

## New Russian Officer Code of Conduct

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past several years, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has implemented policies to improve operational security. Many of these new restrictions stem from advances in digital technology, particularly those associated with social media. Ever since Russia's intervention in Ukraine, there have been numerous incidents where Russian military personnel have posted information on social media sites which flatly contradicted the official Kremlin version of events. The brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news source, *Izvestiya Online*, describes a new code of conduct for officers and general officers on the General Staff, which not only covers proper officer behavior, but places considerable emphasis upon information and operational security.

The article begins by pointing out that the new code of conduct “describes all aspects of a commander’s performance, from his external appearance and manner of talking to the organization of subunit operations,” suggesting that today’s General Staff officers should model themselves after their tsarist and Soviet predecessors. As a leader, the code advises the officer “to be patient and well disposed toward his subordinates,” and that he/she “must not transfer the responsibility for making the final decision onto a subordinate’s shoulders.” The “officer must always maintain a smart external appearance and look like a leader in any situation,” avoiding the use of “street jargon or undesirable language.” Moreover, today’s officer should keep his workplace well organized, and he is “insistently encouraged to place portraits of the Russian Federation President and the Defense Minister in his office.”

A major portion of the code focuses upon computer and digital security. Today’s officer must be computer literate, ensuring that he maintains a strict line between personal and military digital systems. The code warns about the dangers of cellphone use, pointing out that a cellphone is “the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.” According to the new code “social networks are categorically banned,” and are regarded as “taboo for you and your subordinates.”

The timing for the release of this new officer code of conduct is curious. There’s no question, that over the past several years, the Russian Ministry of Defense has become much more alarmed with information and operational security, and that concern is reflected in the new code. However, ever since the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the popular meme for those in the military has been the “polite Russian soldier,” where the brave Russian defender unselfishly protects the motherland. This new code of conduct suggests that this meme may no longer be accurate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

*“The cellphone is called ‘the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.’”*



Soldiers without insignia guard buildings in the Crimean capital, Simferopol, March 2, 2014.  
Source: Elizabeth Arrott (VOA), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VOA-Crimea-unmarked-soldiers.jpg>, Public Domain.

**Source:** Aleksandr Kruglov, Nikolay Surkov, and Aleksey Ramm, “Табу на соцсети включили в кодекс (Social Network Taboos Incorporated into a Code),” *Izvestiya Online*, 28 February 2018. <https://iz.ru/714220/aleksandr-kruglov-nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/tabu-na-sotcseti-vkliuchili-v-kodeks>

*The Defense Ministry has drawn up a code of conduct for officers and general officers on the General Staff, the High Command, and the military district commands. The document describes all aspects of a commander’s performance, from his external appearance and manner of talking to the organization of subunit operations and setting of tasks for subordinates. A special section is devoted to information technologies and the need to observe secrecy in using them. Mobile telephones are to be monitored particularly, and social networks are declared “taboo.” The experts say that in both the tsarist and the Soviet armies a General Staff officer was a model of professionalism and good manners....*

*In the section about work organization the authors have tried to answer the question: What personal qualities must a leader demonstrate first and foremost? The officer is advised to be patient and well disposed toward his subordinates -- with the emphasis on the fact that they are under the leader’s protection. The chief must not transfer the responsibility for making the final decision onto a subordinate’s shoulders....*

*...It is written into the code that an officer must always maintain a smart external appearance and look like a leader in any situation.... Particular attention is paid to standards of speech. An officer may not use street jargon or undesirable language, lest he become the object of mockery and lose authority in the eyes of those around him....*

*...A competent leader must be able to use a PC and office equipment. There are many hidden rocks in these waters, however. The use of personal computers, external hard disks, or other information storage devices for work needs to be prohibited.... The rules for using mobile phones are stipulated separately. The cellphone is called “the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.” ...Social networks are categorically banned. According to the code they are “taboo for you and your subordinates.”*

*The officer’s workplace is not ignored. He is insistently encouraged to place portraits of the Russian Federation President and the Defense Minister in his office. ...*