



“Real Men” and Military Service

OE Watch Commentary: Given the focus that the Kremlin leadership has placed on military modernization and readiness over the past decade, it is not surprising that the prestige of serving in the Russian armed forces has risen accordingly. Citing recent poll data, the brief excerpt from the popular business daily *Kommersant* claims “the majority of Russians (60%) consider military service as mandatory for every ‘real man;’” the highest percentage in over 20 years. The excerpt also points out that “88% of those polled are confident that the Russian military” is capable of defending the country.

The second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news site *Vzglyad* provides additional commentary on this positive poll data. The author insists that “military service has never been viewed by anyone in the USSR or in Russia as a manifestation of patriotism,” but that it is rather regarded as “an ideal social ladder and system that provided additional vocational education.” He credits the current and previous defense ministers for improving “the perception of military service, mainly by reducing the service life to one year.” He claims that the rigors of military service can transform “the spoiled and poorly educated modern boys into something resembling men.” According to the author, mandatory military service instills in young men not only the importance of obedience, but more importantly, how to overcome obstacles and “to accomplish the task before him.” The author concludes with the assertion that “a man with military experience has absolute competitive advantages in the eyes of any woman,” since for many Russian women, “if you haven’t served in the military, you are not a real man.”

Improved living conditions, a shorter term of service, and various legislative carrots and sticks (e.g. military service as a prerequisite for government service and restrictions on foreign travel for those who have not served are on the books albeit with numerous exceptions and workarounds) account for much of the improved prestige of military service. The Kremlin’s control over negative military reporting (e.g. classifying data regarding military casualties) and lack of civilian employment opportunities have also helped to burnish the military’s image. Nevertheless, this poll data suggests that within Russian society, the military has regained much of the status it lost after the collapse of the USSR. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The army can transform spoiled and poorly educated modern boys into something resembling men...”

Source: “Большинство россиян считают службу в армии обязательной для ‘настоящего мужчины’ (Most Russians consider serving in the military mandatory to become a ‘real man’),” *Kommersant*, 18 June 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4004489>

A survey by the Levada Center showed that the majority of Russians (60%) consider military service as mandatory for every “real man.” This is the maximum indicator of a positive attitude of citizens since 1997...

Regarding the assessment of the ability of the Russian army to protect citizens in the event of a real military threat, the majority of respondents (88%) are confident of the Russian military (53% answered ‘definitely agree,’ 35% chose the option ‘agree’)...

Source: Sergey Mardan, “Армия делает из раздолбаев – граждан (The military makes citizens out of bums),” *Vzglyad*, 23 June 2019. <https://vz.ru/opinions/2019/6/23/983427.html>

The “Levada Center” conducted a sociological survey, the results of which once again shocked people of “liberal” views. It turned out that 60% of Russians consider military service in the army mandatory for all men. The figure is really amazing, since never before has this figure exceeded 41%...

The usual explanations are given - militarism, state propaganda, like “Russia in the ring of enemies”, isolationism, brainwashing. But I can explain the Levada data easier. Military service arouses hot enthusiasm among two huge social groups. These are the parents of boys between the ages of 13 and 25 and women between the ages of 18 and 40...

Army service has never been viewed by anyone in the USSR or in Russia as a manifestation of patriotism. Army service was viewed as an inevitable duty, and only in a practical context.... The army was an ideal social ladder and a system that provided additional vocational education, especially for rural boys....

For residents of large cities from educated families, the army also performed an extremely useful educational function. The army can transform spoiled and poorly educated modern boys into something resembling men...

Ministers Serdyukov and Shoigu managed to greatly adjust the perception of military service, mainly by reducing the service life to one year....

...The army still teaches eighteen-year-olds ... the ability to give orders yourself... A man who has served in the army gains experience in the use of any resources to accomplish the task before him. ...You are a person who can do almost everything....

...A man with military experience has absolute competitive advantages in the eyes of any woman, whose choice of the optimal male for mating works at the level of physiological instincts. “If you haven’t served in the military, you are not a real man,” - sits firmly above all in women’s heads.