

## Russian Generals Poised to Play Larger Political Role

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OE Watch Commentary

Some thirty years ago, the top military officer in the USSR, General Dmitry Yazov, played a key role in the failed attempt to seize power and turn back political reforms in the Soviet Union. Two years later, key Russian military leaders played an important role in resolving the constitutional crisis between the executive and legislative branches. Since then, senior Russian military personnel have avoided becoming directly involved in politics—at least while still in uniform. However, as the brief excerpt from the moderate news source *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* suggests, Russian generals may soon be enlisted to help strengthen the Kremlin’s chief political party.

The article asserts that “Colonel-General Andrei Kartapolov, Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate (GVPU) of the Russian Armed Forces, nominated his candidacy for the preliminary vote of United Russia.” The author reminds readers that “on 30 July 2018, by decree of President Vladimir Putin, the GVPU was created, intended ‘to organize military-political work in the Armed Forces aimed at implementing state defense policy.’” Therefore, as the article states, since “political activity in the army and navy...is no longer prohibited...the chief political worker general is ready to work for the ruling party.”

While a final decision has yet to be made regarding the participation of senior military personnel within the electoral process, the article claims that “the likelihood of Kartapolov’s participation in the campaign is high.” Russian parliamentary (Duma) elections are scheduled for mid-September 2021, and the United Russia party’s weakened reputation could use a powerful boost. The article quotes Kartapolov who recently stated that, “it is important that the United Russia party is treated in our country in the same way as the Armed Forces. And 90% of the citizens of our Motherland trust the Armed Forces.” Allowing active-duty generals to campaign for United Russia may help at the polls, but aligning so closely with the current political leadership could ultimately weaken public support for the Russian military or increasingly make the Kremlin beholden to the military’s political support.



Colonel-General Andrei Kartapolov.

Source: mil.ru, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrey\\_Kartapolov,\\_2018.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrey_Kartapolov,_2018.jpg), CCA 4.0

“That is, political activity in the army and navy, as it were, is no longer prohibited. And the chief political worker general is ready to work for the ruling party...”

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “Предвыборное наступление единороссов возглавят генералы (Generals will lead the pre-election offensive of United Russia),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Russia based moderate news source), 29 April 2021. [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-04-29/1\\_8142\\_generals.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-04-29/1_8142_generals.html)

*The active military will take part in the United Russia (ER) campaign for the elections to the State Duma. As the Moscow branch of the party reported on VKontakte, Colonel-General Andrei Kartapolov, Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate (GVPU) of the RF Armed Forces, nominated his candidacy for the preliminary vote of United Russia. In modern Russia, the acting deputy head of the military department for the first time aspires to the seat of a parliamentarian.*

*After the collapse of the USSR and the ban on the activities of the Communist Party in the army, many officers, according to the legislation of the new Russia, became deputies from various political organizations and parties. But they stopped their military service during their term in the State Duma.... But on 30 July 2018, by decree of President Vladimir Putin, the GVPU was created, intended “to organize military-political work in the Armed Forces aimed at implementing state defense policy.” That is, political activity in the army and navy, as it were, is no longer prohibited. And the chief political worker general is ready to work for the ruling party....*

*...But the likelihood of Kartapolov’s participation in the campaign is high, since the regional organization of United Russia announced the general’s involvement in the primaries. And observers believe that the general has already started his campaign activities. The media reported that on April 30, General Kartapolov will take part in the military-patriotic forum of the Ural Federal District “Feat of Generations” in Tyumen. Indirectly, Kartapolov has already stated his position to journalists. “It is important that the United Russia party is treated in our country in the same way as the Armed Forces. And 90% of the citizens of our Motherland trust the Armed Forces. And the main thing is that all citizens love our country as we, the military do,” the deputy minister said....*