

# Military Innovation Under Authoritarian Government – the Case of Russian Special Operations Forces

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AQ2 ABSTRACT Russian Special Forces saw significant changes to both organization and doctrine in the years after 2008. The special forces of the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate were reduced in number, the organization's institutional autonomy and rationale were changed, and an entirely new Special Operations Command was established in March 2013. This article seeks to assess the nature, scope and purpose of these changes, and to explain them by drawing on scholarship on military innovation. In particular, the article looks at military innovation in the context of a non-democratic political regime. 10

KEY NOTES: Special Operations Forces, Russia, Military Innovation, Authoritarian Government 15

Immediately after the August 2008 war with Georgia, Russian Defence Minister Anatolii Serdiukov initiated a fundamental reform of all the Russian armed forces. This reform had serious consequences also for the Russian special operations forces (SOF). The changes made to these forces appear to be continued under Serdiukov's successor Sergei Shoigu. So far, few studies exist of the post-Soviet Russian SOF.<sup>1</sup> The actual use of these forces in the, since spring 2014, continuing conflict in Ukraine underscores the need for such an analysis. 20

The effect of regime type on military innovation is a topic little studied both empirically and theoretically. Most empirical studies of military innovation come from Western democracies and in particular from the USA.<sup>2</sup> In order to broaden the relevance of military innovation 25

<sup>1</sup>One important exception here is Aleksei Nikolskii, 'The Olympic Reserve: Why Russia Has Created Special Operations Command', *Moscow Defence Brief*, No. 4 (2013).

<sup>2</sup>See footnote 28, page 10. Theo Farrell, Sten Rynning and Terry Terriff, *Transforming Military Power Since the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2013), for a representative list. An important exception to this trend is Kimberly Marten-Zisk's *Engaging the Enemy – Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation*

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studies, theory should also take account of the potential effects that regime type may have on policy outcomes.

This article is divided into three main sections. It is initiated by a brief overview of Soviet and Russian SOF in the period from 1950 to 2008, and a survey of Russian thinking on special operations. This is done in order to establish the pre-reform situation. A particular focus is here placed on Russian discussions of doctrine in relation to the three internationally identified SOF tasks special reconnaissance, direct action and military assistance. The next section discusses the changes to Russian SOF after 2008. This discussion is organized around the question of what constitutes a military innovation. The purpose is to show that both from the view of the Russian SOF themselves and from an outside view, the changes may be said to have been significant. The third section looks at the causes of Russian SOF reform in light of contemporary theory on military innovation.<sup>3</sup> Here, also the effect of regime type is examined. While finding empirical support for many of the hypotheses in current theory, the findings in this section suggest that the civil-military model, first presented in Barry Posen's seminal book *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, may be of particular relevance in non-democratic settings.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the findings, especially with regard to the point about regime type, are summarized in a conclusion.

### Soviet Beginnings and the Different Types of Russian SOF

The first post-World War II Soviet SOF were established in 1950, partly on the basis of partisan detachments established during the war. The immediate cause of their creation was the anticipated deployment of mobile tactical US nuclear weapons in Europe. The Soviet leadership was alarmed by the prospect of such weapons being used against Soviet forces. The Soviet Union did not possess missiles with the range and accuracy necessary for destroying these new targets, and they saw SOF as a capability that could be effective against the threat. However, already from the beginning these forces also had other tasks, including

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1955–1991. However, in this otherwise excellent study, regime type is not an important issue. Marten-Zisk uses Western organization theory to analyse processes in the non-democratic Soviet context without a specific discussion of how regime type may affect policy outcomes.

<sup>3</sup>In particular, the following works have been important: Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine – France, Britain and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1984), Adam Grissom, 'The Future of Military Innovation Studies', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29/5 (2006), Farrell, Rynning and Terriff, *Transforming Military Power Since the Cold War*, and Kimberly Marten-Zisk's *Engaging the Enemy – Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation 1955-1991*.

<sup>4</sup>Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*.

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special reconnaissance, destruction of enemy supply and communication systems, organization and training of national liberation movements, and the liquidation or capture of enemy military and political leaders.<sup>5</sup> The first detachments were Army units, but already in 1952 the first naval SOF units were established. 60

Despite the relatively broad range of defined SOF tasks, the Soviet leadership nevertheless saw SOF as a tool that would be expended quickly. After the first few days of a conflict, it was assumed that the enemy had restored control of his rear areas. This included defeating Soviet SOF. These forces would therefore be of little or no significance for the rest of the conflict.<sup>6</sup> Such thinking was in no way peculiar to Soviet authorities. It is a common assumption internationally that SOF are at their best when they in the initial phase of a conflict can surprise the enemy. When the moment of surprise has passed, conventional forces are often more efficient.<sup>7</sup> 65 70

In addition to the purely military SOF, the Soviet Union and later Russia also possessed and continues to possess paramilitary SOF. These include in particular the SOF of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of the Interior (MVD). There is a rough division of labour between the different categories of Russian SOF, but their responsibilities have tended to overlap both in Soviet and post-Soviet times. For example, all SOF categories may in principle take part in operations abroad. This rule was written into law in 2006. The law stated that the President may use the armed forces and SOF abroad in order to “prevent terrorism, defend the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens, and defend Russian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity”.<sup>8</sup> Still, foreign operations are probably first of all the responsibility of the SOF of the General Staff’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), hereafter called *spetsnaz*-GRU, and the Special Operations Command (SOC).<sup>9</sup> At least, this would be the case in operations outside the post-Soviet space. In terms of operations within Russia proper, there is a legal prohibition against *spetsnaz*-GRU taking part here. This restriction was temporarily lifted during the period when 75 80 85 90

<sup>5</sup>Sergeii Kozlov and others (eds.), *Spetsnaz GRU – Ocherki istorii* (Moscow: Russkaia Panorama 2009), 14.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with former *spetsnaz* officer Vladislav Surygin at <[http://3mv.ru/publ/vladislav\\_shurygin\\_ehra\\_specnaza/7-1-0-14898](http://3mv.ru/publ/vladislav_shurygin_ehra_specnaza/7-1-0-14898)>.

<sup>7</sup>See for example Ståle Ljøterud ‘Spesialoperasjoner – med kløkt og mot’ in Harald Høiback and Palle Ydstebø (eds.), *Krigens vitenskap – en innføring i militærteori* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag 2012), 318.

<sup>8</sup>See Vladimir Kuzar, ‘Pravo na vystrel’, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 8 July 2006.

<sup>9</sup>*Spetsnaz* is the Russian terms for special operations forces. It is short for *spetsialnoe naznachenie*.

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the Ministry of Defence ran military operations in Chechnya, but was reinstated as soon as this period was over. Today the MVD SOF have the main responsibility for fighting the insurgency in the North Caucasus, and the FSB SOF is the leading anti-terrorism force. This article deals only with the military and not the paramilitary SOF. 95

#### Russian Thinking on the Use of Special Forces

For obvious reasons, there is no publicized doctrine that describes in detail the Russian employment of its military SOF. Despite this, it is still possible to get some insight into Russian guidelines on the matter from open sources. Some of these sources describe the composition, equipment and organization of the SOF, while others analyse the use of SOF in post-Soviet military operations. In addition, there are also elements of SOF theory in some of the sources. The writings do not add up to a doctrine, but they still say something about the current reasoning on the use of SOF in Russia. 100 105

Military historian Simon Anglim has identified three tasks that most SOF have been given across countries and times: surveillance and reconnaissance, offensive action against important targets, and support and influence.<sup>10</sup> This classification of tasks is almost identical with the official NATO doctrine on special operations, which distinguishes between *special reconnaissance*, *direct action* and *military assistance*.<sup>11</sup> The NATO classification is a useful tool for structuring the discussion also of Russian opinions on SOF, since Western countries currently may be said to be in lead internationally in the development of such forces. 110 115

#### *Russian Theory and Reasoning on Special operations*

Military theory regarding SOF is limited compared to theory on the use of other land, air and sea forces. Simon Anglim argues that SOF have “no Guru and no Great Theoretician”.<sup>12</sup> The same conclusion is also reached by Russian experts in the area. According to former *spetsnaz*-GRU officer Vladimir Kvachkov, the development of SOF theory in Russia is something that largely remains to be done. One particular reason for this state of affairs has been pointed out by another former SOF General, Sergei Kanchukov. According to him, SOF were always regarded with particular suspicion in the Soviet military tradition 120 125

<sup>10</sup>Simon Anglim, ‘Special Forces – Strategic Asset’, *Infinity Journal*, No. 2 (2011), 17.

<sup>11</sup>Ståle Ljøterud ‘Spesialoperasjoner – med kløkt og mot’, 315.

<sup>12</sup>Ståle Ljøterud ‘Spesialoperasjoner – med kløkt og mot’, 302, and Simon Anglim, ‘Special Forces – Strategic Asset’, 15.

because they were held as a typical tool of Western imperialism. Since the Soviet Union condemned this imperialism, contemplation on the use of SOF tended to be limited to their contribution in territorial defence of the homeland.<sup>13</sup> 130

Vladimir Kvachkov is one of very few Russian officers to have been engaged in official SOF theory development in Russia. In the years 2004 to 2008, Kvachkov was tasked with developing a planning document for the future of Russian SOF. This document came to nothing, but in a later book chapter entitled “The use of special forces in today’s world”, 135 he presents the following list of what he considers proper SOF tasks:

- Raids and sabotage
- Special reconnaissance
- Combating enemy SOF
- Psychological operations 140
- Military assistance
- Support for one’s own non-SOF forces
- Search and rescue operations
- Peace support operations<sup>14</sup>

This list is not particularly different from Western equivalents. The one major exception would be combating enemy SOF, which is generally not one of the tasks of Western SOF.<sup>15</sup> Western thinking will here tend to be that the comparative advantages of SOF are negated against forces of similar design and training. Regular forces will often have a significant advantage in terms of firepower, and they will therefore be better suited than friendly SOF to combat enemy SOF. 145 150

Another more general difference between Russian and Western special operations theory is that the Western theory is significantly more concerned with operations far from home. Current Western SOF theory seems very preoccupied with what these forces can achieve in different kinds of peace and stabilization operations. Russian thinking, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with domestic territorial defence. Russia also has substantial experience in fighting insurgencies, from Afghanistan to the North Caucasus, but this experience has never toppled the supremacy of the World War II paradigm in Russian 155 160

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<sup>13</sup>Sergei Kanchukov, ‘Komandovanie spetsialnykh operatsii Rossii: kontsepsiya sozdania’, 12 Dec. 2012, <[http://specnaz.org/articles/analytics/komandovanie\\_spetsialnykh\\_operatsiy\\_rossii\\_kontsepsiya\\_sozdaniya\\_ot\\_sergeya\\_kanchukova/](http://specnaz.org/articles/analytics/komandovanie_spetsialnykh_operatsiy_rossii_kontsepsiya_sozdaniya_ot_sergeya_kanchukova/)>, a website for *spetsnaz* veterans.

<sup>14</sup>JP 3-05, p.10, <<https://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3-05.pdf>>. 2014.

<sup>15</sup>Ljøterud ‘Spesialoperasjoner – med kløkt og mot’,., 316.

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military theory. Defence against foreign symmetrical threats always dominated and continues to dominate the discussion.

Furthermore, because of this dominance of symmetrical thinking, SOF theory has tended to concentrate on high rather than low intensity operations. This is visible, for example in Kvachkov's statement that "the purpose of all special operations is a radical change of the situation in the enemy's rear areas".<sup>16</sup> It is often difficult to identify what the rear areas of insurgencies are. 165

In order to achieve this radical change in the rear areas, Kvachkov proposes that as much as 5–7 per cent of one's own forces should be SOF. With such a significant proportion of SOF, it will be possible to tie down maybe as much as 50 per cent of the enemy's forces in clearing operations rather than direct combat. According to Kvachkov, SOF is the means by which one can make the enemy "lose all comprehension of what is front and what is rear areas".<sup>17</sup> 170 175

A SOF proportion of 5–7 per cent of the personnel is far above what is common in most countries today. Ståle Ljøterud asserts that SOF most often comprise about 1–3 per cent of the total manpower.<sup>18</sup> Kvachkov's ideal figures are also far from the actual percentage in Russia. By a very rough estimate, there are about 14,00 Russian military SOF today (12,000 in *spetsnaz*-GRU, 1,500 in SOC, and 700 in the 45th VDV *spetsnaz*-Brigade).<sup>19</sup> This amounts to only 1.9 % of the 766, 000 military personnel that currently serve in the Russian military.<sup>20</sup> 180 185

In terms of SOF recruitment and deployment, Russia also differs from many other countries. This is first of all because of the significant proportion of conscript soldiers in SOF. For example, in 2011 the proportion of professional contract soldiers in the 16th *spetsnaz*-Brigade in Tambov was only 30 per cent.<sup>21</sup> This means that as much as 70 per cent of the soldiers in that brigade would have had one year or less of training before being sent into combat. The General Staff 190

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<sup>16</sup>Vladimir Kvachkov, *Spetsnaz Rossii* (Moscow: Voennaia Litteratura 2004), sub-chapter 3.2.1 *Klassifikatsia spetsialnykh operatsii*, book accessed from [http://militera.lib.ru/science/kvachkov\\_vv/index.html](http://militera.lib.ru/science/kvachkov_vv/index.html).

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ljøterud 'Spesialoperasjoner – med kløkt og mot', 302.

<sup>19</sup>VDV is short for *Vozdushno-Desantnye Sily*, which is the Russian name for the airborne forces.

<sup>20</sup>Officially, total manpower in the Russian military is 1 million, but a 2013 report by the Russian Audit Chamber claimed that the real manpower is no more than 766, 000. *Ria-Novosti*, 24 Oct. 2013.

<sup>21</sup>Roger McDermott, 'Russian Military Intelligence: Shaken but not stirred', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 Feb. 2012.

optimistically announced that all *spetsnaz*-units would be composed only of contract soldiers by the end of 2014, but it is unclear whether this goal was reached.<sup>22</sup> Despite the current strive for professionalization, the commander of the mentioned Tambov Brigade, Konstantin Bushuiev, did not necessarily think that conscripts were unfit to serve in the SOF. According to his experience, “over the last 15 years we have seen that conscripts fulfil their assignments no worse than do most contract soldiers”.<sup>23</sup>

Most Western countries would probably not consider soldiers with one year or less of training as fit for SOF operations. The common procedures in these countries are either to recruit personnel with experience from other units of the armed forces, or have the soldiers undergo a significantly longer training program before they are considered combat ready.

### *Special Reconnaissance*

SOF collect information that cannot be collected by other means. There are, however, also other units that have gathering of intelligence as their responsibility. One major issue that often distinguishes SOF from other intelligence gathering units in the armed forces is the identity of the “customer”. This may either be other military units or the national leadership of the country. Regular intelligence units commonly serve the other parts of the military, whereas SOF tend to produce intelligence directly for the national leadership. These two “customers” often have different needs in terms of types of intelligence. Russian SOF General Sergei Breslavskii comments that units do not deserve to be called SOF unless their “customer” is the national leadership.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, he argues, Russian military doctrine should state more clearly that military units themselves are chiefly responsible for the intelligence they need. SOF should only collect intelligence with the needs of the national leadership in mind. In order to make this distinction absolutely clear, Breslavskii suggests making SOF a separate branch of the Russian military.<sup>25</sup>

Breslavskii’s proposition is probably based on experience about how Russian SOF actually have been used in terms of intelligence gathering. For example, *spetsnaz*-GRU in the first Chechen war was often used as

<sup>22</sup>Vladimir Mukhin, ‘Bystroe reagirovanie Vladimira Shamanova’, *Nezavisimaaia Gazeta*, 18 Nov. 2013.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with Konstantin Bushuiev at the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, 5 Nov. 2011.

<sup>24</sup>Sergei Breslavskii, ‘Kakoi spetsnaz nuzhen Rossii’, in Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, 368.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

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army intelligence because the latter was not considered to be good enough.<sup>26</sup> While this decision indeed led to improved tactical intelligence, strategic intelligence became scarce since the *spetsnaz*-GRU could not gather strategic and tactical intelligence at the same time.<sup>27</sup> 230  
A similar tendency was reported also in the 2008 Georgian war.<sup>28</sup>

### *Direct Action*

As already mentioned, direct action was one of the original Soviet SOF tasks. Even if destruction of NATO's mobile tactical nuclear weapons was the main mission, attacks against enemy supply and communications systems and liquidation of enemy military and political leaders were also explicitly written into Soviet SOF doctrine. Because of this, *spetsnaz*-GRU assassinated a significant number of Soviet defectors in Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II. A few years later, however, these assignments were taken over by the KGB. The task of liquidating enemy leaders was removed from the GRU doctrine.<sup>29</sup> 235

During the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), direct action again became central to the SOF. Russian sources tend to describe the war in Afghanistan as “the SOF golden age” (*zvezdnii chas spetsnaza*). Both *spetsnaz*-GRU, *spetsnaz*-MVD and *spetsnaz*-KGB took part in the operations. However, it was mainly *spetsnaz*-GRU that carried out the direct action missions, such as attacking Mujahedeen convoys. 240

One general SOF dilemma regards how much time and resources should be spent on special reconnaissance and direct action respectively during combat. This is also an issue in the Russian debate. General Kvachkov thinks that current Russian doctrine puts too much emphasis on intelligence at the cost of “spectacular actions that may hurt the enemy especially hard”.<sup>30</sup> According to him, this priority makes the SOF forces too similar to regular army intelligence. Former SOF Major Sergei Kozlov has suggested that as a rule of thumb, *spetsnaz*-GRU should spend 80 per cent of its time on special reconnaissance and 20 per cent on direct action. In addition, he wants the newly established 250 255

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<sup>26</sup>Igor Vetrov, ‘Spetsnaz GRU: istoria s prodolzheniem’, article published 24 Aug. 2011 at the *spetsnaz* website [specnaz.org](http://specnaz.org). [http://spec-naz.org/articles/analytics/specnaz\\_gru\\_istoriya\\_s\\_prodolzhenijem/](http://spec-naz.org/articles/analytics/specnaz_gru_istoriya_s_prodolzhenijem/).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. I, 14.

<sup>30</sup>Vladimir Kvachkov, ‘Nekotorye polozhenia teorii spetsialnoi operatsii i neobkhodimost Sil Spetsialnogo naznachenia v sostave VDV’ in Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, op. cit., 391.



SOC to have reversed priorities between special reconnaissance and direct action compared to *spetsnaz*-GRU.

Roman Polko, a Polish special forces officer, has pointed out that Russian SOF tend to think differently from Western SOF in terms of how to best achieve military effect in direct action.<sup>31</sup> According to him, the Russian SOF thinking is characterized by a “cult of numbers” (*kult chislennosti*). This sets Russia somewhat apart from her Western counterparts. By “cult of numbers” Polko means that the Russians have a hard time accepting that small units may have qualities of their own simply by being small. He points to the fact that a *spetsnaz*-GRU brigade consists of about 1,500 personnel. Such a high number would be unthinkable as an organizing principle for Polish SOF, even if they had the possibility to set it up. Here, however, it should be added that the organization of the new SOC looks more in line with Western thinking. Polko also thinks that physical strength and kinetic effect play a larger role in Russian SOF thinking than in the West. Russian SOF will tend to consider physical strength in recruits as more important, and also be somewhat less concerned with their ability to find smart and cost efficient solutions.

#### *Military Assistance*

Direct action was one of the original military Soviet SOF tasks, and so was military assistance. In the 1950s this activity was labelled “organization and direction of national liberation movements”.<sup>32</sup> At that time the communist ideology had significant support in many parts of the world, and the Soviet leadership expected to help like-minded groups in other countries in establishing communism. Furthermore, these groups could become allies, even military allies, if conflicts erupted between different Western countries and the Soviet Union.

The full extent to which Russian military SOF in the post-Soviet period has been active in military assistance abroad will probably never be known, due to the secrecy of many such missions. Still, several instances are described in open sources. Three of the most important were (1) the Russian and Uzbek *spetsnaz* assistance to the military insurrection that toppled the partly Islamist regime in Tajikistan in 1994, (2) the Russian support in establishing the special forces in Ethiopia in the years 2002–2003, and (3) the use of *spetsnaz*-GRU and SOC in the continuing Ukraine conflict.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Roman Polko at the Russian military blog run by Denis Mokrushin, <<http://twower.livejournal.com/1261734.html>>, accessed 8 May 2014.

<sup>32</sup>Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. I, 14.

### SOF Reform – a Case of military innovation?

According to Adam Grissom, for a change in military organization or doctrine to be called a military innovation, it needs the following characteristics: (1) a change in the manner in which military formations function in the battlefield, (2) a significant change in scope and impact, and (3) that the change is tacitly equated with greater military efficiency.<sup>33</sup> In the following, the two identified major changes to Russian SOF will be discussed with reference to these criteria.

#### The Decline of *spetsnaz*-GRU

There are in particular three decisions, made during Serdiukov's reign as Minister of Defence, that justify claims about a decline of *spetsnaz*-GRU. First, *spetsnaz*-GRU was in 2009 forced to accept serious cutbacks in terms of the number of personnel. The organization was reduced from nine to seven brigades, around 1,000 officer positions were removed, and it is also claimed that the GRU personnel stationed at Russian embassies were cut by a third.<sup>34</sup> According to an anonymous *spetsnaz*-GRU source, the organization was ordered to cut the overall costs by 30 per cent%.<sup>35</sup> The GRU also felt humiliated because of a decision to make the rank system of GRU similar to the Army rank system. For most GRU officers this meant they would be reduced in rank. Some, however, assert that the brigades that were cut were never fully manned, and that many of those who lost their positions found work in other parts of GRU or in other SOF services.<sup>36</sup> It may therefore be that the cutbacks in personnel were not the disaster that some SOF representatives have claimed, at least not to the personnel. This latter point may somewhat reduce the reform's score on the "scope and impact" criteria, but not at all to the degree of making it insignificant.

In addition to the reductions, the second indication of *spetsnaz*-GRU decline was the re-subordination of *spetsnaz*-GRU from the General Staff to the Regional Joint Commands (RJC)s). For SOF, as already mentioned, it is of great significance for their status and operational freedom whether they carry out missions directly on behalf of the national leadership, or on the order of other parts of the military organization. *Spetsnaz*-GRU was as a result of this new arrangement

<sup>33</sup>Grissom, 907.

<sup>34</sup>Denis Telmanov, 'Nachalnika GRU uvoliat po vykhodu s bolnichnogo', *Izvestia*, 27 Sept. 2011 and unidentified author, 'Pod nozh Serdiukova popali spetsnaz I zarubezhnaia agentura GRU', *Svobodnaia Pressa*, 8 Nov. 2012.

<sup>35</sup><<http://blyg.ru/archives/2927>>.

<sup>36</sup>Author's interview with Aleksei Nikolskii, military correspondent for the *Vedomosti* newspaper, Moscow 19 February 2013.

expected mostly to do the latter, at least in the case of high intensity war. Former Chief of Operations for *spetsnaz*-GRU, General Dmitrii Gerasimov, told the Russian weekly *New Times* in February 2011 that he was convinced that the

“destruction of *spetsnaz*-GRU has been completely intentional. Of the originally 14 brigades [reference to Soviet times] and two training brigades we used to have, there are at best only four left that are of any use. In addition, we also have to remember that we are in reality no longer taking about actual *spetsnaz* brigades, but about ordinary intelligence units now subordinated to the Army”.<sup>37</sup>

The re-subordination of *spetsnaz*-GRU from the strategic level to the RJC was unprecedented both in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Those who argued against the decision claimed among other things that the RJC would have no idea how to utilize the new capability at their disposal. In March 2011, an anonymous General Staff source admitted to the Russian daily *Moskovskii Komsomolets* that the re-subordination had been a mistake. All integration efforts had failed. The RJC had since the re-subordination not been able to develop any viable doctrines or plans for the use and further development of the *spetsnaz*-GRU brigades. The source therefore concluded that at the moment these brigades existed in a “suspended state” within the RJC.<sup>38</sup>

A similar lack of integration seems to have been the case in the naval SOF. There are four naval SOF brigades, one for each of the fleets. Until the Serdiukov reforms, these brigades were also in principle part of GRU, but command over them may have been contested between GRU and the Navy leadership. An example of this is that the leadership of GRU during the Chechen campaigns repeatedly asked for participation also from the naval SOF. The Navy leadership, however, refused.<sup>39</sup> If GRU had had uncontested command of these units, the Navy leadership would not have been in a position to refuse. Sergei Kozlov states that these four brigades were re-subordinated to the RJC in a manner similar to the land brigades. He also asserts that the naval *spetsnaz* brigades were no better integrated within the RJC than the land *spetsnaz* brigades were.<sup>40</sup>

Given the troubled integration of *spetsnaz*-GRU, both land and naval, one might question whether Grissom’s criteria of “tacit equation

<sup>37</sup>Anatolii Yermolin, ‘Razrushitely otechestvo’, *New Times*, No. 6, 21 February 2011.

<sup>38</sup>Irina Kusenkova, ‘Minoborony GRUshnikov okolatshivaet’, *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 22 March 2011.

<sup>39</sup>Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, 364.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

with greater military efficiency” is met. The answer depends on what is meant by “tacit equation”. One interpretation would be only expressed intent to improve. Here the criteria was probably met. The 2008 war in Georgia had revealed that *spetsnaz*-GRU and the regular army had not cooperated well, and it was therefore not unreasonable to suggest that their joint subordination under the RJC’s could help remedy that problem. Another interpretation would be actual improvement. In this case the question of whether the criteria was fulfilled or not is more open. However, as pointed out by Farrell, Rynning and Terriff, that is an unreasonable interpretation of the criteria. As stated by these authors, it is “entirely possible that a military innovation may make a military less effective”.<sup>41</sup> Thus, all taken together, it seems fair to claim that the “tacit equation” criteria is met. 370 375

Probably because of the problems pointed out above and possibly also because of GRU lobbying, the decision to subordinate *spetsnaz*-GRU to the RJC’s was reversed in 2013, after Serdiukov and Makarov had resigned.<sup>42</sup> If the decision had been upheld, there would have been no doubt that the criteria of “change in the manner in which military formations function in the battlefield” had been met. However, even after the reversal of the decision, it seems fair to claim that this criteria is at least partly met. Although *spetsnaz*-GRU again is under direct command from the General Staff, their main function in war still appears to be mostly limited to special reconnaissance or reconnaissance in support of other parts of the military. As will be detailed below, their former role as the sharpest and most flexible tool of the political and military leadership still looks lost to the SOC. 380 385 390

The third and final example of GRU decline is that the organization lost its right to present intelligence directly to the president. Earlier, the head of GRU reported directly and in person to the president. Now, information passes through both the Chief of the General Staff and the Minister of Defence.<sup>43</sup> Direct access to the president is possibly the highest symbol of institutional prestige and political influence in Russia.<sup>44</sup> GRU’s loss of this privilege invariably sent a clear signal to all the other institutions within the Russian apparatus of government 395

<sup>41</sup>Theo Farrell, Sten Rynning and Terry Terriff, *Transforming Military Power Since the Cold War.*, 8.

<sup>42</sup>Aleksey Nikolsky, ‘Little, Green and Polite – The Creation of Russian Special Operations Forces’ in Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov (eds.), *Brothers Armed – Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis: East View Press 2014), 125.

<sup>43</sup>Anatolii Yermolin, ‘Razrushitely otechestvo’,.

<sup>44</sup>Alena Ledenova explains how both personal and institutional importance in Russia is measured by the proximity to the ‘body of the tsar’, in Alena Ledenova, *Can Russia Modernise?* (Cambridge: CUP 2013), 133.

that the organization no longer needed to be treated with the same reverence as before. This element just adds to the point that the changes made to GRU were significant in both scope and impact. 400

### *The Establishment of the Special Operations Command*

In addition to the decline of the GRU, the establishment of the Special Operations Command (SOC) in March 2013 is the second very important change within Russian SOF since the Serdiukov reforms started. Moreover, this new structure was considered by many in the GRU as yet another step in the decline of their own organization.<sup>45</sup> In addition to suspicions that the new SOC received resources that would otherwise have been spent on the GRU, what probably angered the GRU more than anything was that most of its previous responsibility for direct action was taken over by the SOC.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to *spetsnaz*-GRU, the SOC also appears to have been given the right to make its own procurement decisions, independent of the rest of the armed forces.<sup>47</sup> The strength of the SOC is probably around 1,500 troops.<sup>48</sup> 405 410 415

In the beginning of Serdiukov's tenure as Defence Minister, a special division called *Senezh* was established within *spetsnaz*-GRU. It was named *Senezh* after a lake 60 kilometres north of Moscow, close to where the new unit was located. Already in the autumn of 2009, however, this force was removed from GRU command and placed directly under the General Staff. At the same time, former FSB general Igor Medoev was given command of the new force. 420

Originally, it had been expected that *Senezh* could become some kind of a nucleus for a merger of several different existing special forces. However, when *Senezh* was renamed the Special Operations Command in March 2013, it became clear that a very different concept had been chosen. The SOC looked very much like yet another independent SOF force. According to the military correspondent of the Russian daily *Vedomosti*, Aleksei Nikolskii, SOC was to become the main instrument in the hands of Russian politicians for missions of high political significance but little need of follow up by larger forces.<sup>49</sup> The establishment of SOC appears to fit Grissom's criteria for "changes in the manner in which military formations function on the battlefield" 425 430

<sup>45</sup>Interview with anonymous *spetsnaz* source in *Soldaty Rossii*

<sup>46</sup>Aleksey Nikolsky, 'Little, Green and Polite...', 124-5.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>48</sup>Aleksey Nikolsky, 'Russian Special Operations Forces: Further Development or Stagnation?', *Moscow Defence Brief*, No.2 2014, 25.

<sup>49</sup>Aleksei Nikolskii, 'The Olympic Reserve: Why Russia Has Created Special Operations Command', *op. cit.*, 23.

and “tacitly equated with greater military efficiency”. It may score less on the criteria “significant in scope and impact” because of the new unit’s relatively small size, but because of the importance attached to it by the political leadership; one can still maintain that also this criteria is fulfilled. 435

All taken together, there is arguably sufficient evidence to maintain that the decline of *spetsnaz*-GRU and the establishment of the SOC can be considered cases of military innovation. True, the scope of change may have been exaggerated by disgruntled GRU officers, and the alteration to how the *spetsnaz*-GRU functions in the battlefield was partly reversed in 2013. Still, given all the other changes outlined above, these factors alone look insufficient to claim that these two reforms together did not amount to military innovation. 440 445

### Explaining Russian SOF Reform

There are several ways to categorise the current literature on military innovation. Adam Grissom identifies four models.<sup>50</sup> First, it is the civil-military model, which stipulates that the initiative for innovation comes from civilian leaders, preferably in combination with maverick officers. Second, comes the interservice model, which sees innovation as a result of a battle for scarce resources between military services. The third is the intraservice model, which similarly to the interservice model finds the reasons for innovation in resource struggle, but in this case between branches within the same military service rather than between services. Finally, there is the cultural model, which sees innovation as a result of a change in the strategic and/or organizational cultures of military organizations. The sources of such changes can be progressive senior service leaders, external shocks or emulation of innovation taking place in other countries. Alternatively, Theo Farrell, Sten Rynning and Terry Terrif use the four factors (1) organizational interest, (2) new ideas and military culture, (3) the role of civilian and military leaders and (4) feedback from operational experience as categorising principles. 450 455 460

Drawing on these works, but in order to simplify the analysis, the categorisation will here be limited to one military leaning and one civilian leaning category. Thus, *organizational conflicts and operational feedback* is the first category and *new ideas and civilian initiative* the second. Barry Posen’s civil-military model is in this categorization one among several modes of explanation within the new ideas and civilian initiative category. Of course, no modes of explanation are mutually exclusive. As will be shown, several of the propositions in current military innovation literature find support in the empirical material in 465 470

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<sup>50</sup>Adam Grissom, ‘The Future of Military Innovation Studies’, 908–19.

this study. Furthermore, the empirical data does not allow for any firm ranking of hypotheses in terms of explanatory power. Still, it can be argued that Posen's civil-military model may be of particular importance because the Russian SOF innovation took place in a non-democratic setting. 475

### *Organizational Conflicts and Operational feedback*

The full composition of the team of officers that implemented the Serdiukov reforms is still not known.<sup>51</sup> Thus, it is also unclear whether there were representatives of GRU within that team. However, it seems that the team did not consider SOF a priority. According to former *spetsnaz*-GRU Major Sergei Kozlov, author of a five volume history of the Russian SOF, many from the team regarded SOF as “yesterday's forces” (*sily vcherashnogo dnia*).<sup>52</sup> In the Russian SOF community, it was judged as deeply symbolic when Serdiukov declined to visit *spetsnaz*-GRU at the organization's 60-year anniversary in October 2010. According to one source, Serdiukov's disregard for this occasion was without precedence in *spetsnaz*-GRU's history.<sup>53</sup> The logic of many in the reform team may have been that the military SOF had been established first of all in order to deal with NATO's tactical nuclear weapons. Since these were now less of a threat, or could be destroyed by other weapons, the need for SOF was much smaller. The SOF tasks in connection with the conflicts in the North Caucasus, it was claimed, could be dealt with by the SOF MVD.<sup>54</sup> 480 485 490 495

Whether or not GRU officers were part of the reform team, judging by the findings above, representatives of the other services appear to have called the shots. In that case, the possibility to transfer resources from GRU to other services of the armed forces could be part of the explanation. Moreover, SOF in general often have a hard time convincing the other parts of the military establishment of their value. This is not peculiar to Russia, but rather a historical norm. According to the scholar Colin Gray, “SOF always need powerful political sponsorship, because they are typically more or less anathema to regular-minded regulars.”<sup>55</sup> 500 505

<sup>51</sup>It is likely, however, that former GRU-agent and defence intellectual Vitalii Shlykov, and the then Chief of the General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, were probably two of them.

<sup>52</sup>Sergeii Kozlov and others (eds.), *Spetsnaz GRU – Ocherki istorii*, Vol. IV, 332.

<sup>53</sup>Author not identified, ‘Spetsnaz unichtozhen’, <<http://blyg.ru/archives/2927>>. 2013.

<sup>54</sup>Sergeii Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, 332.

<sup>55</sup>Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century – Future Warfare* (London: Phoenix 2005), 249.

Rivalry between services could also explain the changes made to *spetsnaz*-GRU in another way, namely as a scapegoat for failures in the 2008 war with Georgia. One non-official explanation for the subordination of *spetsnaz*-GRU to the RJs is that the Chief of the North-Caucasus Military District, General Vladimir Boldyrev, needed somebody to blame for his regular army forces' poor performance in Georgia.<sup>56</sup> This was especially the case with intelligence, which was one of the major weaknesses of the Russian war effort. Boldyrev may have been able to convince the political and military leadership that *spetsnaz*-GRU did not manage to provide the necessary intelligence when operating on its own. They should therefore in the future be subordinated to the regional commands. *Spetsnaz*-GRU responded to this criticism by insisting that they provided the rest of the armed forces with plenty of intelligence in Georgia, but that much of it was squandered because the other services proved unable to make proper use of it.<sup>57</sup> Thus, whether the changes to SOF attributed to experiences from the war in Georgia were a case of organizational conflict or operational feedback may be hard to disentangle. In fact, they could very well be both at the same time.

Similarly, the changes made to *spetsnaz*-GRU may also be a result of the generally troubled relations between the GRU and the FSB. Former FSB officer Anatolii Yermolin claims that the GRU and the KGB/FSB were always competitors. Therefore, when the FSB got one of its own into the presidency, it was only a matter of time before GRU would feel the effects. Yermolin in fact sees the decline of GRU at least partly as a result of a "special operation" from the service he once used to belong to.<sup>58</sup> In particular, Yermolin suspects that the presence of the GRU at embassies around the world has been an annoyance with respect to money laundering schemes run by corrupt elements of the FSB. When engaging in this kind of activity, one does not want one's institutional competitor to be able to monitor the activity.

Furthermore, when faced with demands for reduced costs, discord within the GRU itself may also help explain the organization's decline. GRU is divided into the two main branches *spetsnaz*-GRU and *agentura*-GRU. While the *spetsnaz*-GRU consists of the SOF brigades, the *agentura*-GRU consists of the signal intelligence units and the military intelligence personnel stationed at Russian embassies. The people of the *agentura* are somewhat derogatorily called the "white-collars" by their *spetsnaz* colleagues. The relationship between the two branches has not always been the best. According to a specialist on the

<sup>56</sup> 'Minoborony proigryvaet GRU', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 23 Jan. 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Anatolii Yermolin, 'Razrushitely otechestvo', op.cit.

<sup>58</sup> Anatolii Yermolin, 'Razrushitely otechestvo't.



Russian secret services, Andrei Soldatov, General Valentin Korabelnikov, the head of the GRU from 1997 to 2009, always chose the side of the *agentura*-GRU in internal conflicts.<sup>59</sup> When Korabelnikov was forced to resign in 2009, his deputy General Aleksandr Shliakhturov took over. Russian sources claim that Shliakhturov was even less concerned with the fate of *spetsnaz*-GRU.<sup>60</sup> Sergei Kozlov additionally suggests that the initiative to close the brigades in Berdsk and Asbest actually came from within the GRU itself.<sup>61</sup> This decision may therefore have been influenced by a struggle for funds within the GRU, where the “white-collars” won the day. The evidence on this point is not conclusive enough to state that intraservice rivalry *was* one of the explanations behind the Russian SOF reforms, only that there are reasons to suspect it.

#### *New Ideas and Civilian Initiative*

Emulation in terms of learning from or copying other countries is one way of getting new ideas for military innovation. When the Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, in March 2013 announced the establishment of SOC, he explicitly referred to Western trends in SOF as a motivation. Additionally, according to Aleksey Nikolsky, the SOC idea had originated from the then head of the General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, who had studied US and German SOF experiences in detail.<sup>62</sup> With both official and non-official evidence, there is little doubt that emulation was one of the motives behind Russian SOF reforms. However, ideas do not turn into policy by themselves. They cannot have an impact unless there are leaders willing to spend resources and take risks in order to get them implemented.

When Anatolii Serdiukov was appointed Minister of Defence in 2007, he came with the full political backing of the president and no previous commitments to the military. This latter point was probably one of the main reasons why he was chosen for the job. Thus, Serdiukov was in a position to take on the vested interests and Cold War mentalities of the officer corps to a degree that no previous post-Soviet minister of defence had. The whole reform, including the changes

<sup>59</sup>Soldatov quoted in Ivan Konovalov, ‘Generala Korabelnikova ne puskauiat iz razvedki’, *Kommersant-Daily*, 19 March 2009.

<sup>60</sup>Denis Telmanov, ‘Nachalnika GRU uvoliat po vykhodu s bolnichnogo’, *Izvestia*, 27 Sept.r 2011.

<sup>61</sup>Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, 308.

<sup>62</sup>Roger McDermott, ‘Moscow Plans Rapid Reaction Forces and Professional Soldiers—Again’, *Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12 March 2013, and Aleksey Nikolsky, ‘Little, Green and Polite...’, 125.

to SOF, have by most observers been held as a classical example of a reform forced upon a largely unwilling military.<sup>63</sup> 580

In this light, the establishment of SOC may be a particularly clear example of the civil-military model at work. The new unit was from the very beginning seen as “Serdiukov’s personal special force”.<sup>64</sup> The minister’s initiative here exemplifies a general historical trend in the relations between political leaders and SOF. According to Derek Leebaert “many political leaders are drawn to these peculiar elites and take a certain defiant pride in serving as patrons of warrior cultures which annoy the high command”.<sup>65</sup> 585

Kozlov’s detailed study of developments inside *spetsnaz*-GRU 1999–2010 reveals that although some officers already had argued for change, they were not heard by the GRU leadership. For example, the generals Tishin and Kvachkov had suggested that Russia develop something similar to the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM). This initiative was without further discussion flatly rejected by the then head of GRU General Korabelnikov.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the reform of Russian SOF looks almost like a textbook case of military innovation as described by Barry Posen’s civil-military model.<sup>67</sup> The organization suppressed the few reform initiatives that came from within, and was in turn forced to change by the country’s political leadership. This leadership cooperated with a few, still mostly unidentified, reform-minded officers or “mavericks”. According to Posen, such “mavericks” are one way by which civilian leaders may “overcome the limits on their own military knowledge and get around the bureaucratic shenanigans of their military organization”.<sup>68</sup> 590  
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Intuitively, one would think that the civil-military model would be less relevant in non-democratic regimes. Much of the theoretical literature on authoritarian government is concerned with the question

<sup>63</sup>See for example Ruslan Pukhov, ‘*Predislovie*’ in Mikhail Barabanov (ed.), *Novaia armia Rossii* (Moscow: Tsentr Analiza Strategii I Tekhnologii 2010), 5; Mark Galeotti, ‘Reform of the Russian Military and Security Apparatus: An Investigator’s Perspective’, in Stephen J. Blank (ed.), *Can Russia Reform? Economic, Political and Military Perspectives* (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute 2012), 62, Mikhail Barabanov, ‘Hard Lessons Learned’, in Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov (eds.) *Brothers Armed – Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis: East View Press 2014), 86–7 and Roger N. McDermott, *The Reform of Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces* (Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation 2011), 16–17.

<sup>64</sup>Andrei Sidorchik, ‘Poyaviatsia li v Rossii svoi kommandos?’, *Argumenty I Fakty*, 27 Nov. 2012.

<sup>65</sup>Derek Leebaert, *To Dare & To Conquer* (New York: Little, Brown 2006), 37.

<sup>66</sup>Sergei Kozlov and others, Vol. IV, 329.

<sup>67</sup>Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 222–28.

<sup>68</sup>Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 223.

of the leader's political, and sometimes physical, survival.<sup>69</sup> Forcing in particular the military to do what it does not want to do should be very risky in such a context. Thus, an argument about the particular utility of the civil-military model for explaining military innovation in non-democratic regimes is dependent upon the existence of an additional, and probably necessary, condition. This is the existence of an instrument of force at the hand of the political leadership that can offset the threat that the military may constitute. One such force can be the domestic security services. The existence and strength of such a force, together with the greater capacity for action normally available to autocratic leaders compared to civilian ones<sup>70</sup>, may make the civil-military model especially relevant in non-democratic contexts. "Greater capacity for action" here means that in authoritarian systems the political leadership often is not bound neither by the rule of law nor by democratic accountability.

For example, officers who may want to oppose the political leadership risk being investigated and prosecuted for crimes in order to stop their activity, even if they have committed none. There are several examples of military officers being put in prison during Putin's period in power, and for at least for some of them it is questionable whether it was criminal activities that sent them there. One example is General-Lieutenant Vladimir Sabatovskii. Sabatovskii was deputy commander of Russian military transport aviation, and in 2009 he was sentenced to three years in prison and six million roubles in fines. According to one source, this was largely because he prevented some centrally placed FSB officers from selling off military land and pocket the profits themselves.<sup>71</sup> Thus, military opposition to civilian initiatives for innovation is likely to be personally riskier in non-democratic than democratic settings.

<sup>69</sup>See for example Ronald Wintrobe, 'How to understand, and deal with dictatorship: an economist's view', *Economics of Governance*, No. 2 (2001), Stephen Haber, 'Authoritarian Government', in Donald A. Wittman and Barry R. Weingast, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (Oxford: OUP 2008), 693–707, Ronald Wintrobe, 'Dictatorship: Analytical Approaches', in Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford: OUP2009), 363–94, Jeff Carter, 'Butter, Guns and Money: Leadership Survival and Government Spending in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes', Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University (2011), and Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook* (New York: Public Affairs 2011).

<sup>70</sup>On the greater capacity of action for autocratic compared to democratic leaders, see Ronald Wintrobe, 'How to understand...' 42, and Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*, 43.

<sup>71</sup>Olga Romanova, 'Nastoiashchii polkovnik', *New Times*, 29 Aug. 2011.

Furthermore, in addition to differences in personal risk, there is also the question of relative institutional strength. According to observer of the Russian military Zoltan Barany, this organization enjoyed significant political clout in the 1990s.<sup>72</sup> Thus, reforms similar to the ones analysed here would probably have been much more difficult to initiate at that time. Also, rule of law and democratic accountability was stronger then. However, when Putin became president in 2000, things began to change. He swiftly moved to curb the political voice of the military. The first step was to place people he trusted from the FSB and the MVD in top positions in the Ministry of Defence (MOD). In addition, he established a system of FSB representatives within most military units called Agencies of Security in the Forces (*Organy bezopasnosti v voiskakh*). These were not warmly welcomed in the units, and they quickly came to be seen as FSB spies by the military. Putin also significantly increased funding for the FSB.<sup>73</sup> All security organs, including the military, received more money under Putin, but at least until 2011 the increase was steeper for the FSB than for the military.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, while the armed forces obviously still are militarily much stronger than the FSB, they constitute an organization trained and organized for fighting foreign enemies. The military is not set up for domestic power struggles; here the FSB is much more at its home turf.

Arguably, therefore, the risk to Putin's power by forcing an unwanted reform on the military had been significantly reduced by the time the reforms started in 2008. In the Russian SOF, despite significant bitterness, the GRU largely acquiesced. The only major exception was the staging of a local public demonstration by soldiers from the 64th Brigade in Berdsk in Siberia against the decision to close down the brigade. These soldiers also publicly demanded Serdiukov's resignation.<sup>75</sup> Such actions of protest among military personnel were both illegal and highly uncommon in Russia. The political leadership probably strongly disliked this public display of military discontent, but although everybody knew Serdiukov was acting with Putin's full support the protests were not aimed at the president.

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<sup>72</sup>Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military* (Princeton UP 2007), 78–110.

<sup>73</sup>Carolina Vendil Pallin, *Russian Military Reform – A failed exercise in defence decision making* (London: Routledge 2009), 146 and Roger N. McDermott, *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces*, 133.

<sup>74</sup>Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia* (Cambridge: CUP 2011), 54.

<sup>75</sup>Oleg Fochkin, 'Berdsk vstupilisia za spetsnaz-GRU', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 10 March 2009.

## Conclusion

The Serdiukov reforms, initialled in 2008, substantially altered Russian SOF and their organizational structure. The most significant changes were the decline of *spetsnaz*-GRU, and the 2013 establishment of the Special Operations Command. In explaining their SOF reforms, Russian authorities explicitly cited international developments as an inspiration. 675

Based on the empirical evidence presented in this study, it seems fair to argue that the reforms of Russian SOF constituted a case of military innovation. Although the destructiveness due to reductions in numbers may have been exaggerated by the GRU, and the decision to subordinate the GRU to the RJC was revised in 2013, enough of a change in the way Russian special forces are organized and operate in the battlefield remained to justify calling this a military innovation. The GRU, which used to be the first tool available to the political and military leadership for especially demanding tasks, no longer holds this position. Instead, its role in war is now mostly limited to special reconnaissance. The SOC has taken over much of the responsibility for direct action. This organization is much more similar to current Western SOF than *spetsnaz*-GRU ever was. 680 685 690

In terms of organizational conflicts and operational feedback, it is possible to read the reforms partly as a result of a struggle between the GRU and the other services, and between the GRU and the FSB. Additionally, the historical division within GRU between *spetsnaz* and *agentura* may have made it more difficult for the GRU to withstand pressure for reform. 695

Moreover, in terms of new ideas and civilian initiative, the establishment of the SOC was explicitly referred to as an emulation of international (i.e. Western) trends. The latter point, however, as demonstrated above, did not mean that Russian SOF in any way became a replica of Western SOF. Furthermore, there is broad agreement among observers that the Serdiukov reform was a largely civilian initiative forced upon an unwilling and hesitant military organization. True, a few reform-minded officers, in particular Chief of the General Staff General Makarov, were also behind, but this is also in full correspondence with Posen's civil-military model. The model, while stressing the civilian initiative, allows for "maverick officers" to play an important role. 700 705 710

The evidence in this study suggests that what was true for the whole reform was also true for SOF reform. The GRU as an organization showed limited willingness to self-reform ahead of the changes. The few internal reform attempts were largely rejected by the GRU leadership, 715

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and they had no sympathy for the establishment of the SOC. Thus, there is little doubt that the locus of reform was outside the organization.

The final argument in this study is that the crucial role of civilian initiative in military innovation was reinforced in the Russian case by the authoritarian character of the political regime. The greater capacity for action associated with authoritarian regimes, and the existence of another agency of force within the system that reduced the likelihood of resistance from the military, laid the foundation for change according to the *civil-military* model. Putin was able to launch and implement one of the most radical reforms in Russian history with relative little resistance, something which also led to military innovation in Russian SOF.

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