



Less Hazing, More Corruption in the Russian Ranks

OE Watch Commentary: To a considerable degree, the Russian military reflects both positive and negative values of Russian society. The level of violent crime within Russian society has decreased over the past 20 years, while corruption remains a problem. As the first excerpt from the official *Interfax* news agency points out, similar trends are now being observed in the military: “military investigators report a decrease in crime in the Russian Armed Forces, including cases of hazing, but at the same time, they note an increase in corruption.”



Logo of The Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3cqH5yt>, Attribution: CCA SA 4.0 Intl

The second excerpt from the mostly independent source *Svobodnaya Pressa* takes a closer look at violent crime, particularly hazing, within the ranks. The article suggests that “the ‘bullying’ has not gone anywhere,” but has rather “transformed, lost her previous violent forms: bruises, knocked out teeth, fractures, and numerous deaths.” The article interviews a representative from the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, Valentina Melnikova, who asserts that today this less violent form of hazing is most often perpetrated by company and platoon commanders who abuse their authority. Melnikova refers to “the recent case of Ramil Shamsutdinov... who was openly bullied by one of the officers, where although he [the officer] did not beat him, did not let him sleep,” which allegedly helped to provoke the soldier to kill 8 of his fellow soldiers in October 2019. She asserts that the problem stems from officers “not understanding that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together.”

The article concludes by quoting a couple statistics from the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia, which asserts that in 2019, “about 330 people suffered from hazing, and that “the annual so-called non-combat losses in the Russian army are estimated at about 500 people.” Included in this category are losses from “crime, illness, suicide, and accidents,” to include hazing. However, we have no corroboration of these figures. Since 2015, the Kremlin has classified the reporting of all military losses. While improvements have been made, these two articles suggest that the Russian military is still struggling to eliminate corruption and hazing in the ranks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The main reason for this is that commanders, from Defense Minister Shoigu to lower-level officers, do not understand that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together....”

Source: “СК заметил в российской армии снижение дедовщины и рост коррупции (The Investigative Committee noticed a decrease in hazing and an increase in corruption in the Russian Army),” *Interfax* (official Russian news agency), 10 March 2021. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/755305>

Military investigators report a decrease in crime in the Russian Armed Forces, including cases of hazing, but at the same time, they note an increase in corruption, according to the website of the Main Military Investigative Directorate (GVSU) of the Investigative Committee (UK)... “The number of acts of corruption has increased by 8.8%,” the statement says.

Source: Victor Sokirko, “Валентина Мельникова: ‘Дедовщины’ в армии нет, есть нарушение закона и прав человека (Valentina Melnikova: There is no ‘bullying’ in the army, there is a violation of the law and human rights),” *Svobodnaya Pressa* (independent Russian news media), 9 March 2021. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/291780/>

The Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia considers company officers to be the main violators of the order...

The topic of ‘bullying’ in the army is as old as the world, and even when commanders and prosecutors win in the fight against ‘barracks hooliganism,’ it remains on the radar. To this day, the ‘ghost of hazing’ walks through the hidden corners of the barracks and frightens both the recruits themselves and their parents. The Ministry of Defense still nervously shudders at any mention of it and assures: “It’s over!”

...Much has changed in the army, ranging from the transition to a year of service, improvement of living conditions and nutrition, increased discipline, including the elimination of hazing. It was somehow not customary to remember the latter, and it might seem that they are no longer there at all. “In fact, the ‘bullying’ has not gone anywhere. Yes, it’s been transformed, lost its previous serious forms, did away for the most part without bruises, knocked out teeth, fractures, and numerous deaths. But ‘hazing’ did not leave the barracks - this is still a familiar place for hazing.”

“Remember, ‘bullying’ as such does not exist, it is not in its usual form in the army,” says the executive secretary of the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia Valentina Melnikova. “There is a violation of the law and human rights in the army, to call a spade a spade. Such cases, when the relationship between commanders and subordinates go beyond the statutory framework, have always been hidden.... And it is difficult to fight this system, it is disguised precisely by well-structured reporting.”

“I would like to emphasize once again - in military units there are constant cases of violation of the law, which cannot be called ‘bullying.’ ...officers often beat soldiers, scoff at them. This is especially common at the company level, where the company commander and platoon commanders have become the main ‘grandfathers.’ They have all the power in their hands and they use it at their own discretion. Here you can also recall the recent case with Ramil Shamsutdinov, who was openly bullied by one of the officers - he did not beat him, but did not let him sleep...”

“...The situation is far from ideal. The main reason for this is that commanders, from Defense Minister Shoigu to lower-level officers, do not understand that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together.... At the same time, only last year, about 330 people suffered from hazing. In fact, there may be many more - not all of them become known to prosecutors....”

This statistic is partially confirmed by the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia - thanks to the calculations of the committee’s activists, the annual so-called non-combat losses in the Russian army are estimated at about 500 people. The causes of these losses include crime, illness, suicide, and accidents. Including due to hazing relationships.