



## Achilles Heel of Russian Defense?

**OE Watch Commentary:** For the past several years the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has been following the Kremlin's lead, and working on a strategy to defend against what has often been referred to as a "color revolution," or how foreign powers (meaning the US) might exploit digital information to disrupt Russia's political system. The MoD's latest rendition has been dubbed the "Trojan Horse strategy," whereby the US would use a combination of precision weapons and targeted information to weaken Russia. In the brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer (VPK)*, the authors examine some of the country's vulnerable points where the enemy might be able to spark "a provocation of insurrection aimed at destabilizing the situation and changing power in Russia."

The authors begin by pointing out that "the difficult socio-economic situation caused by the inability of the authorities to achieve sustainable growth and raise the standard of living of the population... increases the risk of destabilization." They suggest that the country's depressed economic situation, whereby 40% of the population "can only afford essential goods - food and clothing... is extremely negative for defense capability." The authors criticize what they consider to be wasteful spending on prestige projects, claiming that "programs to strengthen the unity of the Russian nation cost 230 times less than the Sochi Olympics." The authors then move on to look at Russia's demographic data, positing that "in the next 10–15 years [the demographic factor] will have a negative impact on the state of the Russian army and society." These poor demographics are exacerbated by the growing urbanization of Russia, whereby "large cities expand from the influx of labor, while villages and small cities shrink."

While the authors describe a number of other weak points within Russian society (e.g. crime, corruption, unemployment, poor infrastructure) they suggest that the danger of ethnic separatism, particularly in the North Caucasus, remains the greatest vulnerability. They assert "that without improving the socio-economic situation in the regions that have the potential to incite separatism and play the national card, it is not possible to neutralize the dangers and threats of a hybrid nature." The article concludes with a recommendation that the government reassert control over key sectors of the economy, positing that "privatization inevitably spurs interethnic contradictions," and that "national ownership is the economic basis and condition for the inviolability of the state."

A key component of Russia's current defense strategy is predicated upon improving the country's domestic situation to prevent the enemy from exploiting problems. This article suggests that there is still much room for improvement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"...According to Rosstat for 2018, 37 percent of Russians live on less than \$ 10 a day. According to surveys, more than 40 percent can only afford essential goods - food and clothing."***

**Source:** Grigory Nikonov, Igor Rodionov, "Молодецкая убыль: В России все меньше годных к строевой службе и просто трудоспособных (Youth decline: In Russia, less and less fit for combat service or even labor)," *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer-VPK (Military-Industrial Courier)*, 25 March 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/49211>

*The essence of the "Trojan Horse" strategy, which is being worked out in the USA, is a combination of a preemptive strike at control centers with a provocation of insurrection aimed at destabilizing the situation and changing power in Russia. A special role in this scenario is assigned to the national factor.*

*...Everything is complicated by the difficult socio-economic situation caused by the inability of the executive to achieve sustainable growth and raise the standard of living of the population, which increases the risk of destabilization....*

*...According to Rosstat for 2018, 37 percent of Russians live on less than \$ 10 a day. According to surveys, more than 40 percent can only afford essential goods - food and clothing.... From the point of view of supporting government policies and preserving the moral and psychological state of the army and the country's population (much of which is regarded as a mobilization resource), this situation is extremely negative for defense capability.*

*...Programs to strengthen the unity of the Russian nation cost 230 times less than the Sochi Olympics"*

*...The demographic situation is getting worse.... The demographic factor in the next 10–15 years will have a negative impact on the state of the Russian army and society. If you do not change the situation, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will be reduced by themselves, talking about guaranteed protection of sovereignty will be problematic.*

*...Extremely negative is the dynamic of the distribution of labor resources. Large cities expand from the influx of labor, and villages and small cities shrink.... This inevitably leads to an increase in the criminal element, which is increasingly structured along national lines. I*

*...The most problematic region that can be used by a geostrategic adversary in a hybrid war is the multinational North Caucasus....It should be recognized that without improving the socio-economic situation in the regions that have the potential to incite separatism and play the national card, it is not possible to neutralize the dangers and threats of a hybrid nature.*

*...One of the most important lessons is that the multinational state is not insured against disintegration or absorption by others until the danger of bureaucratization and corruption of the ruling elite and the entire state and public life is overcome.... National ownership is the economic basis and condition for the inviolability of the state. Its privatization inevitably spurs interethnic contradictions. As a result, in a multinational state, the national-state structure is crumbling. Under these conditions, it is impossible to ensure the country's defense and sovereignty.*