations (*psyops*). This is not an abstract interest in the professional past detached from current reality. On the contrary, this is an effort to distill from a gigantic reservoir of Soviet experience the relevant knowledge to inform current innovations in the realm of military-political work (MPW).

What are the best and worst historical practices that MMPD seniors today keep in mind when designing the current ToV? Which domestic and foreign experiences do they use as frames of reference, sources of inspiration and food for thought? How selective is their learning? Which historical episodes do they tend to emphasize and which do they tend to omit? This monograph deals with these questions.

The monograph argues that within the multitude of references the following themes prevail.

First, an effort is being made to de-Sovietize the function of the commissar and to present political control and morale-spiritual functions as having been pervasive (*skvoznaiia*) throughout Russian military history, from the country's conversion to Christianity till today.

Second, the discourse does not shy away from the controversial aspects of the control element, presents them as a necessary and justifiable evil, but mainly emphasizes the morale-psychological-spiritual element of the *zampolit's* profession. The negative attitude toward the *zampolits* in the units beyond the combat zone in the late Soviet era is also mostly mitigated.

Third, the *zampolits'* contribution to combat effectiveness (i.e., unit cohesion, suppression of fear, discipline, motivation, and initiative) through morale-psychological maintenance is emphasized, together with the capacity of the *zampolits* to assume certain battlefield roles and substitute for fallen commanders, especially in wartime. In the inward-aimed areas of operation, the discourse

emphasizes the importance of counterpropaganda. The latter stands for neutralization of adversarial informational subversive influence, an effort that should be, according to the ideal, of an offensive and proactive nature.

Fourth, both the internal (aimed at one's own forces and citizens) and external (aimed at the enemy's military and population) functions of propaganda feature in the history of MPW. In the current professional discourse, a forward-looking reading of the lessons learned presents inward-aimed *agitprop* and outward-aimed *spetspropaganda* as mutually reinforcing elements of the same holistic military-political operation. On the highest level of abstraction, the call for reproducing this offense-defense dialectical unity in military-political operations is explicit.

Fifth, references to the history of the competitive-cooperative relationship between the Soviet military-political and intelligence organs are marginal and indirect in the official sources. The complicated nexus between intelligence and MPW organs, however, is a major historical phenomenon with immediate practical ramifications for today's MMPD.

The monograph argues that MMPD seniors are on the verge of a crisis of knowledge. Arguably, they are likely to experience cognitive dissonance, since the MMPD does not have a national ideology to lean upon, lacks organs of outward-aimed special propaganda, and possesses neither the quality nor quantity of an appropriately prepared cadre to conduct its missions.

This monograph postulates that the MMPD apparently is internalizing this crisis of knowledge and is likely to try to address it. The following monograph will speculate on the directions of the main efforts on the part of MMPD to address these challenges, assess the MMPD's capacity to bridge these gaps, and examine the implications of these endeavors for the Russian strategic community.