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From Militia to Police: The Path of Russian Law Enforcement Reforms

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By Olga Semukhina, Milwaukee

Abstract

This article outlines the major events of the 2011 police reform in Russia and discusses the recent changes in the structure and function of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MVD) implemented by Minister Vladimir Kolokol'tsev in 2012–2014. The analysis suggests that despite its limitations, the 2011 police reform reduced public tensions surrounding the issue of “bad and corrupt” police in Russia that were evident in 2009–2010.

Police Troubles

In 2011, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev conducted a new reform of the Russian police aimed at improving the public image of police officers and increasing their general efficiency. Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian society began to criticize its police force, whose problems were mostly the result of drastic underfunding and understaffing, deficiencies in turn exacerbated by pervasive corruption. In the past twenty years, the public–police relationship in Russia remained strained with a large number of citizens expressing distrust and dissatisfaction with law enforcement.

Longitudinal studies examining levels of trust and satisfaction with police in Russia indicate that at least 50 percent of Russians do not trust the police in any given year; in some years the levels of public trust and satisfaction plummeted to 30 percent. International studies, including the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), New Europe Barometer (NEB), European Social Survey (ESS), Gallup World Poll, and World Value Survey (WVS) consistently rank Russia as one of the lowest countries in both public trust in and satisfaction with police. The declared purpose of the 2011 police reform in Russia was to restore public trust and improve citizens' satisfaction by creating an efficient law enforcement agency that effectively serves and protects the Russian population.

The Nature of the 2011 Police Reform in Russia

The 2011 police reform was initiated by Presidential Decree # 252 issued on January 3, 2011, and followed by the Federal law “On Police” #3-FZ issued on July 2, 2011, and the Federal law “On Police Service” # 342-FZ issued on November 30, 2011. These documents recommended an increase of police wages and benefits, a 20 percent cut in personnel, a review of all police officers' personnel files (“re-certification”) by internal affairs services, and centralization of all police funding so that the federal budget, rather than regional budgets, paid the police officers. The measures were meant to cleanse the Russian police of corruption and encourage more effective policing.

The ministry increased wages to at least \$1,000 a month¹ and the federal government began to pay salaries in order to avoid delays from local budgets. Subsequently, the overall funding for Russia's police force (MVD) grew twofold between 2010 and 2012 to an estimated 25 billion dollars a year. Earlier analyses had blamed low wages for pervasive corruption among rank-and-file police officers and their superiors.

The internal affairs service completed its review of every police officer's file between March and August of 2011 in order to identify corrupt or ill-suited officers. Based on available data, 90 percent (875,000) of existing officers and 94 percent of management personnel passed the review and retained their jobs.²

The MVD internal regulations were also reviewed to improve the officers' assessment and promotion system. The preexisting system of police reporting and officer evaluation drew on pre-determined statistical indicators including the number of registered crimes and apprehended offenders and encouraged data manipulation and abuse of power. Police officers often failed to register unsolvable crimes and forced innocent citizens to confess to crimes they did not commit in order to meet their performance targets. Reformers put in place a new assessment system that they claimed moved away from relying on statistical reports and thus sought to discourage data manipulation and abuse of power.³

The 2011 reform renamed the Russian police from “militia,” the term used during the Soviet period, to “politsia,” the Russian word for “police.” According to

- 1 Interview with MVD Minister Nurgaliev published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on 11.17.2011. Retrieved 7.7.2012 from <<http://kp.ru/daily/25789.4/2771871/>>
- 2 Statistics provided by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published on 7.25.2011. Retrieved 7.7.2012 from <<http://kp.ru/daily/25723.5/2715985/>> and interview with MVD Minister Kolokol'tsev published in “*Grani*” on 6.25.2012. Retrieved 7.7.2012 from <<http://grani.ru/tags/police/m.198621.html>>
- 3 Promulgated by MVD Decree #1310 issued on 12.26.2011. This decree was never published officially. Cited in text provided at <http://etkovd.ucoz.ru/index/prikazy_mvd_rf_2011_god_s_1001_i_dalec/0-55>

then President Medvedev, the new name was more suited to describing the nature of Russian law enforcement.⁴

A variety of groups within Russian society held a vigorous discussion of the measures proposed by the 2011 police reform. The draft laws were available online at websites that solicited comments and criticism from Russians. Citizens provided over 20,000 responses during the Internet public discussion related to the draft law “On Police” in 2010.⁵ Several prominent international and Russian NGOs, leading academic institutions, and government-authorized organizations conducted examinations of the draft law and published their expert opinions.⁶ Public opinion polls suggested that more than half of all Russians were aware of the reform and/or closely followed its development.⁷

During this discussion phase, experts on both the Russian police and media openly criticized the 2011 police reform, arguing that it would have little impact on the performance of Russia’s law enforcement agency. Most critics agreed that the proposed measures were simply insufficient to promulgate a major change in such a troubled institution as the MVD. The most significant drawbacks of the 2011 reform included the lack of serious anti-corruption measures and a poorly conceived, rushed implementation.

Further Changes under Minister Kolokol'tsev, 2012–2014

In 2012, the newly appointed police minister, Vladimir Kolokol'tsev, admitted that the 2011 police reform

was not fully successful and pledged to continue with additional changes. One of Kolokol'tsev’s early initiatives was to hold upper-level police officers personally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates.⁸

Also, in 2012 Russia’s leaders set up an independent unit within the Investigative Committee (“*Sledstvennyi komitet*”) to investigate all crimes committed by police officers. Previously, such crimes had been investigated by numerous agencies, including both the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor’s office. Their efforts were often uncoordinated and the agencies lacked sufficient resources to be effective.⁹

That same year, Kolokol'tsev formed a Working Group that included the MVD Public Council to develop a “road map” outlining future changes for the Russian police. In spring 2013, the Working Group presented a document of over 100 pages describing the failures of the 2011 reform and proposing new changes. The document received mixed reviews from expert observers, but as of 2014, it is unclear whether any of the proposed measures will be implemented in the near future.

At the beginning of 2014, the federal government published a new police budget program, allocating over 255 billion dollars for the Russian police in 2014–2020.¹⁰ Critics point out that the MVD continues to use similar performance indicators despite its pledge to restructure the police assessment and reporting system. The federal program on the police budget promises to reduce the number of registered crimes, increase the criminal case clearance rates, and improve the public levels of trust and satisfaction in return for the increased federal funding.

In May 2014, Minister Kolokol'tsev introduced a major change in the police structure by eliminating the Main MVD departments at the federal district level (*glavnye upravleniia v federalnykh okrugakh*). From their conception in 2000 until their abolishment, these departments served as intermediate levels of law enforcement management to coordinate police work in several regions. Putin likely created the federal districts and their corresponding police departments to weaken the regional authorities and strengthen police centralization. Since the 2011 police reform centralized all police units under the federal budget, the federal district police departments were apparently no longer needed.

4 For example, see the news article at <http://newsru.com/russia/06aug2010/medvedev_police.html>

5 For details on the public discussion, please see an archive at <<http://zakonoproekt2012.ru/#law/police>>

6 Among those organizations are Transparency International (the full report can be found at <<http://www.transparency.org/ru/reforma-politcii/zakliuchenie-po-zakonu-o-politcii>>), Independent Expert Council (full report can be found at <<http://www.neps.ru/node/1665>>), Presidential Council on Human Rights (<www.president-sovet.ru/structure/group_corruption/materials/zakon.doc>), The Institute of State and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences (<http://www.igpran.ru/public/articles/Zaklyuchenie_IGPRAN_na_roekt_fz_o_policii.pdf>), Regional Coalition of NGOs “Agora” (<<http://old.novayagazeta.ru/file/pdf/zaklMVD.pdf>>), Ural State Law Academy (<www.gfurfo.tmweb.ru/wp-content/uploads/2010/.../nauchno-pravo_voe.doc>), and Working group of NGOs (<<http://www.polit.ru/article/2010/08/27/npomvd>, <<http://hro.org/node/8908>>).

7 FOM. (2010). Public awareness of the adoption of the federal law “About the Police”. Retrieved 06/17/2011, from <www.fom.ru>. Levada Center. (2010). “Public opinion about adoption of the new federal law ‘About Police.’ How drastic is the impact supposed to be?” Retrieved 06/17/2011, from <www.levada.ru>. ROMIR. (2011). “Public awareness about adoption of the new federal law ‘About Police.’” Retrieved 06/17/2011, from <www.romir.ru>

8 An interview with Minister Kolokol'tsev of 13 November 2012. Retrieved from <<http://kommersant.ru/doc/2065561>>. Also see the article “MVD is preparing the revolution of their cadres” at <<http://izvestia.ru/news/540803>>

9 See the article by Taubina at <<http://publicverdict.ru/topics/library/10193.html>>

10 See, for example, <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/21261431/palochnaya-programma>>

Finally, Minister Kolokol'tsev has pushed to reintroduce the institute of public volunteers (*druzhinniki*), which had been eliminated in the 1990s.¹¹ According to a new draft law, the volunteers will assist the police in patrolling the streets and “working with potential victims”, while being compensated for their time from local budgets.

The Consequences of the 2011–2014 Police Reforms

Most experts agree that Medvedev's 2011 police reforms and subsequent changes implemented by Minister Kolokol'tsev will have little or no effect on the Russian police's ability to perform effectively and fight corruption within its ranks. However, this does not mean that the Russian government police reform initiatives have no consequences.

One of the major achievements of the 2011–2014 police reform for the Russian government was the ability to say that at least something was done to solve the issue of “bad police” and move concerns over policing outside the mainstream public agenda. In 2009–2010, following the disaster when drunken chief police officer Denis Evsyukov went on a shooting spree in a Moscow supermarket, killing two and wounding seven, and the unprecedented whistleblowing by Alexey Dymovsky, a police officer who described police corruption on YouTube and was subsequently fired, public attention in Russia focused on the police and every media outlet discussed the urgent need for change. Following the 2011 reforms and the dismissal of the unpopular Minister Rashid Nurgaliev, public attention now is slowly moving away from the acute issue of police inefficiency, corruption and brutality. In 2014, police reform is no longer a popular item on the Russian public agenda. In fact, the rare calls from experts to continue police reform are no longer welcomed by the public as many now feel “reform fatigue.”¹²

Another important consequence of the recent police reforms in Russia is an increase in the levels of job satisfaction among police officers. Even though many police officers were unhappy about the abrupt reform, “re-certification,” and the extent of public attention created by reform, it appears that at least some satisfaction was brought by the fact that the government “finally remembered about rank-and-file police officers” and they no longer feel “abandoned.” Complaints of neglect among police officers were clearly pronounced during the 1990s, when the rapid transition to the new political and eco-

nomic systems left the police underfunded, understaffed and struggling with its new identity. During the 2000s, when Russian society was slowly recovering from the abrupt post-Soviet transformation, many police officers continued to feel abandoned since government funding of lower rank police officers remained inadequate and police legislation was outdated. The 2011 reform, with all its imperfections, created at least an impression among the rank-and-file officers that the Russian government was taking care of them.¹³

At the same time, the 2011 police reform also highlighted several important problems. One of the major issues is the Russian government's lack of a coherent plan to reform the police force. The recent changes introduced in 2011–2014 appear to be sporadic and often contradictory to the stated goals of reform. Despite the declared need to reduce the numbers of managerial personnel within the MVD, it appears that the number of administrators continues to grow as many high ranked police officers are simply reshuffled to lower level MVD divisions.¹⁴ The law enforcement practices that were previously abandoned as ineffective (police volunteers) are now being re-introduced again, and the institutions that were claimed to be an improvement (federal district level main departments) are now abandoned as unnecessary. It seems that the current measures to reform the police are simply reactive measures aimed at alleviating public tension inflamed by various and often short-term issues with crime and law enforcement practices within Russia.

The public discussion preceding the police reform also showed a deep division among different segments of Russian society over the role and function of the police. Many expert opinions on police reform were directly contradictory to each other, calling for either further centralization or full decentralization of the police hierarchy. There was also no consensus among experts and members of civil society on whether the functions and authority of the Russian police should be further expanded or curtailed under the new law. Popular opinion surveys preceding the reform indicated that many Russians were either undecided or simply unclear about what needs to be done to make Russian police work better. Many Russians just wanted better and less corrupt law enforcement and they expected the government to find ways to deliver these public goods. Such contradictory views held by members of Russian civil society and often paternalistic and ignorant pub-

11 See, for example, <<http://www.openpolice.ru/news/druzhinniki-vmesto-policii/>>

12 See, for example, <<http://www.kp.ru/daily/26157.5/3045226/>>

13 See, for example, discussion boards of police officers at <<http://www.prof-police.ru/>> and <<http://www.policemagazine.ru/>>

14 See, for example, <<http://www.openpolice.ru/news/kak-sokrashenie-shtabnogo-apparata-mvd-privedet-k-egonovomu-rostu/>>

lic views are serious obstacles for future reforms of Russian law enforcement.

Under these circumstances, it is unclear when and how the Russian police will be “reformed” again, and whether it will be done one more time under the pressure of a new public crisis or will be an effort to truly change the nature of the police driven by the maturation of Russian civil society. It is unlikely that any fur-

ther drastic changes in the law enforcement institutions of Russia will be implemented without political changes, which at the moment seems doubtful. At this point, it is more likely that in the near future Russian police performance will improve marginally with a continuous increase in federal funding, the streamlining of some police functionality, and MVD re-structuring.

About the Author

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ANALYSIS

The Day-to-Day Work of the Russian Police

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Abstract

The Russian public has a dim view of its police. The strict hierarchy of the police ranks and the assessment system used to measure their job performance help to explain why the police do things that limit their ability to conduct criminal investigations and develop strong day-to-day relations with residents on their beats. Addressing these issues will provide the base for more effective police reform than Russia has seen so far.

A Matter of Incentives

The Russian police have struggled to gain legitimacy with the public in the post-Soviet period. Poll numbers frequently show that a majority of people distrust the police and consider them corrupt and ineffective. However, in a December 2011 survey, my colleagues and I found that only 27% of Russians reported some sort of encounter with the police in the past two years. Other surveys have shown similar results. Most people get information about the police not from personal contact, but from the media or from second- or third-hand stories told by friends and family. Here I suggest that one of the important causes of negative perceptions of the police is the gap between what people think that the police should be doing and what their incentives actually push them to do. This brief article focuses on two critically important institutional aspects of policing in Russia—the structure of hierarchical subordination and the quantitatively-based performance assessment system—to show how Russian police navigate and weigh competing demands on their time and resources. Ultimately, the typical Russian police officer subordinates the demands of the public to the demands of his institution, not because he is lazy, corrupt or does not care, but because not responding to institutional incen-

tives has a far greater impact on his opportunities for career advancement and his take-home pay. Below, I illustrate how these incentives play out in two areas of policing, criminal investigations and day-to-day policing by beat officers.

Before discussing police incentives, it is worth disaggregating who the “police” actually are. As of 2012, the police agency’s Ministry of the Interior (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del’*—MVD) oversees a national police force of over one million employees with the majority of those working on the ground in direct contact with citizens. The MVD is a hierarchical structure divided into specialized sub-units which are replicated at the national, federal district (*okrug*), regional (*sub'ekit*) and local (*raion*) levels. These sub-units each fulfill specific law enforcement functions and include among others, traffic policing, beat policing, criminal investigation and prevention of corruption and extremism. Most police work takes place at the local level in cities and towns. Throughout Russia, there are approximately 2,000 local departments (*upravlenie*), each with about 100–150 employees covering 50,000–100,000 residents. The public is most likely to encounter only a few of these specialized sub-units, primarily the police assigned to their beat (*uchastkovyi*) and if they drive, the