



## Can Russia Mobilize Military Medical Care?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Military modernization was a key platform when Vladimir Putin was re-elected as the Russian leader in 2012. Considerable progress has been made in improving the overall combat capabilities of Russia's armed forces, and military readiness remains a central focus in the current effort to retain Putin as the top Russian leader. The first brief excerpt from the Russian official news source *TASS* points out that this military preparedness is not just confined to those in uniform; all aspects of Russian society should be prepared for future conflict. The *TASS* report quotes President Putin, who stated that "the economy's ability to promptly increase the output of defense products and services in wartime is one of the key conditions for ensuring the military security of the state. All strategic and large enterprises regardless of the forms of business and ownership must be prepared for this."

However, the ability of Russian business to transfer to wartime production is only one aspect of military mobilization. A more important factor may be the country's ability to handle the increased medical demands which would stem from any large-scale conflict. The second excerpt from the military weekly *Военно-промышленный курьер* (VPK-Military Industrial Courier) discusses Russia's current military medical system. The article begins by examining medical data from the Great Patriotic War (World War II), pointing out that "more than 22 million people, soldiers and officers of the Red Army, were hospitalized with wounds and illnesses" and "of this huge amount, 17 million returned to service, [and] continued to fight on the fronts." The article stresses that "not only the military medical service, but also civilian health care institutions throughout the country" worked to help injured soldiers return to battle.

The article then proceeds to take an unsparing look at the current Russian medical system, specifically at those medical facilities which would be activated in a possible conflict. While the Kremlin continues to strengthen its raw military power "along the western border of Russia," with "three new motorized rifle divisions... and a tank army," there has been no corresponding increase in military medical facilities.

The authors also examine and diagnose the poor medical care for military retirees and the general population. Not only are there shortages of trained personnel, equipment and medication, but wait times to see a doctor can be very long. They describe incidents where a patient died because of lack of medical attention and/or necessary medicine. They point out that the situation is even worse outside of major Russian cities, where medical facilities and personnel remain in short supply. Even within Crimea, the situation is critical, with "deficiencies in all medical areas." The article concludes with the observation that "a healthy nation is a strong state, and healthcare is a component of defense." While the current Kremlin leadership has improved military readiness and has raised defense awareness among the wider population, it has yet to develop and fund a healthcare system to handle the rigors of war or peace. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



**Source:** "Putin calls for enhancing mobilization readiness after Zapad-2017 exercise," *TASS*, 22 November 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/976879>

*Russian President Vladimir Putin has called for scrutinizing the shortfalls exposed in the course of the Zapad-2017 exercise and taking extra measures for enhancing mobilization readiness....*

*"The economy's ability to promptly increase the output of defense products and services in wartime is one of the key conditions for ensuring the military security of the state. All strategic and large enterprises regardless of the forms of business and ownership must be prepared for this," Putin said.*

**"There are deficiencies in all medical areas..."**

**Source:** Oleg Falichev, Yuri Brygin, "Остаться в полуживых; Нынешняя отечественная медицина не в состоянии помочь большинству раненых (Remaining half-alive; Current domestic medicine is not able to help most of the wounded)," *Военно-промышленный курьер* (VPK-Military Industrial Courier), 27 November 2017. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/40126>

*The war against Russia is being conducted by economic, informational, diplomatic means, but the armed phase can begin at any moment. The army and the navy are actively rearming in the new military-industrial complex, and are conducting exercises. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief personally supervised the training of SNF [strategic nuclear forces] with the launch of ballistic missiles. But are military medicine and civil healthcare ready for mass acceptance of the wounded and sick?*

*During the Great Patriotic War, more than 22 million people, soldiers and officers of the Red Army, were hospitalized with wounds and illness. Of this huge amount, 17 million returned to service, and continued to fight on the fronts. In the treatment of the wounded and sick, not only the military medical service, but also civilian health care institutions throughout the country worked to help injured soldiers return to battle....*

*Today, along the western border of Russia, three new motorized rifle divisions have been deployed... and a tank army has been formed... But there have not been reports of new military medical units and civilian medical institutions.... Each of us knows about the sores of our healthcare, personally colliding with the system. On hearing many glaring cases of rendering poor-quality (to put it mildly) help, or the lack of qualified doctors.... Moreover, in many clinics there has been a reduction in medical staff, and there is an acute shortage of qualified personnel... On 14 August, in the famous Botkin Hospital, a Muscovite died in the waiting room after four hours of waiting for help....*

*...In Crimea, polyclinics and hospitals number only nine hundred specialists of different profiles - for a peninsula with a population of 2.3 million people, and this figure is inadequate. There is an urgent need for therapists, pediatricians, neurologists, cardiologists, oncologists, diagnosticians, infectious disease specialists, gastroenterologists. There are deficiencies in all medical areas.... Our government and each of its representatives at every level must realize the simple truth: a healthy nation is a strong state, and healthcare is a component of defense.*