



Strengthening Political Loyalty of the Russian National Guard

OE Watch Commentary: The recent protests in Belarus may have been a proximate cause in the recent decision to introduce new “political instructors” within the Russian National Guard (RNG). Thousands of protesters took to the streets in Belarus after the incumbent, and increasingly unpopular, Alexander Lukashenko claimed that he had won his sixth presidential election in early August with 80% of the vote (Lukashenko has held this office since 1994). To quell these protests, the Belarusian leadership employed domestic security forces, who arrested and detained hundreds of protesters. This forceful strategy to secure the presidency appears to have worked—at least for the short-term.

Recall that when the RNG was created in April 2016, many observers suggested that this new force would strengthen the Kremlin’s control over domestic protest (for additional background on the RNG, see: “National Guard: Defense Against Color Revolution,” *OE Watch*, May 2016; and “National Guard: Defense Against Color Revolution,” *OE Watch*, July 2017). The accompanying excerpt from an article from the moderate source, *Noviye Izvestiya*, describes the recent decision whereby “military-political work will be organized in the Russian Guard to strengthen discipline and order.” Similar to the recently added Main Directorate for Political-Military Affairs within the Ministry of Defense, the new RNG political instructors will be responsible for “organizing political work,” as well as “holding events in the field of physical culture and sports.”

The article quotes the head of the RNG, Viktor Zolotov, who had earlier announced that introducing political officers was “necessary for the further development of moral and psychological support.” The article does not discuss the curriculum that these new political officers will use, but presumably it will align with the current Kremlin narrative (e.g. the West is intent upon weakening Russia and will employ the “Color Revolution” weapon to spark public protests). While the Kremlin leadership never tires of describing the growing military danger from the West, the decision to introduce political instructors within the RNG suggests that it may see a threat closer to home. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Russian National Guard Forces in the 2018 Victory Day Parade.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2018_Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade_55.jpg, CCA 4.0 Intl

“Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree according to which military-political work will be organized in the Russian National Guard to strengthen discipline and order.”

Source: “В Росгвардии организуют военно-политическую работу (Military-political work is organized in the Russian National Guard),” *Noviye Izvestiya*, 21 September 2020. <https://newizv.ru/news/society/21-09-2020/v-rosgvardii-organizuyut-voenno-politicheskuyu-rabotu>

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree according to which military-political work will be organized in the Russian National Guard to strengthen discipline and order. This is somewhat reminiscent of the revival of the institution of Soviet “political instructors.”

The text of the decree says that two changes will be made to the regulations on the Federal Service of the National Guard Troops. In addition to organizing political work, the new “political instructors” will be responsible for “holding events in the field of physical culture and sports.” The decree comes into force today.

In the army, such an institution has existed for two years, when in July 2018 Vladimir Putin signed a decree on the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Ministry of Defense. The website of the Ministry of Defense says that this department is intended for “organizing military-political work in the Armed Forces” and “implementing state defense policy, maintaining the moral, political and psychological state, law and order and military discipline in the Armed Forces.” The department is also engaged in “the organization of military-political propaganda and agitation in the Armed Forces,” notes newsru.com.

In the Rosgvardiya [RNG], its head Viktor Zolotov announced the need to organize military-political work back in March of this year. It was noted that this is necessary for “the further development of moral and psychological support.”