



Interview with “Discredited” Defense Minister

OE Watch Commentary: Just over a decade ago, after the Russian military’s mediocre performance in the August 2008 conflict with Georgia, Russian defense officials began a significant reform program. Besides modernizing various weapon systems and improving overall living conditions for military personnel, the intent was to remove the old mobilizational scaffolding of the Soviet military and replace it with a more streamlined structure to enhance combat readiness and C2.

There were some blunders along the way, and the defense minister at the time, Anatoliy Serdyukov, became the target for those who did not agree with the scope or scale of reform. While many of the reforms were carried out, Serdyukov was ultimately dismissed in December 2012 under pressure from corruption allegations. Since his dismissal, while still working within the Russian government, Serdyukov has maintained a low profile. The brief accompanying excerpt from the moderate news source, *Kommersant*, includes the first in-depth interview with Serdyukov since his removal. In it, Serdyukov describes some of the challenges he faced as defense minister as well as some of the details behind his efforts to reform the military.

While admittedly lacking experience in military affairs, Serdyukov was given the task of improving the status and living conditions for military personnel as well as enhancing combat readiness. He described the enormous task of reducing and consolidating the former Soviet structure, stating “we had 22,800 military camps in the armed forces,” and cutting this down to about 700 by the time he was removed. He also describes the efforts to tackle the military housing problem, which at the time, lacked “a unified system for registering those who needed housing.... Each division has its own lists,” which changed every time an officer moved. Serdyukov helped to enact policies which consolidated these lists, allowing the military to largely resolve the housing problem.

Serdyukov admits that the military’s poor performance during the Georgian conflict proved to be the impetus for reform. He describes how military commanders “had to position repair units every 20-30 kilometers” along the attack route into Georgia, because combat vehicles needed constant repair. He also refers to his efforts to improve readiness by removing excess senior officer billets. This reduction, combined with other efforts to consolidate redundant operations, riled those in uniform (and retirees), which in turn, aggravated the overall reform effort. Serdyukov reminds readers, however, that all the reform efforts were first approved by the Supreme Commander (Putin), suggesting that he was used as a hatchet by the Kremlin.

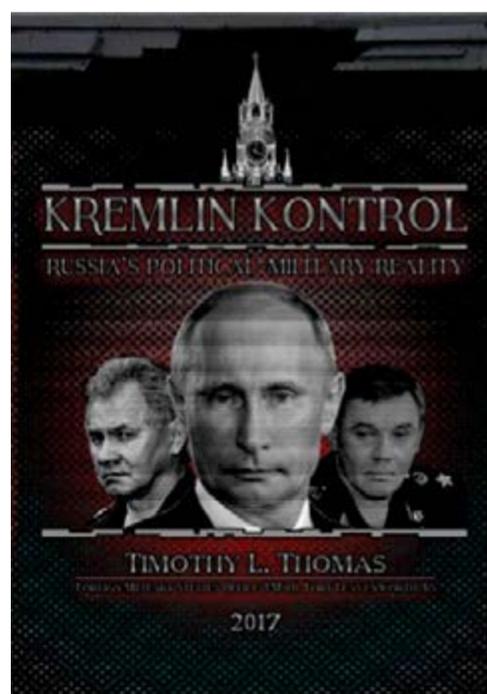
Despite the sharp criticism he received at the time (some of which was deserved, according to some Russians), former Defense Minister Serdyukov was responsible for carrying out many painful, but necessary reforms within the Russian military. While Serdyukov fails to talk about the corruption charges which led to his dismissal, the complete interview provides many valuable insights into the reform efforts which ultimately led to the improved status of today’s armed forces in Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Radical military reform got rid of the superfluous generals and reduced staffs, demanded a fundamentally different approach to military service. Therefore, the Minister’s initiatives were opposed by a part of the officer corps, who did not want changes.”



Former Russian Minister of Defense, Anatoliy Serdyukov.

Source: mil.ru https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Anatoliy_Eduardovich_Serdyukov.jpg, CCA 4.0.



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>

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Continued: Interview with “Discredited” Defense Minister

Source: Vladimir Shcherbakov, “Американцы в шоке от новых роботов Шойгу; Решение Москвы включить в парадный расчет на 9 мая боевых роботов вызвало приступ паники на Западе (Americans Shocked by Shoygu’s New Robots: Moscow’s Decision To Include Combat Robots in 9 May Parade Detail Occasions Fit of Panic in West.)” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 27 April 2018. http://nvo.ng.ru/armament/2018-04-27/100_uran9.html

Ten years ago, reform began, which changed the country’s armed forces. And the first minister of defense, who brought the army in line with modern requirements, Anatoly Serdyukov [AS], as happens with the reformers, did not hear kind words and lost his post.... This is the only interview that Serdyukov gave after leaving the ministry. He was interviewed by Leonid Mlechin [LM]....

...[LM]- What were the main challenges you faced?

[AS] - Two main problems. Social - money allowance and housing for servicemen, as well as schools and kindergartens in military towns, employment of wives. And the second: how to change the attitude of servicemen toward military service? The problems were interrelated: one cannot demand full-fledged service from soldiers and officers, without creating decent living conditions....

[LM]- Did you feel the support of the supreme commander-in-chief?

[AS] Neither I nor the central office of the Ministry of Defense did anything without first getting the approval of the Supreme Commander....

...At the time of the beginning of the reform, we did not have a unified system for registering those who needed housing. Each division has its own lists. The officer changes the place of service and again becomes registered on the new place. Naturally, you are put at the end of the line, unless, of course, you are the division commander. Three years later, you move again. And again the last in line. We made a single electronic register for those in need of housing. You can see in the computer how your turn is moving and where are some of the apartments....

...We had 22,800 military camps in the armed forces....

[LM]- Did you managed to reduce the number of military towns?

[AS]- When I left, there were 700. And proceeded from the fact that 120 should remain....

[LM]- Did the Georgian war affect you greatly?

[AS] “The war showed why reform was needed.” Everyone saw everything. The war itself was not, of course, unexpected. We understood that sooner or later the conflict would arise.... But during the fighting, we had to install repair units every 20-30 kilometers – to repair the equipment so that it could move on....

[LM] Radical military reform got rid of the superfluous generals and reduced staffs, demanded a fundamentally different approach to military service. Therefore, the Minister’s initiatives were opposed by a part of the officer corps, who did not want changes. The retirees did not hide their grievances, they spoke out frankly and publicly....

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.



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