

Russia Moves Forward with New Restrictions on Military Reporting

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OE Watch Commentary

Reporting on military topics in Russia has now become more problematic. As reported previously (see “Russia Pushing to Classify Reporting on the Military,” *OE Watch*, September 2021), in July 2021, Russian security officials proposed legislation designed to restrict information related to Russian security. Now, as the first brief excerpt from the pro-business source *Kommersant* points out, “despite its ambiguity and a wave of criticism,” this legislation has now “come into legal force.” The article reminds readers that among many other security-related topics, this new law “prohibits the dissemination of even general forecasts about the military-political situation, and information about the moral and psychological state of the troops and the state of military equipment.”

The second excerpt, also from *Kommersant*, describes how this new law has already begun to restrict information regarding the military. For the past 30 years, the “human rights organization Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg,” has helped to protect soldiers and their families by “collecting and recording information about crimes and offenses in

the army.” According to the article, because of the new legislation and concerns over possible prosecution, this “human rights organization has stopped collecting information on crimes in the army.” However, despite this new constraint, the organization does “not intend to curtail legal aid to servicemen who have become victims of offenses.” This article concludes on a cautionary note, highlighting that earlier this year, the Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg noted “the number of manifestations of hazing in the Russian army increased for the first time in seven years.” Restricting the publication of information about the military could have a negative effect on the Russian armed forces because it is likely to reduce accountability at a time when Russian leadership is trying to promote the benefits of military service to the nation at large.

“The list of 60 items is rather vague and in several sections prohibits the dissemination of even general forecasts about the military-political situation, information about the moral and psychological state of the troops and the state of military equipment.”

Source: Sergey Sergeev, “ФСБ возродила военную тайну (FSB revived military secret),” *Kommersant* (pro business Russian news source), 1 October 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5016646>

The list of forbidden topics in the field of the defense industry, the Ministry of Defense... has been approved.... The list of 60 items is rather vague and in several sections prohibits the dissemination of even general forecasts about the military-political situation, information about the moral and psychological state of the troops and the state of military equipment and virtually any information about Roscosmos....

FSB order No. 379... “List of information in the area military, military-technical activities of the Russian Federation, which, when received by a foreign state, its state bodies, an international or foreign organization, foreign citizens or stateless persons, can be used against the security of the Russian Federation,” dated September 28... has come into legal force. As Kommersant reported, it was born in the bowels of the special services, and in July was proposed for public discussion.

During this time, despite its ambiguity and a wave of criticism, it practically did not undergo any changes.... Many formulations are extremely vague and contain general phrases about data on the state of military units, their deployment, weapons and their modernization, the servicemen themselves and their families, etc.

Source: Maria Starikova, Ksenia Veretennikova, “Солдатские матери Санкт-Петербурга уходят на дембель (Soldiers’ mothers of St. Petersburg are leaving for demobilization),” *Kommersant*, 6 October 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/5019257>

The human rights organization “Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg” announced the reduction of a number of areas of assistance to servicemen. Human rights activists note that under the recently adopted FSB order, criminal liability may arise, in particular, for “collecting and recording information about crimes and offenses” in the army...

“In connection with the adoption by the FSB of a list of information for the collection and distribution of which may lead to criminal liability, we are forced to respond,” says a statement from Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg, published on Wednesday... As Kommersant reported, the FSB order with a list of data that does not contain state secrets, but that poses a threat to Russia’s security when received by foreigners, was published a week ago. It contains 60 points, among which, in particular, “information on the progress and results of consideration of reports of crimes in the army, information on the observance of the rule of law and the moral and psychological climate in the troops, information on the deployment and size of the army...”

“We are not closing the organization and will not stop helping servicemen in principle, but we have to stop collecting and recording information about crimes and offenses,” Oksana Paramonova, the head of the organization, explained to Kommersant.

...For its part, Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg noted in a statement that in 2021 “the number of manifestations of hazing in the Russian army increased for the first time in seven years.”