

## Evidence of Staffing Troubles for Russian Military-Political Officers

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OE Watch Commentary

In July 2018, the Russian Ministry of Defense reintroduced the Main Military-Political Directorate (MPD) within the Armed Forces. This organization is charged with organizing political-military instruction, as well as helping maintain morale and discipline within the ranks. While it may be premature to draw firm conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the MPD, a recent article from the independent, pro-business source *Kommersant* suggests that there may be problems with MPD staffing and oversight.

The article describes a recent court case where a “deputy regiment commander for military-political work was dismissed,” after he was found to have failed to “conduct classes on general military-political training” with the regiment’s personnel. This omission came to light after a conscript murdered three fellow servicemen in November 2020. The subsequent investigation revealed that the MPD officer

had merely submitted reports stating that “law and order classes” were recorded as completed, without conducting the training. In his defense, the officer argued that “he had no time to talk with conscripts, study their moral and soldier qualities, and ‘examine their psychological compatibility,’ since the command loaded him with other tasks.” The defense lawyer pointed out that the MPD officer was “not a psychiatrist,” but rather had served as a pilot.

The article states that “the colonel’s dismissal was insisted on by the Deputy Minister of Defense - Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces Andrei Kartapolov.” The removal of this officer might indicate that the MPD is serious about conducting more robust political-military instruction within the ranks. It might also suggest that there are continued problems with staffing and training personnel to carry out the MPD mission.

“Colonel Yevgeny Utkin, deputy regiment commander for military-political work, was dismissed for ‘failing to conduct military-political training’ by the decision of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.”

**Source:** Oleg Mukhin, “Замполита наказали за тройное убийство (Zampolit punished for triple murder),” *Kommersant* (independent, pro-business source), 19 July 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4908689>

*As it became known to Kommersant, the Ministry of Defense has identified the culprit in “creating the prerequisites” for the triple murder committed by private Anton Makarov at the Voronezh airfield in November 2020. Colonel Yevgeny Utkin, deputy regiment commander for military-political work, was dismissed for ‘failing to conduct military-political training’ by the decision of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. He tried twice to challenge his dismissal in court, urging to punish the military registration and enlistment office and the immediate commanders of Private Makarov for the lack of “psychological work,” but he lost the case....*

*...The colonel’s dismissal was insisted on by the Deputy Minister of Defense - Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces Andrei Kartapolov, as well as the command of the Western military districts and regiments. As stated in the materials of the court, on November 10, the day after the massacre, an explanation was taken from Colonel Utkin. In it, the colonel said that he did not conduct classes “on general military-political training” with the regiment’s personnel....*

*The “law and order classes” presented by the colonel were carried out “formally...” In his defense, Colonel Utkin stated that he had no time to talk with conscripts, study their moral and soldier qualities, and ‘examine their psychological compatibility,’ since the “command loaded him with other tasks.”*

*The lawyer Victoria Dorofeeva, representing the interests of the officer, stressed that the conclusion about the need for dismissal contradicts the positive description of the colonel....*

*“Yevgeny Borisovich is not a psychiatrist, does not have the appropriate education and was not empowered to conduct psychological testing of the regiment personnel. He is a pilot by education,” said Ms. Dorofeeva, noting that Private Makarov, according to all the conclusions of psychologists, was fit for military service.*

*But the court ultimately considered that the military-political training test reports submitted by the officer were only “formally reflected on paper,” and that “no effective measures aimed at strengthening the rule of law had been worked out.”*