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Chances of an Army Mutiny Have Increased

By Mark Feygin

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There are several reasons why the army is unhappy of late with the country's leaders.

First, the Kremlin refused to hold the annual officers' conference this year.

Second, there has been an increase in criminal cases opened against top military officials on corruption charges.

Third, the military reforms that Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov has instituted have been a serious blow to military leaders who have a financial interest in maintaining the status quo.

The potential for a military rebellion is greater now than it has been since the early 1990s.

One reason that officers have been able to share examples of abuse and better mobilize their discontent is access to the Internet, social networks and officers' forums.

Conscript soldiers are also unhappy. Although the conscript term was decreased to one year in 2008, conscripts are still treated as serfs by their superiors.

In today's world, only developed, stable democracies can afford to have a professional army and not risk falling victim to a military coup. Authoritarian and lacking legitimacy, the Kremlin fears a rapid transition to a professional army, and this is one of the reasons why the conscript army is not abolished, despite all of its inefficiencies.

The Kremlin believes that the threat of a military coup in these conditions will increase significantly. The transition to a professional army in Russia will have to wait until the moment when the leaders are democratically elected.

The State Duma elections in December and the presidential election in March could exacerbate the instability in the military if the Kremlin resorts to mass falsification of votes to compensate for United Russia's sharp drop in popularity among voters.

Election fraud was one of the main factors in the Color Revolutions. If Russians take to the streets to protest the government's falsification of elections like Georgians did in 2003 or Ukrainians in 2004, the Russian army could very well join in the popular rebellion against the Kremlin.

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