

Sergey Shoygu

Russia's Emergency Defense Minister

A Bio-Sketch



Sergey Shoygu-August 2013. Source: RIA Novosti

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Executive Summary

If the ‘state is the soul writ large,’ then Sergey Shoygu serves as an apt metaphor for Russia today. Shoygu was trained as an engineer in the Soviet system and arrived in Moscow just as the USSR began to fall apart. For more than 20 years, as the Minister of Emergency Services, he served as Russia’s ‘first responder.’ In this capacity, Shoygu helped to deal with natural and man-made disasters, gaining an intimate knowledge of the country’s domestic challenges and the reputation of a pragmatic and effective leader. As a resourceful minister and politician, he also profited from his proximity to the Kremlin elite, strengthening regional and national ties and developing sharp survival skills to ensure his official longevity.

In November 2012, Shoygu was unexpectedly appointed as Minister of Defense, partly to deflect criticism from his chief patron (Putin) and partly to lend credence to Putin’s presidential promise to restore Russia’s military prowess. Over the past year, Shoygu has worked diligently to improve morale and raise the military’s prestige.

This paper will briefly examine Shoygu’s background, the speculation behind this sudden appointment, the challenges he faces, his efforts thus far within the Defense Ministry, and possible future implications -both military and political – surrounding his selection as Russia’s chief military representative. Should the stars align correctly, Sergey Shoygu could move from a symbol of modern Russia to its leader.

Introduction

For many in the west, the image of Russia over the past 20 years has been of a broken superpower trying to regain its stature. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia went into something of a tailspin, as its economic, industrial, and social infrastructure deteriorated along with its political system. Alongside images of burnt out buildings and airplane wreckage, were those of old women selling family keepsakes or dead Russian soldiers in Chechnya.

It was against this backdrop that a young engineer, Sergey Shoygu, developed and improved an emergency and rescue service for the new Russia. His timing was fortuitous. The country was falling apart-both literally and figuratively-and his recently formed ministry was charged with responding to these disasters. And respond well it did. As opposed to the corruption and incompetence in most other branches of the Russian government, the Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Natural Disasters (EMERCOM) gained a professional and (relatively) honest reputation.¹

Shoygu held the Minister of Emergency Services position for more than 20 years, serving under all three of Russia's post-Soviet presidents. In this role he gained the reputation of a hands-on, can-do leader. Having assembled a relatively responsive, well trained and equipped organization, Shoygu and his team could arrive at a disaster scene, rescue survivors and render first aid. Not surprisingly, he soon gained the reputation of something of a "savior" within Russian society.

Perhaps as a reward for his good and faithful service, President Putin appointed him as the Governor of the Moscow Region in May 2012. Shoygu had barely finished assembling his gubernatorial team, when the Russian president directed him to take over as Minister of Defense in November 2012, replacing the former discredited minister, Anatoliy Serdyukov.

The Russian military is in the midst of major organizational reform, and Defense Minister Shoygu may now be confronted with his most challenging assignment yet. More importantly, the current Kremlin leadership claims that the country's survival and future greatness relies upon a strong military. This assertion could have profound implications not only for Defense Minister Shoygu and the Russian military, but also for Russia and her neighbors.

Finally, given his long background in Russian politics and extensive connections among the Kremlin elite, there have been suggestions that Shoygu will be a strong candidate for Russia's highest political office once his good friend, Vladimir Putin leaves office. This paper will briefly examine Shoygu's background, the speculation behind his unexpected

¹ In Russian, the Ministry of Emergency Services is most often referred to by its Russian acronym, MChS (Ministerstvo po chrezvychaynym situatsiyam). Shoygu had spent nearly 20 years as Russia's chief "first responder" as the Minister of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Natural Disasters (EMERCOM).

appointment as Defense Minister, the challenges he faces, his efforts thus far, and possible future implications -both military and political - behind this selection.

Sergey Shoygu-Background

Shoygu was born in 1955 in the Tuva region of Siberia. His father was ethnic Tuvan, while his mother was Ukrainian.² In his youth he was known as something of a hooligan, preferring sports to academic pursuits. His father served as a local party official, and as a son of the regional elite, Sergey understood that to move up the ranks, he had to play by the party rules. Shoygu was trained as an engineer and quickly promoted within the local party structure, working as an engineer and party representative in one of the major regional factories.³

Like other ambitious young men, Shoygu was drawn to the opportunities for political and career growth in the Russian capital. He travelled to Moscow in 1990, taking a government/party job in construction/architecture. In the communist patronage system, Shoygu's career was likely helped by family and party connections. There have been reports that his father was acquainted with Sverdlovsk party officials (then led by Boris N. Yeltsin). His marriage to the daughter of a regional party official may have also helped advance his career.

Shoygu apparently had little patience with becoming just another mid-level party bureaucrat within the Soviet Department of Construction, and was planning to return to Siberia when a new opportunity arose within the field of rescue and emergency management. Here was a job perfectly suited to Shoygu's pragmatic and restless personality, as well as his uncanny sense of timing. He had arrived in the capital of the USSR to help with building and construction just as the country was falling apart, both figuratively and literally.

After the experience of Chernobyl and other disasters, and given the political chaos of the collapsing USSR, Russian leaders understood that they were unprepared to handle emergencies. Soviet civil defense had been tied to the military and the party, and relying upon those in uniform to handle disaster response did not appear feasible. The Communist Party had been discredited and the military was confused, recalcitrant, and demoralized. It made sense to create a new organization to handle internal disasters, which would be both technically proficient and loyal to the new government. After some bureaucratic haggling and maneuvering, in 1991, Shoygu was appointed as chief of the nascent Russian Rescue Corps and he began to build his team.



Shoygu had barely found a temporary office to serve as headquarters for his rescue forces, when he was dispatched in

ension in Russia today, Shoygu's ethnic background could be a handicap if highest political office.

are missing, there's a nice biographical sketch at:

[http://www.kreml.ru/1115067/full.htm](#)

Shoygu, (2d from left) N.

Ossetia, 1992. Source:

Itogi.ru.

late 1992 to the Northern Caucasus to help sort out a local ethnic conflict. While the record is not altogether clear, it appears that Shoygu was instrumental in aiding the pro-Russian Ossetians in defending against Georgians, who were attempting to seize this territory.⁴

In addition to helping extinguish ethnic fires on the periphery of the new Russian state, Shoygu also played an important role in solidifying Yeltsin's control of the Kremlin. He assisted in defending the Russian White House during those fateful days in August 1991, and two years later, in October 1993, again supported Yeltsin when the Russian leader used force to dissolve the Duma (parliament) from this same building.⁵ Every disaster (natural or man-made) reinforced the need for an organization to clean up the mess, and Shoygu's energetic, positive alertness transformed his organization into an essential component of the Russian government.

Shoygu was formally appointed to a ministerial-level position in 1994, and continued to expand and improve the abilities of EMERCOM throughout the 1990s. As minister, Shoygu was often seen on the disaster front-lines when responding to emergencies. In a certain sense, he had the perfect job. Russia's infrastructure was constantly breaking down, and Shoygu and his team could render first aid in a timely fashion. (Actually repairing and updating the infrastructure was not his job.)

As his reputation developed, so did funding for his organization. No Russian leader or legislator wanted to appear indifferent to disaster response, so while the Russian military and other security services may have been short-shrifted during the 1990s, the Emergency Ministry was well-funded and continued to grow. Not surprisingly, Shoygu was able to attract a number of experienced ex-military and security personnel into his ranks. This experience certainly paid off in Chechnya.

For the Russian military, the 1994-96 phase of the Chechen conflict has often been portrayed as a defeat. Chechen fighters were able to put up an effective resistance against poorly trained and equipped Russian military units. Although engaged in the same struggle, the Russian media depicted the Emergency Services Ministry as successful in having rescued countless lives. EMERCOM efforts in saving Russian



Shoygu, Grozny
1994. Source: RIA
Novosti

⁴ Over the next twenty years Shoygu would gain considerable experience in this region, both man-made and natural disasters. The involvement of Russian Rescue Corps/EMERCOM in the North Caucasus also illustrates the quasi-military nature of this ministry. While not designed to attack the "enemy," EMERCOM forces have played an important role in assisting victims on the pro-Russian side of any conflict. For a recent example of the ambiguous nature of their assistance, see:

http://voiceofrussia.com/2013_02_19/Russian-aid-airlifted-to-Syria-by-EMERCOM/ This conflict would reignite in August 2008. By then, Russian military forces were in a much better position to repel the attack.

⁵ According to a report in Argumenti I Fakti [Arguments and Facts], "On the night of the 3-4 October 1993 at the request of Yegor Gaidar, Shoygu provided him with 1000 weapons with ammunition from his jurisdiction of the civil defense." <http://www.aif.ru/dossier/1415>

civilians and hostages were the silver linings in the otherwise dark cloud of the Chechen conflict.⁶

During the difficult decade of the 1990s, Russia had few soft-power tools at its disposal. Shoygu and his Emergency Ministry was one solid exception. Even though the country was reeling economically, EMERCOM forces and equipment were dispatched to many international disaster sites (many within the confines of the former USSR), where they assisted in disaster recovery. Their list of accomplishments has been impressive and includes everything from helping with de-mining in Kosovo to responding to international catastrophes (e.g., delivering humanitarian aid to earthquake victims in Iran).⁷

Unlike other Russian ministries, EMERCOM has been able to avoid major scandal and the taint of rampant corruption.⁸ Some of this positive reputation may be attributed to Shoygu's integrity and leadership abilities. Instead of using this ministry merely to enrich himself, Shoygu trained, equipped and built an effective and responsive organization. Some of his approval status, however, may be due to creative accounting when handling disaster relief funds and a very effective public relations campaign.

Whether by design or good fortune, Shoygu and EMERCOM enjoyed a warm and positive relationship with the Russian media. As opposed to the military, his organization was media-friendly, often working with journalists when they covered disasters. TV reports frequently showed the heroism and responsiveness of this ministry and its young leader, and over the past 15 years, the Russian media has produced a number of laudatory documentary films. For instance, in 1998 the influential Soviet/Russian film director Nikita Mikhalkov, produced a 30-minute praiseworthy documentary titled, "Генерал Кужугетыч" [General Kuzhugetych], which impressed upon viewers Shoygu's courage, determination and selfless service.⁹ During the 1990s, when most Russian ministers came under withering press criticism, Shoygu and his Emergency Ministry were depicted as shining stars.



Shoygu with Mikhalkov, 2005. Source: Utro.ru

With regard to political maneuvering, Shoygu has been extremely clever. He has consistently fostered the impression that he places his professional rescue duties above

⁶ Shoygu apparently has a close relationship with the current Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov. See for instance the brief report at: <http://stringer-news.com/publication.mhtml?Part=50&PubID=20574>

⁷ For a partial list of EMERCOM activities (1994-2007), see Annex A.

⁸ There were serious allegations against EMERCOM officials made illegal profits during the economic sanctions against Iraq and the oil-for-food program (1995-2003). See for instance, Nick Walsh, "Russia 'giving illegal millions to Saddam for trade deals,'" *The Guardian*, 20 August 2002. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/20/iraq.oil>

⁹ Available at: <http://goo.gl/NuyRxp>

party or political intrigues. From the beginning of his career, however, he has played a key role in developing and supporting the main Kremlin-friendly parties, ensuring solid backing for whoever was serving as Russian president. For instance, he helped to ensure regional support for Yeltsin's bid for president in 1996, and has been equally helpful politically to his close friend, Vladimir Putin during all of his elections. While not as prominent as his rescue work, Shoygu's political endeavors as a Kremlin-stalwart have been equally substantial in building Russia's current political system.

Shoygu has demonstrated a similar cleverness with regard to his personal life. He claims to be something of a straight-arrow, preferring kasha to caviar and a good night's sleep to carousing. Officially, he is married to his first (and only) wife and has two grown daughters. Unofficially, there have been suggestions of a more luxurious and profligate lifestyle.¹⁰

Shoygu in Putin's Kremlin

Shoygu's political sixth sense was evident during the dramatic series of events in the autumn of 1999 which accompanied the transfer of power from Yeltsin to his successor. A number of political heavy-hitters were maneuvering for the all-powerful presidency, and few initially placed much hope on the recently appointed Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin. Shoygu, who had initially voiced support for the popular Moscow mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, changed his mind after realizing that Putin had gained Yeltsin's (and his entourage's support).



Yeltsin awarding Hero of Russia to Shoygu, Sept. 1999. Source: RIA

Novosti

Putin's tough rhetoric in the face of renewed fighting in the Northern Caucasus, plus a series of deadly apartment explosions in Moscow and other cities in September 1999, catapulted Putin's Kremlin leadership ratings. In helping to respond and clean up after the apartment explosions, Shoygu and Putin must have formed a strong bond. Less than two weeks after these deadly blasts, Shoygu was awarded with Russia's highest award (Hero of Russia). The citation includes the statement, "for courage and heroism in the line of duty in extreme situations."¹¹

as been largely mute about any of Shoygu's indiscretions, the Internet has been more critical. It is difficult to verify the on-line accusations. For instance, a recent report purports to describe extensive property which belongs to Shoygu and his former deputy within the Emergency Ministry. See: <http://reality.newsru.com/article/12aug2013/shoigu>

¹¹ There is no doubting the extremity of these apartment explosions. However, there are lingering questions as to who exactly was responsible. Some point to the rapid clean-up and removal of the bomb sites as "proof" of official involvement. The same arguments were made after the disaster at Beslan. I am inclined

During the period 2000-2012, as Minister of Emergency Services, Shoygu was either on the front-lines or at Putin's side during almost every natural and man-made disaster. Shoygu and his EMERCOM forces were the visual proof that the Kremlin leadership was doing everything possible to alleviate the suffering of the Russian people. Since the Russian state was on a stronger financial foundation under President Putin (after the needy 1990s), the Russian government could now hand out relatively generous payments to disaster victims.¹² Such largesse may have also helped Shoygu's reputation. Sometimes, however, even extra money was of little help.

The terrorist act which occurred in September 2004 in the city of Beslan (North Ossetia) has often been referred to as "Russia's 9-11." Armed terrorists seized an elementary school and held hostage more than 1000 children and adults. The school was surrounded by a variety of Russian security forces, but the Kremlin refused to negotiate with the terrorists. Almost a decade after this disaster, it is still unclear what prompted the initial explosion and assault on the school. Despite valiant attempts at rescue, once the fighting stopped some 350 people had been killed, half of them children. When Putin visited the town just after the smoke had cleared, he expressed his condolences and entrusted Shoygu and EMERCOM with the post-operation clean up.¹³ Horrible incidents like this further cemented their relationship.¹⁴

The official Russian media did not dwell on painful topics like Beslan.¹⁵ In the popular narrative which developed under Putin's leadership, Russia was portrayed as "getting up off her knees" after the painful and humiliating 1990s. Instead of the chaotic "democracy" of the Yeltsin period, the country was now operating under Putin's strict and effective "power vertical." This Kremlin control was most apparent in the media realm. Where under Yeltsin the national media was a battleground of competing interests, under Putin the Kremlin began to limit high-level criticism and control the major narrative.

The Kremlin-controlled national media only strengthened the reputation of Shoygu and his ministry. Disasters still



to believe that the authorities merely wanted to remove the reminders of these tragedies as soon as possible. <http://www.ruor.org/our-heroes/heroes-of-russia/shoygu/>

¹² This has become one of the more morbid aspects of the modern Russian state. Usually within hours after the latest catastrophe, a Kremlin spokesperson will announce how much money victims are entitled to.

¹³ Putin also hinted that outside forces may have also played a role in this terrorist act.

¹⁴ While overall command and control of this operation could have been better, there is no doubting the bravery and self-sacrifice of those involved in the rescue effort. Among other Russian casualties, three EMERCOM employees were killed during the Beslan rescue operation. Ad for Shoygu documentary. Source:

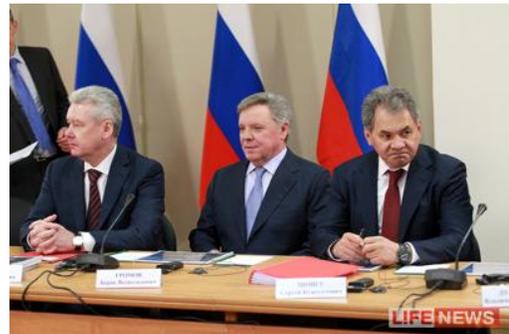
¹⁵ The Russian national media (particularly TV), under Putin has to a significant degree been brought under state control. While there is no direct censorship, certain topics are avoided.

occurred on a regular basis, but instead of dwelling on the underlying causes (often related to corruption and an undemocratic political system), the Russian media would highlight the brave and expert efforts of EMERCOM. A good example of this positive perspective is the 2012 documentary, “Five Elements of Sergey Shoygu” [пять стихий Сергея Шойгу], which, given the timing of its release, was a most powerful propaganda tool for his new assignment.¹⁶ As in earlier documentaries, this film praises the courage and resourcefulness of Shoygu and his emergency team. Indirectly, the film also praises the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin.

In this regard, Shoygu has been equally indispensable in supporting Putin politically. He has faithfully served as a prominent leader in the pro-Kremlin, United Russia Party. In his capacity as minister, he could be relied on to not merely toe and back the Kremlin line and ensure that EMERCOM employees did likewise, but to also encourage similar support among the regional elite. In more than ten years working closely with Putin, Shoygu has never once uttered a single word of criticism toward this Russian leader. Just the opposite; Shoygu rarely allows an opportunity to pass without praising and supporting President Putin.

Shoygu’s Brief Term as Moscow Region Governor

Shoygu’s loyalty and devotion to duty paid off when he was selected to become the Governor of the Moscow region in May 2012. Putin had just returned to the presidency for his third term, and there was conjecture among some Kremlinologists that Shoygu’s move as the Moscow regional governor might be a stepping stone to Russia’s highest political office.¹⁷ The Moscow Region governor position would have allowed Shoygu to intimately understand modern Russian politics, gain even greater publicity, and polish his credentials for higher political office.



Shoygu (right) as Moscow Regional governor. With B. Gromov (center) and S. Sobyenin (left)
Source: LifeNews.ru

During the six months that he served as governor

¹⁶ As a close confidant of Putin, Shoygu had likely been informed of his upcoming transfer long before it was officially announced. The release of this documentary certainly helped in dispelling any doubts that Shoygu was not capable of the Moscow region governor position.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJUBF054UC4>

An even more laudatory documentary was released just a few months ago, “Первый спасатель. Сергей Шойгу.” [The First Savior-Sergey Shoygu]. In this celebratory film Shoygu is interviewed by his press secretary (and possible girlfriend), and his many exploits are reviewed.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-9sCX3Ixp0>

¹⁷ Shoygu, however, has been adamant that he has no such aspirations. See for instance:

<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1709802.html>

Shoygu worked on assembling a team (many of whom had transferred from EMERCOM) and determining overall regional priorities.¹⁸ He confronted a host of challenging problems, many of them tied to uncontrolled growth and endemic corruption. Some Moscow region residents joked that his appointment as governor was recognition of the disaster within the region. Infrastructure was breaking down, growth was poorly planned, taxes were unpaid and corruption was the rule rather than the exception. Shoygu had only begun to roll up his sleeves to tackle these problems when duty again called, and he was appointed to the minister of defense position.¹⁹

Why Shoygu Was Appointed Minister of Defense

Dissatisfaction with the previous defense minister (Anatoliy Serdyukov) had been growing steadily almost since he had been appointed by Putin in 2007. Discontent with Serdyukov centered upon lack of military experience, disagreements over the direction of military reforms, and allegations of high-level corruption. There were a number of other factors which may have also contributed to Serdyukov's ouster, to include personal indiscretions.²⁰

As part of his re-election campaign in 2011-12, Putin had promised to focus more on restoring Russia's military prowess. By firing Serdyukov and appointing the popular Shoygu to the top defense position, the Kremlin leadership may have wanted to demonstrate that it was serious about uprooting corruption and rebuilding the military.



Satirical image of former MoD, A. Serdyukov. Caption reads: "Well fellows, you no longer have any defense." Source: demotivator.ru

Much has been written about the timing of Serdyukov's dismissal and his replacement by Shoygu. By November 2012 the Kremlin leadership may have been concerned over the growing sense of public protest. Many within the military were beginning to realize that Serdyukov was not acting independently, but was rather carrying out Kremlin-directed reforms. To some conservatives, "Putin's comprador government" was destroying the military at the behest of some foreign power.²¹ If Putin were truly in charge, he would stop this sabotage. There were likely Kremlin concerns that the grumbling within the military might coalesce with other protest groups. Similarly, once the corruption

¹⁸ For a brief report that Shoygu gave after his first 100 days on the job as regional governor, see: http://ria.ru/tv_politics/20120822/728381204.html

¹⁹ I have no proof of this conjecture, but I could imagine Putin assuring Shoygu that in agreeing to accept the defense minister position, he would be in better shape to assume the presidency if/when Putin stepped down.

²⁰ Serdyukov was married to the daughter of one of Putin's closest associates, Viktor Zubkov. While still Minister of Defense, he began an affair with a subordinate which ultimately led to a divorce (and his removal from the MoD).

²¹ See for instance, the writings and commentary of Leonid Ivashov, President of the Geo-Politics Academy in Moscow: <http://akademiagp.ru/>

allegations against Serdyukov were made public, if Putin did not remove him he would be tainted with the same sleaze. From the Kremlin's perspective, removing Serdyukov and replacing him with the popular Shoygu made perfect strategic sense.²²

Shoygu as Defense Minister and Reform Challenges

Whatever the reason for Serdyukov's dismissal, Shoygu dutifully accepted the defense minister position, and over the past year has worked hard to sort out and identify problem areas and, where possible, take corrective action. His early decisions reflect both a willingness to listen to the military leadership and a demonstration of genuine concern for those in uniform. To raise morale he has made a number of cosmetic changes (e.g., new uniforms, socks for soldiers, cadets included in Victory Day parades, etc.). He has supervised a series of nation-wide exercises to determine the actual readiness of Russia's Armed Forces. While some have suggested that these "surprise" inspections would be used to "prove" his predecessor's mistakes and therefore justify major reform reversals, the basic organizational reforms enacted under Serdyukov have remained largely untouched.



Shoygu, Victory Day Parade, 9 May 2013. Source: RIA Novosti

Other significant changes include modifying the brigade structure to accommodate historical traditions (e.g., retaining the division title for the Tamanskaya and Kantemirovskaya guards divisions), increasing the number of active military airbases, reinstating elements of the former officer education system, the restoration of warrant officer positions, increasing the annual expenditure of training ammunition, and discussions regarding both the creation of a

Special Operations command and a centralized command and control facility. Shoygu has also proposed using monetary payments to the never-ending housing problem for military retirees. These and a host of other minor reforms have (on the surface, at least) helped to raise morale and the prestige of military service.²³

Large capital inflows for defense spending have also helped to improve morale. Contract soldiers and officers have seen significant increases to their salaries over the past three years. While still relying on conscripts for manpower, there is a growing realization (advocated by Shoygu) that Russia needs to create a professional military. There have

²² Almost a year after his removal, criminal charges have yet to be filed against Serdyukov.

²³ In a recent poll among Russians, Shoygu was selected as the most effective minister in the Russian government. See: <http://www.znak.com/urfo/news/2013-10-17/1013006.html>

been qualitative improvements in training facilities and living conditions. New military equipment is being fielded, although there are still delays with some major end items, to include communication and systems dependent upon advanced technology.

While an accomplished Kremlin-insider, Shoygu has discovered that the defense minister position is considerably more challenging than that of EMERCOM. Not only is the defense establishment infinitely more complex, but there is also much more institutional (bureaucratic) resistance and competition for resources. Defense industry officials continue to produce and sell equipment that the military is sometimes reluctant to accept. For someone used to making his own decisions, there is also less autonomy. Key military decisions must be coordinated with other key defense officials, some of whom may perceive Shoygu's appointment as limiting their own political aspirations.²⁴

Shoygu's can-do, common-sense pragmatism will likely offend those who advocate traditional Soviet defense planning and who regard the victory in the Great Patriotic War as the future model for Russia's military. While muted so far, should Shoygu continue with initiatives to make the Ministry of Defense look more like EMERCOM (or even possibly merge the two ministries), criticism among senior defense officials would likely grow.²⁵

Despite considerable effort (or at least rhetoric) over the past 20 years, the Russian military is still in need of considerable reform. Since the formation of a Russian national military in 1991, the Kremlin leadership has continued to struggle with transforming the Soviet military legacy into a modern, combat-ready force. The chief obstacles have been in the realm of economics and doctrine.

Up until quite recently the Ministry of Defense was operating on a shoestring budget. Allocations for research, development and new equipment, along with more mundane expenditures on salaries and housing, were simply inadequate. The 1990s were particularly strained for the military, and during Putin's first two terms as president (2000-2008) domestic security services received greater priority. Aggravating these budget shortfalls were serious problems with mismanagement and corruption within the military.²⁶

²⁴ As always, the Russian leadership succession process remains opaque. No one close to the throne will dare to announce his presidential aspirations out of fear of being removed. For political reasons, I suspect, however, that Shoygu's appointment as minister of defense was not well received by Kremlin insiders such as S. Ivanov, D. Rogozin or I. Sechin.

²⁵ There are already some grumbings. While no longer on active duty, General Leonid Ivashov remains an influential military commentator. See his comments regarding the challenges facing Shoygu: http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=UUbRDcMW9I3jhHqclw4pmbUQ&v=1Nkq4i2L0uA&feature=player_embedded

²⁶ The Russian military and associated defense industries are infected with the same corruption which plagues Russian society. Whether in times of dearth (the 1990s) or plenty (today), a large portion of defense expenditures have been misappropriated or poorly spent. The corruption reaches to the highest levels. When Serdyukov was appointed defense minister in 2007, one of his chief tasks was to tackle military corruption; five years later he was removed for this same offense.

The other major challenge deals with the contours of the actual reform plan. To date, key leaders have been unable to decide on the overall structure and the main components of the Russian defense forces. Questions remain over whether to build a regional or global military power, to include power projection capabilities. There has been a strong lobby which advocates a return to the huge mobilization model developed during the Cold War. These proponents argue that Russia is destined to be a global military power. Using the success of the USSR against the Nazis as a backdrop, they argue that, given Russia's immense size and the presence of potentially aggressive neighbors, the military (manning, training, equipping) ought to be **the** key component of Russian national identity. As opposed to fossil fuel revenues, military technology and armaments should be the engine for the Russian economy. As the Russian economy (outside of the natural resource extraction) continues to struggle, employment considerations in many mono-cities which produce armaments also play a factor. The advocates of 'big-military' point to the Soviet experience, when the USSR was feared and respected largely because of its military might.²⁷

Others, including those who have been attentive observers of modern conflict, suggest that changes in technology have transformed the large WWII formations into more of a liability. These proponents point out that raw military power is not the only component of national strength, and that without an equally robust national infrastructure (e.g., roads, healthcare, education etc.) Russia will not be able to sustain a modern military. While they still argue for Russia to play a prominent global role, they maintain that smaller, highly mobile, well trained and equipped units constitute a more effective model. This was part of the rationale behind the reforms implemented by the former defense minister (but almost certainly directed by the Kremlin). The Russian Army would dissolve the old USSR mobilization model built upon skeletal infantry, tank and artillery divisions (which would be filled out prior to engaging in conflict), and instead create combat-ready brigades capable of a variety of missions.



Shoygu and Putin at recent military exercise, July 2013. Source: rosinform.ru

The latest series of meaningful reforms began shortly after the brief conflict with Georgia in August 2008. Despite what appeared to be thorough preparations on the Russian side, Russian military units still experienced difficulties with organization, command and control, maneuver and fires. This was not the first time that Putin was dissatisfied with the military's performance. Just after he was appointed prime minister in 1999, Putin had wanted to crush a spreading insurgency in the North Caucasus. In assembling military units to carry out this operation, he discovered that only a fraction of the Russian military forces were combat-ready. The

²⁷ This is the primary argument of Russia's Vice-premier of Defense Industry, Dmitry Rogozin. Since his entry into this position in December 2011, Rogozin has worked untiringly to propagate this ideology.

Ministry of Defense (with the Kremlin's backing) exploited these past problems (particularly, the August 2008 conflict with Georgia) as the impetus for these latest reforms.²⁸

Even though Shoygu has only been Defense Minister for less than a year, all indications point to retaining the basic outline of his predecessor's reforms. Shoygu certainly understands that as commander-in-chief, Putin has been the chief author of these reforms. Since his re-election in May 2012, Putin has demonstrated considerable interest in military affairs. While some of these visits to training exercises and military factories contain elements of public relations, Putin continues to provide the necessary funding to carry out these reforms. Shoygu will likely be entrusted to ensure that the bulk of this funding hits the target.

US-Russian relations remain strained, and with regard to military cooperation with the US, as defense minister Shoygu will not make any independent overtures.²⁹ During his recent visit to Washington with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, Shoygu spoke of the need for greater military cooperation and invited the US to participate in a tank competition. He voiced criticism, however, over US plans to extend missile defense in Europe, claiming that this defensive system will infringe on Russia's legitimate security interests.³⁰ As Putin's close associate, Shoygu understands the domestic importance of maintaining the appearance of a foreign threat and apparently subscribes to the prevalent Kremlin narrative that the US is the primary source of global instability.

Shoygu's Connections

Given his long experience working within the Kremlin, Shoygu has a wide circle of important personal connections. In the recently released Minchenko report, Shoygu was positioned as being close to (but not necessarily affiliated with) the old Yeltsin family clan.³¹ This report was released prior to Shoygu's appointment as Defense Minister

²⁸ Demographics have also helped to thwart reform efforts. The pool of healthy young Russian men willing to serve in the military has shrunk considerably. For instance, those who are now 18 years old were conceived during the lean and economically distressed period of 1995-96, and number only 450,000. Their parents well remember the horrors of the Chechen conflict and a number of other well publicized stories dealing with brutality in the military. Even though patriotism has become the primary state ideology (with military service a "sacred obligation"), many young Russian men remain reluctant to don a military uniform. The Russian military today has a hybrid manning system, comprising one-year conscripts, contract soldiers and officers. While the plan calls for an end strength of one million, the actual manpower is estimated at 750,000 (200,000 officers; 150,000 contract soldiers; 400,000 conscripts).

²⁹ The causes are many; everything from the Magnitsky Act to the Snowden affair to the current crisis in Syria. Even if he wanted, Shoygu could not express much enthusiasm in greater US military cooperation.

³⁰ See <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2253417>

³¹ Since Russia's political retains an opaque quality, "Kremlinology" has made a return. Minchenko Consulting is one of the better Russian firms engaged in this pursuit. See their report from August 2012: http://www.minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_27.html

(August 2012). In this schematic he was placed within the more liberal constellation surrounding Putin, though such terms may apply more to economic leanings than political beliefs. Shoygu remains a top official in the major Kremlin-friendly party (United Russia), and certainly retains considerable influence among other members. As mentioned previously, Shoygu enjoys the reputation as the most effective minister within the current Russian government.

Besides these extensive Kremlin connections, Shoygu maintains close ties with senior EMERCOM officials. These connections may be an important factor behind recent discussions to merge the two ministries. Besides the economy of scale this merger might provide, such a move would immediately solve the manpower shortage within the military (on paper at least). Shoygu likely understands that some of Russia's most pressing threats are domestic, and that security forces (regardless of uniform) will be tasked to address these challenges. More importantly, having spent 20-plus years building the EMERCOM ministry, Shoygu still retains the authority within this organization to make such a merger possible.

Shoygu has also developed important connections at the regional level. Besides his political work with United Russia, as the EMERCOM Minister he worked closely with local officials when responding to disasters. Moreover, each region is manned to some degree by an EMERCOM presence. In his capacity as minister, Shoygu gained the reputation of being fearless in criticizing sloppy efforts of local officials (for this criticism, he likely worked with Putin's consent). Regardless, many regional leaders remain indebted to Shoygu for his support and could likely be relied upon to render assistance should he decide (or be permitted) to compete for higher office.

In addition to these extensive connections at the federal and local levels, Shoygu has also developed an entire arsenal of soft-power ties. He remains a darling of the media and counts among his close friends many of Russia's most influential image-makers. As EMERCOM minister, he helped to create a wide array of parochial media to champion the ministry's achievements. As Defense Minister, he now has at his disposal an even larger inventory of media and public relations assets.³²



Shoygu meeting with ROC Patriarch Kirill, Dec 2012. Source: polit.ru

In the spiritual realm, Shoygu has formed important ties with Russia's leading religious figures. While not openly religious, he claims to be a believer, confessing that he was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church when he was a child. As EMERCOM Minister, governor of the Moscow region, and now Defense Minister, he has held a number of well-publicized meetings with leading Russian clerics.³³

to expand and strengthen its media holdings. Besides the assets managed directly by the MoD (e.g., Zvezda TV, the newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda, etc...), it also supports a number of journalists and pundits within the national media.

³³ While he has never advocated it publicly, Shoygu appears to support the imperial bumper-sticker "Tsar, Motherland, Orthodoxy."

In the patronage system of modern Russian politics, personal connections often take precedent over institutional requirements. Shoygu still retains the reputation of Russia's 'First Responder,' so in the event of a catastrophic situation among any of Putin's close associates, he would likely be called upon to provide assistance. As defense minister, should the occasion arise, Shoygu might also be pressed to use military forces to protect parochial interests.³⁴

While Shoygu has avoided the taint of personal corruption, there have been various allegations that as EMERCOM minister he was involved in some questionable operations. One dealt with possible kickbacks in the 'food for oil' program designed to allow Saddam's Iraq to trade oil for food.³⁵ Recently, questions have arisen over property owned by Shoygu.³⁶ Having worked within the Kremlin for over 20 years, it is highly likely that there is merit to these and other allegations. It is also equally plausible that Shoygu has set up a series of quasi-legal filters to protect him from direct corruption charges.³⁷

Shoygu's Relationship with Putin

While Shoygu is more gregarious than Putin, the two leaders share a number of similarities. They both portray themselves as "real Russian men (muzhiks)"; down to earth; seemingly unpretentious; cruel when necessary; and preferring pragmatism over speculative thought. They both enjoy manly pursuits like sports and hunting, and over the past decade, have frequently vacationed together. If the many PR photos from these excursions can be believed, the two men enjoy a close friendship.



Vacationing with Putin in Tuva, 2013. Source: Kremlin.ru

Shoygu prides himself on his health and athletic ability (particularly in hockey and soccer), and, more importantly, has developed a robust sporting relationship with key Kremlin officials (to include Putin). He has helped to build a number of athletic facilities, where VIPs and their staffs can recreate and relax. Shoygu understands the strength of the bonds formed by sport, competition and hospitality.

As a native of Siberia, Shoygu also understands the importance of a knowledgeable tour guide and vacation host. For instance, over the past five years, Shoygu and Putin have enjoyed a couple highly publicized vacations to Shoygu's home region of Tuva. There have been countless news reports that have showed the pair fishing, hunting and horse-

³⁴ This is not unheard of in post-Soviet Russia. In 2009, the Commander of the Airborne forces, General V. Shamanov, tried to use military forces to help settle a personal business problem. See: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/43498.html>

³⁵ See footnote #6.

³⁶ See footnote #8.

³⁷ A favorite tactic is to list property as belonging to one's wife or other family members.

riding in the remoteness of southern Siberia.³⁸ Shoygu has helped to host a number of other, less publicized visits by Kremlin officials.

His proximity to Putin naturally raises the question of Shoygu's political aspirations. As a long-term Kremlin survivor, Shoygu is well aware of the dangers in displaying overt political ambition. When interviewed, he has repeatedly denied any presidential plans, claiming that he is fully content with his current position. Russia being Russia, there are plenty of theories or speculations which posit that Shoygu is being groomed as Putin's successor. Such claims are impossible to verify, but given his close friendship with Putin and insider knowledge of Kremlin politics, such conjectures may hold substance.³⁹

Conclusion

There is indeed something miraculous in Shoygu's longevity. He is one of a few high-level Kremlin officials who have served successfully since the beginning of the Yeltsin presidency. Part of the secret to his longevity over the past two decades has been his dedication to duty, his strong constitution, his lack of overt political ambition, his excellent public relation skills, and his avoidance of major scandal. Much of his success also stems from his cleverness, his personal connections, and his fortuitous decision to focus on rescue work and emergency services.

For more than 20 years Sergey Shoygu earned the reputation in Russia of being able to cope with disasters. Whether responding to fire, flood or explosion, he consistently demonstrated bravery, persistence and strong leadership skills. He has become well versed in the intricacies of Kremlin politics and has an intimate understanding of Russia's vulnerabilities. Most importantly, he appears to be a close and trusted friend of Vladimir Putin. While not a miracle-worker, Shoygu will likely be more effective than his predecessor in transforming Russia's military into a combat-capable force. He may also use this position and his proximity to Putin to strengthen his future political prospects.

³⁸ For a representative example of this type of reporting, see: <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/85530>

³⁹ An informal Internet poll was conducted in November 2012 (just after Shoygu was appointed as MoD) with the question, "How would you react if Shoygu became the next president of Russia. Some 20% of respondents viewed this positively, while nearly 60% voted negative. The comment section at the poll is instructive. Besides Shoygu's ethnic background, some found fault in his close ties to the Yeltsin 'family' as well as his mother possibly having Jewish roots. <http://maxpark.com/user/35875/content/1660710>

Annex A Major EMERCOM Missions (1994-2006)

The Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters

Year 1994

March-April – providing safe delivery of the humanitarian aid goods to the Russian community in Georgia;

August – accompanying of humanitarian aid for Tajik refugees in Afghanistan; сопровождение гуманитарной помощи таджикским беженцам в Афганистане;

September- December – providing security for the hospital of the Medical center of disasters "Protection", delivering humanitarian goods, evacuation of injured and sick people from the Chechen Republic;

Year 1995

January - September, December – deploying and providing the safety of Territorial administration of the EMERCOM of Russia in the Chechen Republic. Protection and defense of the points of location of Territorial administration, life-support objects of Grozny, providing safe evacuation of refugees, sick and injured local civilians, accompanying humanitarian escorts, repair-and-renewal crews of the EMERCOM of Russia and medical staff of different departments, defusing of risky-explosive items;

May-June – emergency-and-rescue operations in Neftegorsk destroyed by earthquake;

June – evacuation of hostages taken by the terrorists in Budyonnovsk;

July – providing security of humanitarian escort for the Doukhobor community in Georgia;

August – accompanying of pack of humanitarian aid to Serbia.

Year 1996

January – providing security of CD of the EMERCOM of Russia and the hospital of the Centre "Protection" in the area of subversive terroristic act in Khizlyar;

April – providing security of humanitarian escort for the Doukhobor community in Georgia;

June - July – rescue operations and fighting the consequences of the terroristic acts in the public transportation in Moscow;

August – providing safe evacuation of Russian pilots having escaped from the prison of Afghanistan;

November – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of explosion at Kotlyakovsoe cemetery in Moscow;

November – emergency-and-rescue and pyrotechnical operations at the site of house explosion in Kaspiuysk;

November – conducting search-and-rescue operations in the area of airplane IL-76 collapse near the town of Abakan;

December – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of gas explosion in the house of Priozersk.

Year 1997

January – search-and-rescue operations of the tourists lost in the area of Beluga mountain in Altai;

March – conducting search-and-rescue operations at the site of the aircraft AN-24B catastrophe near the town of Cherkessk;

April – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of block of apartments explosion in Naro-Fominsk;

May – accompanying humanitarian goods for the victims of earthquake in Iran;

May – providing safe evacuation of the Russian Embassy in Afghanistan;

June – providing safe evacuation of the Russian Embassy staff and Russian-speaking population from Congo and Gabon;

June – conducting of special operation in the Russian federal nuclear center – VNIIEF in Sarov;

July – emergency and rescue works at the location of collapsed barracks of military school in Tomsk;

August – conducting rescue operations in the destroyed building in village Kueda of Perm region;

September – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of explosion at the plant "Serp y Molot" in Moscow;

November – providing safe evacuation of Russian pilots, Ukraine and Polish citizens from Congo;

November – search-and-rescue operations in the area of helicopter MI-8 crash in Sochi;

December – emergency-and-rescue operations in the area of aircraft AN-124 (Ruslan) catastrophe in Irkutsk;

December – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of collapse of constructions of the gym building in Kotlas.

Year 1998

January – conducting in collaboration with FSS of Russia operation of defusing a self-made explosive assembly of high power in Makhachkala;

February – special operation aimed at localizing the source of ionizing radiation near Grozny;

February, June – delivering humanitarian goods to the population of Afghanistan victims if an earthquake;

May-September – operations aimed at defusing and destroying air bombs, mines and shells in moscow and Moscow region. Total de-mining of the territory in Voronezh region;.

June – providing safe evacuation of the CIS citizens from Guinea-Bissay;

July – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of block of apartments collapse in Scherbakovskaya street in Moscow;

July – emergency-and-rescue operations in the area of railway accident near Bekasovo station;

August – accompanying of Russia citizens back from Congo;

September – emergency-and-rescue operations in the area of houses exploded by terrorists in Makhachkala;

September – conducting ERO at the site of gas explosion in the house in Orehovo-Zuevo;

November- October of 1999 – humanitarian de-mining of the territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina;

November – evacuation of Russian citizens from Iraq.

Year 1999

January – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of passenger bus crash near Vladikavkaz; **January -February** – conducting of emergency-and-rescue operations in the regions damaged by the earthquake in Colombia;

February – emergency-and-rescue operations during fighting the consequences of the fire in GUVB (Main Department of Internal Affairs) office building in Samara region;

March-April – providing safe delivery of humanitarian goods and evacuation of Russian citizens from the areas of combat operations in Yugoslavia;

May - June – conducting pyrotechnical operations to break through the ice blockage at Yenisey river;

July - November – humanitarian de-mining in Kosovo;

August, November – emergency-and-rescue operations in the regions damaged by the earthquake in Turkey;

September – conducting emergency-and-rescue and other urgent operations after explosion of the blocks of apartments in Buynakhsk and Moscow;

September - emergency-and-rescue operations during earthquake on the island of Taiwan;

September - December – providing security of humanitarian goods' delivery as well as of the EMERCOM staff members working in the North-Caucasian region.

Year 2000

January -July – conducting activities providing security of the Teritorial Administration of the EMERCOM of Russia in the Chechen Republic;

March – emergency-and-rescue and other urgent operations during the accident at OAO "Khimvolokno" in the town of Klin;

May – evacuation of Russian pilots from Zambia;

June - November – humanitarian de-mining of territories in Kosovo;

July – special operation of radiation clean-up of Grozny;

July – emergency-and-rescue operations during the mud torrents descending in Tyrnyauz;

October – search-and-rescue operations in the area of airplane Il-18 crash near Batumi;

December – special operation aimed at investigating drowned vessels with explosive ammunition in the Baltic Sea.

Year 2001

January - February – emergency-and-rescue operations in India in the regions damaged by the earthquake;

March - November – humanitarian de-mining of the territories in Kosovo;

May – search-and-rescue operations and delivering humanitarian goods during the flood in Lensk;

June – search-and-rescue operations in the area of airplane IL-76 crash near airfield "Chkalovsky";

July – mitigation of the consequences of the hurricane in Moscow;

October – evacuation of Russian citizens from Pakistan;

November – search-and -rescue operations during the aircraft catastrophe of IL-18 in Tverskaya region;

November - December – accompanying humanitarian escorts along the path of Pamirs from Kyrgystan to Afghanistan; **November -September 2002** - deploying and providing the operation of Humanitarian center of the EMERCOM of Russia in Afghanistan;

December - January 2002 - special operation aimed at de-mining and restoration of Salang tunnel at the Salang pass in Afghanistan.

Year 2002

March - April – emergency-and-rescue operations during the earthquake in Afghanistan;

March - June – delivering humanitarian aid goods via Pamirs path from Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan;

May – emergency-and-rescue operations during collapse of the dome of the SPF at Baikonur space launching site;

June – search-and-rescue operations during catastrophic flood at Stavropol Territory;

July – providing safe delivery of humanitarian goods to the territory of the Chechen Republic;

July – search-and-rescue operations during the aircraft catastrophe of IL-86 near Sheremetyevo;

July - August – defusing and destroying of explosive-risky items in Afghanistan;

August – emergency-and-search operations during the flood near Novorossiysk;

September – search-and –rescue operations during the Kolka glacier avalanching in Karmadonskoye gorge;

October – rescue operations during the hostage-taking by terrorists in the theater building at Dubrovka in Moscow;

December – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of Chechen Republic Government Hall explosion .

Year 2003

March – providing safe delivery of humanitarian goods to Grozny;

March – conducting pyrotechnical operations during elimination of ice blockages at Severnaya Dvina in Velikuy Ustug;

March – search and special operations in Karmadon gorge;

March-April – special operation on de-mining of the territory of the Russian Embassy in Afghanistan;

May – emergency-and-rescue operations upon the earthquake in Algeria;

August – conducting emergency-and-rescue operations upon the military hospital explosion in Mozdok;

October – conducting search-and-rescue operations of the disappeared helicopter MI-8 at Kamchatka;

October - special operation in Grozny;

December – emergency-and-rescue operations upon the earthquake in Iran;

Year 2004

February – emergency-and-rescue operations during the terroristic act at Moscow underground railway stations Avtozavodskaya – Paveletskaya;

February – emergency-and rescue and other urgent operations upon the roof collapsing of the building of aqua-park "Trasvaal-Park" in Moscow;

March – emergency-and-rescue operations at the site of explosion of the front door of the block of apartments in Arkhangelsk;

April - October – operations on defusing and destroying of air bombs and other ammunition in Moscow and Moscow region;

April -December – conducting special operations on rehabilitation of the territory and objects of RNC "Kurchatovsky Institution" from the radioactive wastes;

April – search-and-rescue operations in Prielbrus mountains;

April – emergency-and-rescue and other urgent operations in the course of fighting the consequences of the explosion at the cold-storage facility # 14 in Moscow;

May - July – search-and-rescue operations of the tourists lost at Mount Elbrus;

August – search-and-rescue operations of the tourists lost at Alexandrov glacier under mountain Han-Tengri of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan;

September – conducting of emergency-and-rescue and special operations at hostage taking in secondary school # 1 of Beslan.

Year 2005

March–May – de-mining of the cultivation areas, pastures and ecological inspection in the potentially hazardous objects location areas in Chechen Republic;

July– September – monitoring of fire-proof state of the forest areas, thermal points in the peat areas and peat industries of Moscow region, radio prospecting around Moscow;

August – September– total de-mining of the area from explosive-risky items on Bolshoy Tuters island in the Baltic Sea;

Year 2006

February – search-and-rescue operations at the site of Basmanny market dome collapse in Moscow;

August – providing humanitarian aid goods delivery to Lebanon;

September – search-and-rescue operations at the site of the pump station explosion in the town of Krasnogors of Moscow region;

October – providing evacuation of Russian citizens from Georgia.

Source: EMERCOM of Russia, 2013. <http://en.mchs.ru/>