

Main Problems for Civilian Control of Military Budgets in Russia

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To some extent, one can say that in Russia now there is no control over military expenditures, neither by civilians nor the military. For five years the government has followed its own budget targets without regard to military requirements. The military command has made unauthorized expenditures without regard to the financial capabilities of a state experiencing a deep economic decline. The president and the parliament play the role of referees whose interference as yet has not improved the picture of financial clashes between civil and military interests. At the same time national security is becoming a main source of public concern and the necessity of the military reform is clear to the country's leadership. Only 5-10 years ago the public demanded both disclosure of military expenditures and spending reductions several times. Today according to some polls, about 51% of Russians would object to increases in military expenditures, which the government constantly tries to keep at the level of 3.5% of GDP (but which in reality are 7-9% of GDP taking into account the debts of the Russian DOD and total defense-related expenditures).

In comparison with the former Soviet state the Russian political system has achieved noticeable improvements on its way toward democracy including in the realm of civilian control of the military budget. The system for producing military budgets has all the attributes of democracy: governmental budget requests are passing through parliamentary debates and approval procedures and then they are signed by the president. At the same time, a lack of democratic experience related to civil-military relations, and in particular lingering Soviet traditions in Russian state practice seriously constrain further movement toward effective civilian control of military budgets. Even at closed sessions of the State Duma the military refuses to reveal their expenditures in detail, which would give deputies the opportunity to cut ineffective military programs and to distinguish priorities in military construction. The whole distribution and redistribution of money flow from the Ministry of Finance is in the hands of military commanders in the Defense Ministry. Thus, civilian control of outlays is nonexistent.

What should be done to establish civilian control of the military budget, and what are possible ways of its realization? Investigation of the Western experience shows many features unique to each country, but there are also several basic common principals of civilian control over the military budget, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The civilian minister and bureaucratic apparatus of the Defense Ministry plays the role of mediator between government and military, including financing military arrangements.

2. Parliaments carry out the public control of financing military arrangements, and can expose military expenditures in certain forms. All actors, including civilian and military, must follow budget restrictions and cannot overspend. Strict control over execution of the budget is exercised by legislative branches of state authority.
3. The participants in the budget process discuss, follow and carry out uniform financial and defense policies, and are guided by agreed procedures on formation and statement of the military budget.

As is clear in these points, the practice of financing defense in the Western countries is unified by a number of fundamental principles of civilian control of the military budget. Their differences lie in national methods and forms of interaction of various branches and institutions of state authority during formation and execution of the military budget. Perhaps the main differences in mechanisms of defense financing in Western countries follow from the differing roles of parliaments in these processes. In the US, Congress carries out both positive and negative control of the military budget; that is, Congress directly participates in the formation and rather rigidly supervises execution of the military budget. At the same time, in the majority of NATO countries the role of parliaments is limited to negative control. That is, parliament is a "watch dog" preventing significant violations of national interests, inefficient expenses, corruption in the executive branch, and other abuses. These distinctions in the activity of parliaments signifies a degree of scrutiny over military programs and attention by media and independent experts. The main lesson for Russia is a concentration of civilian control not on the formation of the military budget (as occurs now), but on the control over its execution.

What are the prospects for acceptance of fundamental principles of civilian control over the military budget in Russia? Presidential Ukaz #1592 extends the structure of the considered military budget from 6-9 items to about 128 by 1997. Eight consumers of budget allocations on national defense, including the Ministry of Defense and other force departments, are to describe their requirements in more than 1000 articles of federal expenditures according to draft budget code awaiting approval by the Federal Assembly.

The civilian apparatus of the Russian Defense Ministry is insignificant in number and has little influence on the decisionmaking process. The overwhelming majority of key posts in the Russian Ministry of Defense are occupied by the military. Military personnel rule the process of acceptance of all specific decisions on military arrangements and its financing. It is clear that in existing conditions the Ministry of Defense is not able to carry out mediating functions similar to those of defense ministries in the West. It is even more obvious that the corporate military bureaucracy would resist any efforts to install civilians in its top structures. Recent intentions to enhance the role of the General Staff in military arrangements related to planning as well as operative command and control over daily issues of the Armed Forces would release the Defense Ministry for governmental bureaucratic tasks closed to other ministries. Yet, prospective military reform plans to increase the role of the General Staff do not mean the reform of Armed Forces management will result in a civilian Ministry of Defense. Strengthening the role of the General Staff could lead to a situation whereby the Ministry of Defense will not coordinate the activity of administration, government, defensive industry and militaries, but instead, operates as a tool to get as much tax payers' money as possible, pushing military political concepts developed by the General Staff through state authorities.

It seems that the most favorable developments would be the strengthening of presidential structures' ability to manage force departments. Currently, at the staff level there is private competition for spheres of influence between the Defense Council and the Security Council. In terms of personnel, the Defense Council represents the civilian administration of the President, while representatives of the force structures constitute ninety percent of the Security Council. The personnel of the Security Council has temporary status in this agency and their future career and well-being is strictly dependent on their originating departments. This situation automatically creates the preconditions for lobbying of departmental interests.

At the same time, the personnel in the administration do not have sufficient qualifications nor authority to constructively influence military policy. Nevertheless, in comparison with the Ministry of Defense, the presidential staff is much more ready to carry out new functions--by virtue of their bureaucratic structure and the fact that they themselves are products of recent reforms of the political system. In the end, the concentration of authority in the hands of the Councils' staff would provide synchronized reforms of other security structures. In any case, getting a balance of interests seems to be much more achievable at this level of the state's military hierarchy. Giving advisors the function of achieving reform, the president can both provide them with necessary powers, and insure that reform will begin "from the outside" of the military machine, which apparently cannot reform itself. Such a method, however, does not exclude a further merger of the Ministry of Defense and Presidential Councils in a uniform body, responsible both for development and realization of military policy.

Any reform is a controversial process. If military reform in Russia is implemented, it should inevitably solve a number of sharp contradictions in civil-military relations. Today, the military has fallen in social status from its formerly privileged position. Yet, in a democratic society they should effectively compete for budget resources, learn to cooperate with civilians competently and constructively, and assert and coordinate their basic requirements. If such a scenario were to transpire, civilians and military in Russia should pass through a difficult period to one characterized by more consent and interaction.