

Strong Men, Weak State

Power Ministry Officials and the Federal Districts

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Vladimir Putin's KGB past, strong state rhetoric, and specific policy decisions (Chechnya, the attacks on media oligarchs Boris Berezovskii and Vladimir Gusinskii, etc.) have heightened fears of the return to a police state in Russia. The creation of seven federal districts in May 2000, five of which were headed by police and military generals, seemed to provide further evidence of this authoritarian drift.

Two and one half years later, we can now draw some conclusions about the extent to which Putin's federal reforms are based on the use of military and police power. Although some of the nightmare scenarios have not materialized, the degree to which power ministry officials dominate federal district structures is striking.

Paradoxically, however, the presence of so many officers in these positions will ultimately weaken, rather than strengthen, Putin's efforts to build a strong state. In the twenty-first century, effective state administration relies as much on horizontal ties as on vertical ones. As a general rule, Russian officers lack the political skills and training required to create these ties. Russia's strong men are likely to create a weak state.

Coloring the Regions Khaki

"Power ministries" or "power structures" (*silovie strukturi*, or *siloviki* for personnel from these structures) are the catchall terms used to describe Russian government bodies whose personnel carry weapons or wear uniforms. There are more than a dozen such agencies in Russia. The three most important are generally considered to be the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and the Federal Security Service (FSB). Several other power ministries are also important players in Russian politics, including the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS), the Federal Tax Police Service (FSNP), and the Federal Border Service (FPS). Many differences cut across this alphabet soup of agencies, and frequently, they are in conflict with each other. But they are also united by several common features, in particular their command-oriented bureaucratic styles and their embodiment of the state's control over legitimate force.

Putin's choice of two army generals (Viktor Kazantsev and Konstantin Pulikovskii), two former KGB colleagues (Georgii Poltavchenko and Viktor Cherkesov), and one MVD general

FEDERAL DISTRICTS AND POWER MINISTRY PERSONNEL

Federal District	Deputies with Power Ministry Background	Main Federal Inspectors with Power Ministry Background	Totals
<i>Central</i> Poltavchenko -- KGB/FSNP	3 of 8 (FSB, VS, FSNP)	10 of 18 (4 FSB, 2 MVD, 2 VS, 1 FSNP, 1 ZhDV)	13 of 26 (50%)
<i>Northwest</i> Cherkesov -- KGB/FSB	4 of 6 (2 FSB, 1 VS, 1 Procuracy)	7 of 10 (2 VS, 2 FSNP, 1 FSB, 1 MVD, 1 (Procuracy))	11 of 16 (69%)
<i>Volga</i> Kirienko	1 of 6 (Procuracy)	6 of 13 (MVD, FSB, VS, MChS, FSNP, FPS)	7 of 19 (37%)
<i>Southern</i> Kazantsev -- VS	2 of 7 (VS, MVD)	5 of 9 (3 VS, 2 MVD)	7 of 16 (44%)
<i>Urals</i> Latyshev -- MVD	1 of 5 (FSB)	3 of 6 (FSB, MVD, VS)	4 of 11 (36%)
<i>Siberian</i> Drachevskii	2 of 6 (FSB, FSNP)	2 of 11 (MVD, FSB)	4 of 17 (24%)
<i>Far Eastern</i> Pulikovskii -- VS	3 of 6 (3 VS)	1 of 8 (FPS)	4 of 14 (29%)
Totals	16 of 44 (36%)	34 of 75 (45%)	50 of 119 (42%)

Source: *Rambler.Ru: Rossiskaia Vlast'* [<http://Vlast.rambler.ru/>]

Key: FSB-Federal Security Service; VS-Armed Forces; FSNP-Federal Tax Police; MVD-Ministry of Internal Affairs; ZhDV-Railroad Troops; MChS-Ministry of Emergency Situations; FPS-Federal Border Service

(Petr Latyshev) to head five of the seven federal districts set the tone for further appointments to the districts. The other two federal district heads are former prime minister Sergey Kirienko and former diplomat Leonid Drachevskii. One third of the presidential representatives' deputies have power ministry backgrounds. Furthermore, 45 percent of the main federal inspectors appointed by Moscow to oversee relations with the 89 regions are *siloviki*. Most heavily represented among these personnel are the Armed Forces, the FSB, the MVD, and the FSNP (see table). All of the FSNP officials started their careers in the KGB.

The degree to which officials in the seven federal districts have power structure backgrounds varies considerably by district. 69 percent of top officials under Cherkesov in the Northwest district are officers, compared to 24 percent in the Siberian Federal District under Drachevskii. Overall, more than 40 percent of these top officials come from the power ministries.

This trend toward more police and military officials in top regional positions is not confined to the federal districts. 19 members of the new Federation Council have power ministry backgrounds, as do 9 governors. Although the percentage of *siloviki* in these positions is around 10 percent, significantly lower than in the federal district structures, the absolute number of officers among these important regional figures has also increased.

Moreover, as Russian sociologist Olga Kryshantovskaia has shown, there has been a marked increase in the representation of officers among the political and administrative elite throughout Russia. According to Kryshantovskaia, since 1998, the share of elite positions occupied by power ministry personnel has increased almost seven times. Similarly, Nikolai Petrov concluded in a December 2001 PONARS Policy Memo that "the militarization and policization of the state is going on both at personal and institutional levels."

Giving Orders and Playing Politics

One goal of Putin's federal reforms was to strengthen vertical power in Russia. Putin and many other Russian political elites believed that regional actors had become too powerful vis-à-vis the center under Boris Yeltsin. The presidential representatives, or *polpredy*, have had some success in reasserting central control, but in other ways, their efforts have either failed or set the stage for later failure. Recentralizing control is not the same as building a strong or effective state.

A key function of the presidential envoy is "to oversee the effectiveness of law enforcement organs' activity in the federal district," including the appointment of officials. The *polpredy* have been most effective in this sphere. Key law enforcement bodies, including the MVD, the Procuracy, and the tax police have reorganized themselves along federal district lines. Only the FSB of the major law enforcement bodies has not followed suit (the Armed Forces' Military Districts boundaries also do not correspond to those of the federal districts, although those of the MChS now do). The MVD created a Main Administration for Internal Affairs (GUVd) in each of the 7 districts, headed by a deputy minister carrying the rank of colonel-general who supervises a staff of around 150.

Most important in terms of regional law enforcement, the Kremlin has successfully wrested control of the appointment of regional police chiefs from the governors. Under Boris Yeltsin, governors gained considerable influence over police chiefs and prosecutors, and were able to use this influence to their own benefit, as well as to the benefit of their regional economic allies. Putin pushed through a change in the law on the militia that recentralized appointment and

dismissal power. Chiefs of regional administrations for internal affairs (UVDs) have been replaced in many areas in the last several years, including numerous important regions such as Moscow, Nizhnii Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, and Primorskii Krai (Vladivostok). A new person to head the UVD has often been brought in from outside the region. Similarly, regional prosecutors have been replaced in many regions under the direction of the *polpredy*.

Another Putin initiative under the supervision of the presidential representatives is the effort to bring local laws into compliance with federal law. Putin's envoys have reported success rates ranging from 80 to 99 percent in clearing up contradictions in regional legislation. These figures are almost certainly inflated, with district and regional level prosecutors "overfulfilling the plan" to show loyalty to Moscow. Certainly, key trouble spots remain, particularly the cases of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Nevertheless, this campaign has undoubtedly yielded real successes.

The effort to harmonize federal and regional laws also demonstrates the downside of relying on officers to carry out political and administrative tasks. Russian police and military officers may be good at conducting campaigns ordered from the top, but they are less qualified for the long-term task of establishing a well-institutionalized legal and administrative process for harmonizing a massive body of law in a multitiered federation.

Reasserting centralized control over law enforcement bodies is also not a long-term solution to strengthening the rule of law in Russia. Greater central government control over the police and the Procuracy has reduced the influence of local clan and criminal groupings over law enforcement, but it will not transform these officials into disinterested or public-spirited administrators. Rather, law enforcement officials are now subject to manipulation by federal and district level politicians and oligarchs. The Procuracy, in particular, has been directed against political opponents of the Kremlin and the *polpredy*. In other words, the same problems that previously afflicted Russian bureaucratic behavior continue to exist under Putin, just at a different level.

Finally, the presidential representatives have been particularly inept at influencing regional elections in favor of Kremlin-backed candidates. Efforts to manipulate elections have often backfired, with the public electing the "wrong" candidate, leaving the presidential representative looking ineffective. Of course, the civilian politician Kiriyenko has failed in this regard as much as an army general like Pulikovskii. The larger problem is that using the federal district structures to manipulate elections, even when successful, may strengthen Kremlin control in the short term, but it will not build a strong state in the long term.

The Powerlessness of the *Siloviki*

In one sense, Putin has clearly strengthened the Russian state. Regional leaders, opposition parties, the media, and civil society are all weaker now than they were under Yeltsin. The Kremlin is therefore relatively stronger. But Putin himself has used the word effective as a synonym for strong when he talks about rebuilding the Russian state. If Putin wants to create an effective state, putting *siloviki* in charge of key agencies is the wrong way to go.

Forty years of worldwide experience with military rule demonstrates that officers make bad politicians and bad administrators. When the first wave of coups hit the Third World after decolonization, some analysts argued that the military was the most modern institution in many

countries and therefore best equipped to lead these states to prosperity. These suppositions were false. Military governments do not produce higher growth rates or create political stability or wipe out corruption. They do not even make the trains run on time. The one area in which Third World military governments have outperformed their civilian counterparts is in the repression of their own citizens.

Russian history also demonstrates the perils of relying on officers for administrative positions. Under the tsars, officers often served as governor-generals in administering the regions. In the nineteenth century, however, there was a trend toward greater division between military and civilian administration. The enlightened bureaucrats of the reforming Tsar Alexander II realized that, in order to keep up with the main European powers, Russia needed both a more professional military, removed from domestic administration, and a more professional civilian bureaucracy. A civilianization of the bureaucracy took place in the late-imperial period, although arguably this tendency did not go either far or fast enough. As the historian John Keep remarked, a "modern state needed to be ruled by officials, not by officers."

There are, of course, many examples around the world of officers becoming successful politicians. In general, though, the rigid hierarchies of military-style organizations are poor schools for the logrolling and compromise of modern state bureaucracies. The Soviet KGB and Armed Forces were particularly poor training grounds in this respect, marked by a secretiveness and separation from civilian life that is inappropriate for current requirements. The background and training of Russian officers differ substantially from their American counterparts, who are much more likely to have received some or all of their education in a civilian institution, and who also tend to interact more frequently with civilian bureaucrats and civil society than Russian officers. *Siloviki* are also unlikely to have the economic and legal experience most necessary for domestic reforms.

Aleksandr Lebed, the former general and Krasnoïarsk governor, found that the transition from troop commander to public politician was a difficult one. In June 2000, commenting on the appointment of five *polpredy* from the power ministries, Lebed stated, "I was in the military for twenty-six years. I left five years ago and found myself in another world. I very quickly realized that that world had no need of all the knowledge and skills I'd acquired in the past and I began to get rid of them one by one."

Another general turned governor, Vladimir Shamanov, current governor of the Ulianovsk region, has faced similar difficulties in making the transition from the Chechen battlefield to political dealing. Earlier this year Shamanov was unable to fulfill his promise to pay Ulianovsk's electricity bills, leading to electricity cutoffs and a proposal by a Unified Energy System board member for direct federal rule in the region because of the incompetence of Shamanov and his team.

Putin was right that the effectiveness of vertical power under Yeltsin had become alarmingly weak. But this problem was arguably due more to Yeltsin's own failings, and those of his coterie, than anything intrinsic to the Russian state. What the Russian state needs to be more effective is not more vertical control from the top but rather, what the political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell calls "horizontal accountability," or, in more conventional political language, separation of powers and checks and balances. Independent courts, oversight agencies, ombudsmen, and public accounting bodies are all a part of this equation. And horizontal accountability from multiple branches of government works most effectively when a free press and active civil

society help ensure that abuses of power are publicized, investigated, and punished. Without these checks, the opportunities for corruption can often become too tempting. Certainly, there should no longer be any illusions that Russian police and military officers are more likely to have clean hands than their civilian counterparts.

Many analysts have concluded that Putin's federal district reforms have been a failure, and there is increasing speculation that the federal districts will be abolished or allowed to wither and die. This perspective is too bleak; there have been definite accomplishments. But the methods used to fix the problems with center-region relations that arose under Yeltsin are not long term solutions to achieving Putin's stated goal of creating a "strong state." The time for orders and campaigns has passed, and the further usefulness of such methods is doubtful. The hard work of creating an effective federal state in Russia will be a long process, and one better accomplished by good laws and clever politicians—not strong men.

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