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Information Leak on Armenia's Armed Forces or Russia's New Strategy in the Region

Haykak Arshamyan

On 9 March 2016, Aleksandr Khranchikhin, Deputy Director of Russia's Institute of Political and Military Analysis, published an analytical article in the Russian weekly *Military-Industrial Courier*, entitled "Outpost with Questions. In Case of Conflict between Russia and Turkey, Armenia Appears on the Frontline."¹

The article provided a detailed description of the disposition of the Armenian Armed Forces, including the precise locations of the deployments of its army corps, battalions and brigades. The numbers and locations of heavy weapons and air facilities were also stated. Similarly, the Nagorno-Karabakh armed forces were also described. The author even revealed the military equipment of the Russian 102nd Military Base in Gyumri.

At first sight, it may seem that this article was just another provocation of Russian propaganda that was preceded by the Russian Defense Ministry's website publication of the list of weapons provided to Armenia in exchange for a \$200 million loan.

However, examining the *Military-Industrial Courier*'s publications for the last three months, we encounter similar analyses of the armed forces of a number of other post-Soviet countries.

¹ For the original Russian-language article, see: Храмчихин, Александр, "Форпост с вопросами. В случае конфликта России с Турцией Армения оказывается на передовой." Опубликовано в выпуске № 9 (624) за 9 марта 2016. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/29587>

For example, an earlier article on Georgia's armed forces, published on 24 February 2016, entitled, "Georgia Boasts of its Army, But No More," provides the description of the armaments of the Georgian Army with similar details.²

And in another publication from 17 February 2016, entitled "The Armies of the Eastern New Recruits Can Only Go to War with White Flags," gives descriptions of the armaments of Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.³ Earlier, the same author published similar analytical articles about the capacities of the armed forces of Belarus⁴ and Ukraine.⁵

In fact, Alexander Khranchikhin started this series in December 2015, the last article of which referred to the Republics of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Most likely, he will turn to Azerbaijan's armed forces in his next analysis. In fact, the Russian analyst, possessing top secret information, reveals data on the armed forces of the Eastern Partnership member countries, as well as of NATO member Baltic States. Obviously, it is impossible to obtain such information from books, internet

² Храмчихин, Александр, "Грузия может похвастаться своей армией, но не больше." Опубликовано в выпуске № 7 (622) за 24 февраля 2016. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/29349>

³ Храмчихин, Александр, "Армиям восточных новобранцев можно идти на войну только под белым флагом." Опубликовано в выпуске № 6 (621) за 17 февраля 2016. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/29215>

⁴ <http://vpknews.ru/articles/29106>

⁵ <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/28601>

websites and/or through journalistic investigation. It is clear that the author received this information directly through channels of the Russian Defense Ministry and intelligence agencies.

If in the cases of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Baltic countries, the dissemination of such information is more or less clear, (Russia does not have good relations with them, to say the least), then in Armenia's case, it can give rise to a serious political scandal. Armenia, unlike these countries, at least officially, is a strategic ally of Russia, as well as a founding member of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization).

Why the Russian side published a similar article about Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh in their quite popular political weekly is still not so clear, but there are a number of questions, and the Armenian authorities must respond to them. First of all, how did the Russian side obtain such information? Even if Armenian and Russian officials claim that the list is not complete and/or it does not contain military secrets. Either the Armenian side passed the data to its Russian counterparts, or the Russian intelligence agencies spied and collected this information, and then it was published by a Russian analyst.

Moreover, this publication was preceded by the visit of high-ranking Russian officials to Azerbaijan and followed Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan's official visit to Moscow on 10 March of this year.

Most likely, the Russian authorities send different signals to the countries of the region. In the case of Turkey, it is yet another warning that the main function of the Russian military base in Armenia is the neutralization of the Turkish threat, and in case of an attack on Armenia, Russia will not remain indifferent. Although this is a well-known fact, it fits in the context of the strained Turkish-Russian rhetoric of the last few months.

Through Khramchikhin's publication, Russia also sent a message to Azerbaijan: in case of hostilities against Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia may take a neutral position, but in the case of blatant aggressions against Armenia, Russia will not remain indifferent. Of course, this fits in the context of the Turkey-Azerbaijan axis, as well as Azerbaijan's non-payment of billions of dollars for the purchase of weapons from Russia.

Finally, in Armenia's case, the Russia Federation once again makes it clear, that Armenia, not only politically and economically, but also in military terms strongly depends on Russia, and that Russia has full control of Armenia's security information, even top secret.

At the same time, taking into account the fact that recently Russia has repeatedly referred to the necessity of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, and that the discussion of this issue with President Vladimir Putin is on the agenda of President Sargsyan's visit to Moscow, it becomes clear that Russia is seriously committed to the issue of changing the status quo in Karabakh.

Further developments in the region will illustrate the results. Once again, Russia is shuffling all the cards, to deal them again and take actions based on its own interests.

Note:

For the original Armenian-language version of this article, see:

www.regional-studies.org/publications/staff-papers/524-100316

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Regional Studies Center (RSC)
Yerevan, Armenia

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