



Russian Ministry of Defense: Battening Down the Information Hatches

OE Watch Commentary: August will mark the 20th anniversary of the sinking of the Kursk, an Oscar-class, nuclear submarine in the Barents Sea with a total loss of its crew. After embarrassing media revelations surrounding this disaster, one of the Kremlin's lessons-learned was the importance of controlling the country's major information flow, particularly with regard to military matters. However, given the advances in communication over the past two decades, sustaining this control has proven exceptionally challenging. The brief excerpt from the moderate site *Gazeta.ru* describes recent legislation signed by President Putin to ensure that the Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to maintain (and further extend) effective control over the military's primary narrative.

As the article points out, "in March last year [2019], Putin signed a federal law, according to which servicemen were forbidden to post in the media and the Internet information revealing their departmental affiliation and official activities." The new legislation extends these restrictions to anybody who has previously served in the military and "their family members or their parents." To ensure its control over information, the law not only applies to actual combat operations and training exercises, but any data which might "include the location of a person, his work, the activities of military units, bodies, associations and organizations."



Burial site of sailors from the nuclear submarine "Kursk." St. Petersburg.

Source: GAlexandrova via Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/2A9u8F8>, CC by SA 4.0 Intl

The article alleges that those who break this law will be charged with "gross misconduct," and while it doesn't spell out the penalties for ex-military or family members, those in uniform "may be demoted, dismissed from military service or arrested for 30 days." Such punishment, according to the article, is similar for those charged "with hazing, destruction of military property, or unauthorized abandonment of a military unit."

By prohibiting service members from possessing digital devices or posting material on the Internet, the MoD limits sensitive data from falling into the wrong hands. While restricting ex-military and family members may also serve this objective, it may also allow the military to cover up negative information and maintain firm control over the narrative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"The military has also forbidden to divulge information those who had been dismissed from military service, their family members or their parents..."

Source: Lydia Misnik, "Новый устав: военным запретили говорить о службе (New order: military forbidden to talk about service)," *Gazeta.ru*, 7 May 2020. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/05/07/13074877.shtml>

...The Russian military was banned from disseminating information on the Internet or the media that could determine their affiliation with the Russian Armed Forces. In addition, the placement of information about other servicemen and members of their families will be considered a gross misconduct. The corresponding decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin on amendments to the Disciplinary Charter of the RF Armed Forces of 2007 was published on the official Internet portal of legal information.

The military has also forbidden to divulge information those who had been dismissed from military service, their family members or their parents. In particular, it is impossible to disseminate information that allows you to determine the location of these people in a certain period. Another prohibition is on the disclosure of information on the deployment or redeployment of military command and control bodies.

...In March last year, Putin signed a federal law, according to which servicemen were forbidden to post in the media and the Internet information revealing their departmental affiliation and official activities. In particular, it is impossible to distribute photo, video materials and geolocation data about yourself and other military personnel.

...These categories of citizens were forbidden to distribute or provide information "about other military personnel and citizens called up for military training, citizens discharged from military service, members of their families or their parents". Such data include the location of a person, his work, the activities of military units, bodies, associations and organizations.

The military was forbidden to use social networks and gadgets with which you can store and distribute audio recordings, photos, videos and geolocation data via the Internet. At the same time, push-button telephones can be used....

Later, the Ministry of Defense prepared a draft presidential decree, which proposed expanding the list of gross disciplinary misconduct by military personnel, including the use of gadgets and communication with the media. The decree provided for a significant toughening of punishment for servicemen for breaking the rules.

According to the law "On the status of military personnel," for gross disciplinary misconduct, the military may be demoted, or dismissed from military service or arrested for 30 days. That is, the storage of smartphones or communication with the media was proposed to be equated with hazing, the destruction of military property and the unauthorized abandonment of a military unit.