



# Improving the Officer Promotion System

**OE Watch Commentary:** Despite significant advances with incorporating digital technologies into the Russian military's command and control (C2), many aspects of the officer personnel system still rely upon traditional processes. As the accompanying excerpt from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) journal, *Voennaya Mysl'* (*Military Thought*) suggests, these bureaucratic and outdated practices have had a deleterious effect upon the officer promotion system. In this article, the author describes some of the drawbacks of the current promotion model and offers proposals to update the system to ensure that the “the most honest, strong-willed and talented officers [get] to the top of the military hierarchy.”

The author begins by reviewing some of the weaknesses of the current system, arguing that “it is impossible to fill the hierarchy of the Armed Forces by promoting officers only within the units where they serve,” pointing out that “the closed nature of information about vacancies in units reduces the number of potential candidates.” Today, the burden rests upon the aspiring officer to find a vacancy into which he might gain promotion. Moreover, as the author points out, for the junior officer to even be considered for promotion, he/she “is sometimes limited by the selfish motivation of the command of the military unit—the better the officer fulfills his duties, the less interest in his promotion.” Furthermore, since the status of the military has improved over the past decade, the author asserts that the promotion problem has become exacerbated by a reluctance “at the top level of the military hierarchy (lieutenant colonel - colonel)” to retire, thus not allowing junior officers the opportunity to advance. To rectify this problem, the author advocates the “establishment of deadlines for holding positions and the transfer of unpromising officers to the reserve.”



*President Putin at officer promotion ceremony, 2018.*

Source: [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru). [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir\\_Putin\\_with\\_military\\_people\\_\(2018-05-31\)\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_with_military_people_(2018-05-31)_02.jpg), CCA 4.0 Intl

To both streamline and make the current officer promotion system more impartial, the author also proposes harnessing “the use of modern information technologies” to create a centralized system of promotion whereby every eligible officer will be competing for all vacant billets. These proposals have already gained some traction, since the author points out that the MoD is currently using the new National Center for Defense Management of the Russian Federation to test “an automated system for personnel selection of officers,” which has been dubbed “Centurion.” Though it is too early to draw any conclusion, it appears that the MoD is working to improve the overall quality of its officer corps by introducing greater competition into the promotion process. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“The effectiveness of its work is determined by the ‘system’ of numerous rules and procedures for personnel selection of officers, its ability to let the most honest, strong-willed and talented officers to the top of the military hierarchy...”***

**Source:** “Кадровый отбор офицерского состава российской армии: содержание и перспективы (Personnel selection of officers within the Russian army: content and perspectives),” *Voennaya Mysl'*, October 2020. <http://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/iYRh6L46C2.pdf> (pp. 124-32)

...A high level of professionalism, competence and moral and volitional qualities of officers is increasingly becoming its goal from the means of military service.... The effectiveness of its work is determined by the “system” of numerous rules and procedures for personnel selection of officers, its ability to let the most honest, strong-willed and talented officers to the top of the military hierarchy....

...The functioning of the officer corps is based on a systemic contradiction caused by a sharp reduction in the number of posts at each level.... The promotion of officers in the service is the main incentive underlying the entire officer service....

...History shows that the effectiveness, fairness and transparency of promotion increases the moral and psychological climate of the officer corps, contributes to the improvement of the quality level of officers. The closed nature, unfairness of the advancement of officers leads to negative processes - the Armed Forces lose competition in the labor market, the ‘turnover’ of personnel and a decrease in the general level of the officer corps.

...Long years of low social status of servicemen have led to a certain deformation of personnel policy. At present, this policy is aimed, in particular, at motivating the retention of officers in military service. What happened in the last decade, the increase in the social status of servicemen has led to the fact that the outflow of officers at the top level of the military hierarchy (lieutenant colonel - colonel) has slowed down.... The solution to this problem is the establishment of deadlines for holding positions and the transfer of unpromising officers to the reserve....

...It is impossible to fill the hierarchy of the Armed Forces by promoting officers only within the units where they serve, therefore, starting from the senior level officers, most promotions are associated with transfer to another unit.... The current system for the promotion of officers has certain drawbacks at all stages of decision-making. First of all, the closed nature of information about vacancies in units reduces the number of potential candidates.... Further, in the military unit where the officer is serving, the effectiveness of decision-making is sometimes limited by the selfish motivation of the command of the military unit - the better the officer fulfills his duties, the less interest in his promotion....

...To increase the efficiency of the system for the promotion of officers, it is necessary to select simultaneously from many candidates (ideally from all possible candidates). The use of modern information technologies opens up the possibility of implementing this approach...

...The listed disadvantages can be eliminated by the implementation of certification of officers on the basis of modern information technologies. To this end, the National Center for Defense Management of the Russian Federation has developed and is testing an automated system for personnel selection of officers, ‘Centurion.’