

The Return to Patriotic Education in Post-Soviet Russia: How, When, and Why the Russian Military Engaged in Civilian Nation Building

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***Abstract:** This article examines the military origins of the Russian State Program of Patriotic Education. It documents how the policy was incubated within the Ministry of Defense and had found much of its form and content before Vladimir Putin became Russia's president. To a degree often forgotten, patriotic education was shaped by circumstances of crisis and social destabilization. In response to failed nation building and rising concerns over youth behavior, military values and aesthetics were taken up as a means to cure social ills and moral vices and to counter the influx of western values. The military actors involved sought not only to increase the prestige of military service. Equally important was the fact that patriotic education served as a form of social outreach, based on a traditionalist worldview. Soviet and Russian soldiers were seen as important role models for the young, and the Armed Forces as a bearer of historical continuity and "Russianness." Thus, already before Putin's presidency, the regime invited the military into the heart of civilian affairs, presenting military traditionalism with a stronghold within the domain of official nation building. Under Putin, too, patriotic education policies continue to bear the strong imprint of their origins in crisis and failed nation building in the 1990s.*

Keywords: Russia, official patriotism, patriotic education, identity politics, militarization, militarism.