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Senior Lawmaker Suggests Lengthening Military Service

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Compulsory military service was reduced from two years to 18 months in 2006 and to 12 months in 2008. The reduction aimed to make the armed forces more professional by increasing the number of contract soldiers while keeping conscription.

A senior lawmaker called for the service time for conscripts to be lengthened from one year to 18 months, but the Kremlin on Thursday quickly denied that there were any such plans.

Vladimir Komoyedov, chairman of the State Duma's Defense Committee and a member of the Communist Party, told Izvestia in an interview published Thursday that one year is too little to train military specialists and that his committee will press for a review of the current practice.

"The term of service needs to be 1 1/2 years. The reduction was a political decision and had negative effects on the Army's combat readiness," Komoyedov told the daily.

But a senior Kremlin official said Thursday that there would be no deviation from the military reforms initiated by President Vladimir Putin before 2005.

"Putin's promises were fulfilled, and nobody is going to change that," the unidentified official told Interfax.

His words were echoed by the military's top brass. Vasily Smirnov, a deputy chief of the General Staff, told Interfax that "there are no plans to increase service times."

Compulsory military service was reduced from two years to 18 months in 2006 and to 12 months in 2008. The reduction was aimed at making the armed forces more professional by increasing the number of contract soldiers while still keeping the practice of conscription.

But Komoyedov, a retired Navy admiral, argued that hopes of creating a professional contract army were a "bubble waiting to burst" because of the lack of personnel reserves.

The deputy said the armed forces are recruiting men born in the 1990s, a decade that saw very low birth rates.

"We are now seriously approaching the demographic hole," he said.

Komoyedov also said making military service mandatory for only one year reduces the country's combat readiness because fresh conscripts do not serve together with those drafted earlier, which they would under the 18-month regime.

Faced with opposition from the Kremlin and the General Staff, Komoyedov said Thursday that he had merely expressed his personal opinion and that there were currently no plans to initiate a bill.

But he told Interfax that many lawmakers and senior officials were on his side, including "every member of the Security Council."

Komoyedov's position is also supported inside the ruling United Russia party. Stanislav Govorukhin, who served as Putin's campaign manager for this year's presidential election, agreed that 18 months should be the minimum service time.

"One year of service, that's a joke," Govorukhin told Izvestia.

Many of the military reforms of the past years are seen as being up in the air after Putin fired Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov last month over a corruption scandal.

Earlier this week, reports said that Serdyukov's successor, Sergei Shoigu, will replace uniforms tailored by fashion designer Valentin Yudashkin and introduced under Serdyukov.

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