

**YOUR ASSEMBLY IS ABOLISHED:**  
**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND PUBLIC**  
**POLICIES IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the role of non-democratic civil-military relations in defense policymaking. The project claims that the weakness of monitoring mechanisms and political accountability in autocracies increases the military's role in defense policymaking. By comparing three cases of defense reforms in Putin's Russia, the dissertation critically contributes to the discussion about civilian supremacy in civil-military relations. It shows that the Russian military's monopoly on special expertise and skills inflated its autonomy in military reforms. The Kremlin was able to restrict its autonomy only partially, despite the military's strict allegiance to civilian supremacy. The project also expands on the classical argument about the military as a power broker in non-democratic states by highlighting the Russian military's tradition of keeping away from internal politics but actively protecting its policy prerogatives. The dissertation proposes a novel security coalition framework for studying policy-focused civil-military relations that was used for the analysis of Russian defense reforms in the 2000-2016 period. The framework pays close attention to military culture, political institutions, and actors' strategies in defense policymaking. The project utilizes 36 interviews, hundreds of media reports, speeches, legal amendments, and a survey of Russian elites in the analysis. Its framework and theoretical arguments are applicable to states with professional militaries that support the notion that armed forces cannot overthrow the government. These states must also have an analytically measurable separation between the civilian branches of government, the military, and the supreme commander's office.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I became interested in civil-military relations more than ten years ago, although I did not know about such a concept back then. My interest in this topic was initially sparked by witnessing the reaction to the Russian defense reform in 2008-2012. As a non-military outsider, I was astonished to see thousands of officers resign, and some of them criticize the military command and their president. At the same time, most civilians in Russia knew that the government had to do something with the military as young people did not want to serve, few men wished to become military officers, and much fewer – enlisted soldiers. Therefore, I was surprised to witness such a wide civil-military gap when, on the one hand, officers were resigning in response to the reform and, on the other, civilians were reluctant to show their support for them. I was not satisfied with simplistic and anecdotal explanations about military corruption, a treacherous minister of defense, or the lack of patriotism among the youth. This was one of the reasons why I decided to study political science in general. Finally, this dissertation is an answer to the question I asked twelve years ago.

Over the course of researching this subject, I met wonderful people, whose ideas, opinions, and help were inspiring and helpful for me. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my two academic mentors, Christopher David LaRoche and Julia Buxton, who inspired me and always supported me during my studies. Christopher helped me develop the most data-heavy part of my work, provided crucial feedback on my writing, and always supported my extracurricular endeavors. Although Julia had to leave CEU at the end of my second year, I learned much from our collaboration. She helped me develop the habit of thinking and writing for the public good and to critically approach mainstream opinions on any subject, be it academia or political debates. My panel members Cristina Corduneanu-Huci and Carsten Q. Schneider always provided invaluable feedback on my work that helped me improve my

argument. I am also thankful to Bettina Renz from the University of Nottingham, who shared her experience and wisdom with me in Fall 2021. Bettina's articles formed my original academic interest in Russian civil-military relations back in 2013-2014, which led me to discovering seminal theoretical contributions by Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, and Peter Feaver. CEU provided me with a Doctoral Research Support Grant to work with Bettina in England at the late stage of my PhD studies.

I got in the habit of explaining to non-CEU folks that being at CEU is like studying and working with walking encyclopedias. Despite spending most of my time in the pandemic lockdown for almost two years, I will remember the conversations and experiences I had with my classmates and colleagues. Special thanks go to my CEU friends, Ameni, Barbora, Elisabeta, Freya, James, Ricardo, and Vika, with whom we shared so many happy, delightful, annoying, sad, worrying, hazardous and exciting moments. I express my gratitude to Zsuzsanna Toth from the Center for Academic Writing for helping me with my writing in the first year of school.

A lot of developments have happened since the 2008-2012 period. Russia is no longer a façade democracy; the Kremlin transformed it into a full-fledged personalist autocracy. The Russian military resurfaced from years of decay to become an unaccountable tool of the president's assertive foreign policy. Most of my social circle has left Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, making the metropolises of Saint Petersburg and Moscow feel empty. Although the Higher School of Economics I studied at as a bachelor's student has been occupied by non-academic government-appointed superintendents, I am very grateful to the HSE academic colleagues for giving me feedback on my chapters and helping me with my fieldwork. I am not naming them here as some of them still remain in Russia.

During my fieldwork, I talked to dozens of experts, military veterans, journalists, and civil society activists. The people I interviewed are very different. One of them was sanctioned by

the British and Australian governments in Spring 2022 for spreading the Kremlin's propaganda from the battlegrounds in Ukraine. A couple of others should theoretically be subject to the same punishment. Another respondent received a lengthy prison sentence under a politically motivated sham trial for their critical articles about the Russian security sector. A few more had to leave Russia in order to avoid a similar fate. Sadly, one of the respondents passed away after falling ill with COVID just a couple of months after I interviewed him in February 2020. Despite having different political views and moral values, some of which I find repugnant, I am thankful to them for being open and ready to spend their time talking to me.

At last, I thank my parents, Veronika and Vyacheslav (Slava), for giving me free will, inspiring my thirst for discovery, and supporting me along the way. I am a second-generation university student and the first to receive a degree abroad. It has only been possible due to my parents investing enormous resources and effort in my upbringing and education.

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# INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines how the transformation of civil-military relations affects the efficacy of defense policies in non-democratic states. It proposes a theoretical framework that explains how the politico-economic context regulates civil-military relations and their role in defense affairs. It contributes to research on the military's role in non-democratic states and critically assesses the role of civilian supremacy in autocracies. The dissertation also emphasizes the vital role of access to decision-makers in agenda setting, military expertise during policy development, and monitoring and evaluation tools in implementation.

Unlike most contemporary literature on the military in autocracies, the thesis argues the military's role in authoritarian states goes beyond the questions of repression and coups d'état. Civil-military relations determine the inputs and activities of defense reforms, which autocratic leaders use to develop armed forces and correct their role in policymaking. Similar to democracies, armed forces in authoritarian states can become important actors in the policy arena because few changes in the defense sector can be implemented without military specialists and expertise. Hence, defense policies can be thwarted unless civilian decision-makers have enough resources and capacities to create practically feasible policies that overcome the military's objections, despite its nominal support for civilian supremacy in defense affairs. However, political leaders may not necessarily punish the military for wrongdoings as the monitoring and accountability mechanisms are subject to political control in autocracies. This weakens the efficacy of policy learning and ultimately decreases the strength of autocracies to build an effective military force. In summary, this dissertation argues that a seemingly obedient military can become a veto-player in the policy process, redistributing power so that it can thwart reforms imposed by civilian leadership – even in highly centralized authoritarian civil-military relations.

To develop these theoretical propositions, the dissertation scrutinizes civil-military relations and the three cases of defense policymaking in sixteen years of Putin's Russia. Between 2000 and 2007, the Kremlin was reluctant to invest in military effectiveness despite announcing several times that it would do so. President Putin focused on strengthening political control over the military instead. From 2007 to 2012, the Kremlin tasked the military with implementing a set of radical policies. The military resisted, however, slowing down the process. Between 2012 and 2016, Russia's civil-military relations became seemingly more cohesive, but the selection of monitoring mechanisms demanded significant resources and was ineffective.

My analysis presents qualitative evidence from interviews and media sources combined with some quantitative findings from text analysis and surveys. The thesis also digs into amendments to the federal laws regulating civil-military relations to assess the institutional distribution of power within the government. The data traces the role of military culture in Russia's civil-military relations from the 1990s to 2016 and provides contextualized facts on defense policies in Putin's period. The findings can only be applicable to states with professional militaries that support the notion that armed forces cannot overthrow the government. The analytically measurable separation between the civilian branches of government, the military, and the supreme commander's office is the second important condition that restricts the scope of the findings.

Using a novel theoretical framework, this dissertation suggests that defense reforms and civil-military relations are interconnected, and developments in one influence the other. It also invites more studies of national defense sectors and comparative research of civil-military relations with the security coalition framework.