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AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

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SOVIET SOLDIERS IN POLITICS AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

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Increasing reports of the possibility of a military coup in the USSR, foot-dragging on the part of the Soviet armed forces in arms control discussions, signs of resentment on the part of military officers over their unilateral force cuts and the withdrawal of their forces from Eastern Europe have led some to fear that the Kremlin’s generals are taking over—or, if not running the country, becoming increasingly important behind the scenes. This, it is suggested, has ominous implications for European Security—i.e., it may only be a matter of time before the generals attempt to "normalize" the situation in Eastern Europe by reasserting Soviet control in the region.

The attempted coup in August, 1991 seemed to substantiate these fears. In fact, as has become evident since the coup, military involvement was not only minimal; it was the military that saved the situation by refusing to support the plotters. Had the military acted as a cohesive institution the coup would undoubtedly have succeeded. In reality, however, the military turned out to be as split as other structures in Soviet society. In addition, it is clear in retrospect that perestroika and glasnost had a major impact on the Soviet armed forces. Diversity of views—fostered by perestroika and glasnost—commitment to semi-democratic institutions and processes turned out to be deeper than many in the West had expected.
Soviet generals undoubtedly are resentful over the loss of Eastern Europe, worried about the international political and economic instability that besets their country. However, from a practical standpoint, these military leaders are and will continue to be more preoccupied with internal, managerial problems than intent on becoming involved in the political process. Their budget and force structure is characterized by chaos. Indeed, with the formation of a Commonwealth of Independent States, it is uncertain if anything like a unified armed forces will still exist by the time this book goes to press. It is therefore not surprising that morale is down, and internal problems within the armed forces are their major concern. Besides, the investigation process under way, which will look at each officer’s behavior during the coup, is likely to eliminate those most disposed to engage in future coup attempts.

In order to better understand the situation in which the Soviet armed forces finds itself, it is useful to compare the current position to that which existed under Brezhnev. Therefore this analysis will focus on seven factors of key concern to the High Command. These include: the unity of the armed forces, its technological prowess, its prestige, its many internal problems, its attitude toward the political leadership, and its attitude toward Europe.

THE PRE-GORBACHEV PERIOD

Military Unity. One of the key conceptual problems that has long confronted analysts, is to define what is meant by the term military. Does it include everyone
in uniform? Only the officer corps? Or is it limited to generals and admirals, or even more narrowly to those individuals at the very top who tend to be engaged in articulating policy? The simplest answer to such a question is that it depends on the issue under analysis.

In the case of this study, we are primarily concerned about the ability of the Soviet military to act as a unified entity in the face of considerable societal chaos. For the Soviet military to play a key role under such circumstances, it would be necessary for them to be able to act as a cohesive organization. Such a situation would require not only the cooperation of the generals and admirals, but the rest of the military as well. If we are talking about the possibility of a coup or a civil war, then the role of the entire armed forces becomes important. It does generals and colonels no good to give orders if subordinates are not prepared to carry them out.

Looking at the Pre-Gorbachev period, it is difficult to comment authoritatively on the unity of the armed forces other than to note that there were major differences between the most senior officers. For example, Marshal Ogarkov and Marshal Pavlov had important differences of opinion on the relative role of tanks and high technology (Pavlov believed tanks continued to play an important role, while Ogarkov believed the future lay in high technology). Likewise, Marshal Tolubko differed with Ogarkov over the role of nuclear weapons (Ogarkov believed the primary purpose/function of nuclear weapons was to deter the use of such weapons; Tolubko believed they would be a key component of any war). Marshal Batitskii also had a run-in with Ogarkov over the significance of air defense forces
(The latter argued for an expanded Ballistic Missile Defense system, while Ogarkov favored a more modest approach). Ogarkov and Admiral Gorshkov also differed in the assessment of the importance of naval power (Gorshkov argued for an independent, blue water strategy, while Ogarkov wanted naval strategy subordinate to Soviet military strategy). (1)

While it is difficult to know how deep such differences of opinion were in the Soviet High Command during the late 70s and early 80s, the fact that the country’s top military officers openly differed on key aspects of the country’s doctrine and force structure suggests that a number of such differences of opinion existed in the military. The difference between then and now is that military officers did not normally openly express their opinions—if they differed from their superiors—except at the highest levels. Discussions with Soviet military officers in recent years suggest that differences of opinion always existed in the Red Army; they were simply papered over during this pre-glasnost period. (2)

**Technological Prowess.** The Soviet High Command has long believed that it is technologically inferior to the west, and particularly vis-a-vis the United States. The Israeli-Syrian war in which the Syrians lost 80 planes while the Israelis did not suffer a single loss brought home to the Kremlin that while Soviet pilots may be better than Syrians, the quality of their pilots could not by itself account for such a lopsided result. Western weapons systems were obviously superior. Indeed, while there was a recognition that the Soviet military was behind the West in a number of key areas, the main problem facing officers such as Ogarkov was that rather
than narrowing, the gap was getting wider.

This fear of technological obsolescence was one of the major reasons for Ogarkov's decision to oppose Brezhnev and later Andropov and Chernenko's arms control proposals. The USSR was already behind the West he believed, and given the state of the Soviet economy, such agreements would not only condemn the USSR to a permanent state of inferiority, they would also lead to a cut in the military budget, something that could not be permitted in light of the sorry state of the country's economy.

The traditional Soviet military approach to this problem was to compensate for its perceived technological inferiority by heavy reliance on quantity. American tanks or anti-tank weapons may be qualitatively superior to those possessed by the USSR, but Soviet superiority in numbers help offset the West's qualitative advantages. This helps explain the Soviet penchant for building large numbers of tanks. From the Soviet perspective, even though their forces out-numbered those of the West in Europe, qualitative considerations meant that the balance was more or less even. Furthermore, the further behind the Soviets believed they were vis-a-vis the West, the more reliance they tended to place on numbers. (3)

**Prestige.** Under Brezhnev, Soviet military prestige was at an all time high. Brezhnev identified closely with the heroic period of the Second World War, indeed to a large degree he attempted to legitimize his rule by heavy reliance on symbols from that period. His "writings" tended to focus on the War and his penchant for having his picture taken in his be-medaled uniform, not to mention his promotion
to Marshal of the Soviet Union (not bad for a former political officer) created resentment among Soviet military officers.

However, along with Brezhnev’s reliance on military symbols came an immunity from criticism. Similarly, while he did not always give the Soviet military everything it wanted, he was certainly generous. Furthermore, the military was constantly glorified. Being a military officer was a prestigious occupation as illustrated by the large number of young men who applied to attend military academies. In addition, the military was more or less left alone when it came to working out procedures for implementing warfighting doctrine and dealing with internal issues such as discipline or promotion. As a consequence, the resentment felt by some military officers toward Brezhnev’s effort to use the military for his own ends was tempered by a recognition that his support significantly improved their position within Soviet society.

**Internal Military Problems.** With the emergence of glasnost there has been a tendency in the West to think that the internal problems of the Soviet military are new; that they developed only recently, under Gorbachev’s tutelage. In reality, all of them existed under Brezhnev—they were just not openly discussed.

These problems included: ethnic rivalry, illiteracy, hazing, a poor military educational system, an officer corps that did not show initiative or creativity, nor accept responsibility, discipline and an over-age officer corps, especially at the most senior levels. Ogarkov, in particular, was outspoken on many of these issues, especially when it came to the quality of the officer corps. He blasted the
tendency of Soviet military officers to fight the last war, and openly criticized their failure to show initiative and creativity not to mention their unwillingness to accept responsibility for their actions and those of their subordinates. Similarly, both illiteracy and ethnic issues as well as hazing were problems cited by a wide variety of Soviet military officers at the time. (4)

**Attitude Toward the Political Leadership.** If most Soviet military officers tended to avoid comments on technical issues such as the role of Soviet naval strategy or the role of air defenses when their views differed from those at the top, disagreements on political issues were still more uncommon. Indeed, during the late Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko periods, there was only one senior military officer prepared to openly disagree with the senior political leadership--Marshal Ogarkov, the chief of the General Staff. (5)

For his part, Ogarkov's attitude toward the political leadership evolved from one of open, strong support when he first became Chief of the General Staff in 1978 to one of open hostility and guerilla warfare by the end of 1980. Ogarkov increasingly began to believe that the political leadership was inept, unable to deal with the country's mounting problems. As a result, he became one of the country's most outspoken opponents of the arms control process and the military's strongest advocate of an increased military budget. This frequently led to clashes with the political leadership--most notably defense minister Ustinov.

Despite his open opposition to Brezhnev and apparent belief that the country's political leadership was incapable of handling the USSR's many
problems, Ogarkov never complained of the way it was dealt with by Soviet society in general. He appeared to accept the lack of public criticism as the correct approach and despite his other complaints did not focus on issues such as prestige. His complaints were reserved for the way leadership dealt with questions such as the budget and arms control.

**Europe.** The Soviet military traditionally looked upon Eastern Europe as a military buffer zone against the West in the event of a war. If the USSR launched an attack first, possession of Eastern Europe could provide the High Command with a jumping off point far away from its own borders. Likewise, if the attack came from the West, the possession of Eastern Europe increased the chances that the conflict would be fought outside Soviet territory.

Europe has also played an important role in Soviet military thinking since the end of World War II. To begin with, Soviet strategists came up with a new strategy in 1960 (coalition strategy) according to which the East European forces were closely integrated with Soviet forces and in the event of a conflict would supplement Soviet forces. Faced with their inferiority in strategic nuclear delivery systems in the early fifties, the Soviets attempted to compensate by holding Europe hostage.

In practice, this meant having the capability to threaten Europe even if the Kremlin were not able to directly threaten the U.S. Given the closeness of U.S.-West European ties, it was hoped that this would help remove an American incentive for using strategic nuclear weapons against the USSR. Later, when the
USSR began to get its own strategic nuclear weapons systems, Soviet ability to threaten Western Europe with its conventional forces began to play a similar role. As long as the United States was concerned about and closely tied to Western Europe, the USSR could effectively threaten the U.S. by keeping Europe hostage. It also provided the Kremlin with a vehicle for undermining U.S.-West European relations. The USSR had the option of taking actions that might be viewed in Bonn, Paris or London as bringing the U.S. nuclear guarantee into question.

THE GORBACHEV ERA

From the High Command’s standpoint, the Gorbachev era turned Soviet military affairs upside down. On the one hand, it exacerbated many of the problems outlined above, while on the other it has introduced new difficulties. Furthermore, it has forced a military leadership used to order and predictability to deal with a very confusing and almost completely unpredictable and fluid situation.

Unity of the Officer Corps. The aborted coup in August 1991 shattered the myth of unity of the Soviet officer corps. Some (e.g., Marshal Yazov, Generals Varrienikov, Kuz’min openly supported it), while others (Generals Shaposhnikov, Lobov, Grachev, and Kobets) not only opposed it but were instrumental in ensuring the victory of the reform process. In retrospect, however, it was clear even before the coup that the Gorbachev period had led to emergence of even deep splits in the armed forces.

To begin with, there was an increasing recognition that an age gap exists
between the country's senior officers and the rest of the officer corps. Former Major Lopatin probably put it best when he complained that it was hard to have confidence in officers who are thirty years older than him (6).

Attacks by a variety of military officers on Colonel General Dmitri Volkogonov, former head of the Institute of Military History, and author of the biographies of Stalin and Trotsky highlight another area of heterogeneity within the Soviet officer corps--ideology. An open supporter of Yeltsin, Volkogonov alienated many of his fellow generals--and may have led to his ouster as Chief of the Institution of Military History--by his "liberal" (within a Soviet context) views. Meanwhile, while Volkogonov openly supported Yeltsin, General Boris Gromov, the hero of Afghanistan, served as former Prime Minister Ryzhkov's running mate in his bid for the RSFSR Presidency, while the arch conservative General Makashov ran for the RSFSR Presidency himself.

In addition to differences of opinion among generals, there was also a split between officers at the rank of general and those below--especially on the part of junior and mid-level officers. Many of the latter--especially those who are members of the Supreme Soviet have openly criticized senior officers. The different views represented among the junior and mid-level officers in the Supreme Soviet are representative of the officer corps as a whole; demonstrating that Soviet officers were no more homogeneous than any other group in the USSR.

There was also another area of heterogeneity in the Soviet military; namely, the ethnic question. This does not appear to be a major problem within the officer
corps--primarily because the vast majority of officers are Great Russians, Ukrainians or White Russians. The situation is quite different among the rank and file, however, where racial diversity is the norm--especially among conscripts.

**Technological Prowess.** If anything, the Gorbachev era served to intensify the sense of inferiority felt by Soviet officers vis-a-vis the West. To begin with, such problems are now openly discussed. Soviet military officers criticize the backward nature of the equipment they receive from civilian officials. As one Soviet Navy officer put it, "We do not have a military-industrial complex, rather we have an industrial-military complex. That means that the army, air force and the fleet do not get the weapons they need, but those which are convenient for industry to produce or which it is capable of producing." (7)

If anything, the performance of American weapons systems in the Persian Gulf served to intensify Soviet concerns. Not only do the Americans possess exotic weapons systems, but they work! Officially, the Soviets have argued that it is the human factor which is most important in combat, and that the Iraqi military was trained by a variety of Western militaries (and therefore the Soviets are not responsible for their poor performance). Meanwhile, private discussions with Soviet military officers since the Gulf War constantly return to question of Western Technology--and Soviet inferiority. Similarly, senior Soviet officers have admitted that Moscow has a lot of work to do to improve its air defense systems, while a number of civilian analysts have seized on the events of the Gulf war to argue that they show the inferiority of Soviet weapons and the need for radical steps,
especially further cuts in the military budget. Otherwise, the country will never be able to successfully restructure its sagging economy.

From a purely military standpoint, one area in which the high command has focused on in response to its technological backwardness is to shift the thinking of Soviet military officers away from emphasis on quantity toward quality. This is a long-overdue development, one that Ogarkov, among others had been pushing since the early seventies. In practice, this meant effecting a radical change in the way Soviet officers think. Numbers of tanks are not as important as the quality of tanks. Likewise, the quantity of nuclear weapons are not as important as the fact that approximate parity existed between two sides. As one Soviet writer put it, "once a certain point has been reached accumulating larger numbers of nuclear weapons does not provide greater security." (8) Indeed, the idea of placing primary reliance on qualitative factors has now become official Soviet policy. General Moiseyev, for example, stated that "the future of the armed forces must be conditioned by qualitative parameters, not quantitative ones," while General Lizichev commented that the efficiency of Soviet military organizational development must be determined primarily by qualitative parameters. More recently, Marshal Yazov elevated qualitative factors to first place in the restructuring of the Soviet military when he stated that:

We see the key in solving that task in ensuring in practice that priority goes to quality. Above all, in personnel, structure, the technical equipment of the armed forces, in training personnel, in military science, and in resolving the task of socialist culture--everywhere quality should be foremost. (9)

While all Soviet writers tend to agree on the principle of placing greater reliance on
qualitative factors, in practice a number of them have complained that arms control negotiations may be going too far. Too many reductions in the numbers of weapons—even if they are not the newest and latest weapons—can begin to undermine Soviet military readiness. This was one of the major reasons why Marshal Yazov made it clear that while he was prepared to reduce weapons, primary attention was being given to getting rid of older systems.

As for the reductions and scrapping of military hardware, yes, indeed some of the hardware that has seen out its prescribed service life is being destroyed, being sent for melting down. But what tanks are these? the T-34, T-54, old models of the T-55, T-10. but all of the new hardware will remain. Moreover, any hardware that is still serviceable is not being withdrawn from the Armed Forces . . . it is being mothballed and, should the need arise, will be used. (10)

Prestige. Probably no change in the Gorbachev era has had a greater impact on the Soviet armed forces than the drop in prestige that has been suffered by the military. During the early stages of perestroika, most of the Soviet Union’s top generals came out strongly in favor of a policy of glasnost. However, it soon turned out that their understanding of the concept and that held by the majority of Soviets—especially those who have been critical of the armed forces—differed. The generals understood glasnost to be a policy aimed at improving the operation of the armed forces by permitting open, but constructive criticism of the way policies are implemented. It never crossed their minds that Soviet citizens—and especially journalists—would not only criticize policies (e.g., the budget, doctrine), but would question their honor as military officers. For example, Sakharhov’s charge that Soviet helicopters killed Soviet soldiers rather than permit them to fall into the
hands of Afghan insurgents led to a bitter reaction by senior military officers such as Marshal Akhromeyev. If a senior military officer stated that such a situation exists—or didn’t exist—then any questioning of his position can only be interpreted as an attack on his honor as a Soviet military officer.

In recent months, especially in the aftermath of the coup, it became obvious that all aspects of Soviet life are open to attack—and often these attacks are unjustified or as Soviet military officers tend to put it, "irresponsible." In the past, it was an honor to serve as a military officer. Now, however, the Soviet press is full of stories of how officers have been insulted on the street, of discrimination against their children, and wives--indeed, there are reports of officers being beaten and murdered by civilians.

Every day the newspapers are full of more revelations of misconduct, brutality and incompetence within the military. As a consequence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit young men to become officers. In the past where there might have been 10 or 15 candidates for every position in an officer school, the High Command is now faced with a situation in which some positions are going unfilled. To make matters worse, there is no sign in the near future that the situation will improve—indeed, if anything, it is likely to get worse.

**Internal Military Problems.** Despite all of the problems that glasnost has created for the military—it has also had an unintended, positive effect. During the Brezhnev era, little was done to deal seriously with the many problems facing the armed forces—if anything they were merely swept under the rug. Glasnost,
however, has changed that situation. The increased public attention to the military's internal problems has forced the military to begin to deal seriously with them. Failure to do so will not only further damage the prestige of the armed forces, in many cases it leads to calls for civilian bodies to investigate the abuses and monitor the steps taken by the military to improve the situation. And in almost every case, the military is attempting to correct these problems.

**Ethnicity.** To deal with this problem, the High Command has adopted a two-pronged approach; first, it is trying to minimize military involvement in internal policing functions, and second, it is working to neutralize ethnic problems within the armed forces.

The evidence of the past five years suggests that involvement of the military in internal policing actions generally serves to turn the local populace against the armed forces and exacerbate tensions within the military. (11) One of the most important recent developments in this regard was the passage by the Supreme Soviet of legislation making it necessary to first obtain permission from the Supreme Soviet/President before Soviet troops can be ordered to put down civil disturbances. While such an order does not guarantee that Soviet forces will not be used for internal purposes, it makes it more difficult, and ensures that careful consideration will be given to the consequences of such an action before it is undertaken.

Another action taken by the High Command (admittedly under considerable public pressure) was to permit a proportion of the various ethnic groups to serve in
their own republics. For example, 30% of those who were drafted from the Baltic region were to be permitted to serve in that area. (12)

In addition, ethnic "sensitivity" courses for both officers and officer trainees have been introduced in an effort to impress upon officer cadre the importance of working actively to defuse such conflicts before they occur. Efforts have also been made to assign at least one officer of non-Russian ethnic background to each military unit. According to Soviet specialists, the assignment of such an officer reduces "the possibility of micro-groups forming in the sub-unit. (13)

An intensified campaign to recruit non-Russians for officer schools has also been undertaken. Non-competitive admissions (the Soviet military's form of affirmative action) have been instituted, and have been the source of complaints by ethnic Russians. (14)

**Russian Language Knowledge.** The biggest problem involved in integrating a large number of non-Russians into a joint military—and especially the officer corps—remains knowledge of Russian. It does little good to recruit non-Russians if they cannot handle the military's command language. Despite efforts to attract a greater number of non-Russians, the military's record to date remains abysmal. According to one source, there are only one hundred Kirghez, and 400 Turkmen officers in the Soviet military, and Uzbeks make-up only 1.6 percent of the officer corps. "Representatives from the (former) Baltic Republics (could) be listed by name." (15)

On the enlisted level, the majority of non-Russian recruits tend to end up in
the less technical services. "Where do representatives of Central Asia and the Transcaucasia primarily serve? In Construction troops. There are objective reasons for this: the sometimes insufficiently high level of general education and a poor knowledge of Russian." (16) For its part, the military is attempting to deal with the language difficulty by setting up special courses for non-Russian speakers. Given the size of the problem and the fact that soldiers only serve for two years, the military's ability to train them in both Russian and modern technology is severely limited.

The High Command's response to the language problem has been to argue that it is a matter for the civilian world. For example, a meeting of the Military Council of the Central Asian Military District stressed the need for Russian knowledge among youth as a "means of communicating among nationalities and mastering complex military skills," and called for a basic improvement in Russian language study in secondary schools. (17)

**Hazing.** Few issues have been the subject of more sensationalized articles in the Soviet civilian press than hazing. Indeed, it has led to calls in the civilian press for the "creation in each republic, kray, and oblast of independent committees for the social control of the army." (18) Cognizant of the impact such control structures would have on the High Command's control over the armed forces, the generals responded swiftly and firmly. Yazov condemned it as "an unnatural phenomenon," and Lizichev not only condemned it, but placed responsibility for it solely on the heads of military officers themselves. "We and only we--
commanders and political workers--are responsible for hazing, responsible before
the people and before our conscience."

When commanders and political workers do not take decisive
measures to curtail such ugly and shameful phenomena and use
neither the educational possibilities nor the full force of the
authority granted to them for this purpose, we make them strictly
accountable. We expel them from the party and the Komsomol. (19)

Despite the High Command's efforts, hazing is turning out to be a more intractable
problem than many anticipated. When reports of hazing are received by the
General Staff or the Ministry of Defense, they are immediately investigated. But
such investigations are not always successful. As one officer who participated in
such investigations argued:

But will the victim help the military investigator establish all the
circumstances of the case, so that it can be subsequently forwarded to
a military tribunal? By no means always. At moments of candor, the
victim might acknowledge that his injuries were caused by barracks
hooligans. But as soon as the discussion turns to who specifically
dared raise his hand against his fellow soldier, he nervously falls
silent, which he explains with the worldly truism: 'I have to live with
them.' (20)

This situation is made worse by ethnic problems. According to one Soviet military
officer, 80% of all crimes committed in his unit that involved hazing were
ethnically based. (21)

Educational Institutions. The Soviet military educational system has long
been beset by a number of problems. Dogmatic instructors, a lack of automation
in training aids, and a lack of relevance in training programs have undermined the
effectiveness of educational institutions. In the eyes of Soviet military officers,
these problems have led to a situation where "For all practical purposes, we have
yet to achieve a decisive shift from mass, 'gross output' training and education to individual training and education . . . " (22)

The quality of the instructional programs in military educational institutions has been openly criticized by senior military officers.

The problem of improving the methodological expertise of commanders may thus be said to be the most acute problem that we face at the present time. The source of the problem is to be found in military educational institutions where future officers undertake only minimal study of even the most elementary methodological procedure. It is in the military educational institutions that the improvement of work with cadres must be begin, because it is here that the foundations are laid for the future of the army and the navy. (23)

In 1989, a campaign to improve the quality of military educational institutions was instituted. Considerable effort is now being devoted to streamlining training procedures through the introduction of computers and computer simulated training devices. Increased emphasis is being paid to raising the psychological, pedagogical and leadership skills of officers. Most important--and presumably most difficult--is the effort to teach educators to think creatively.

The High Command is taking the need to upgrade the military educational system very seriously. Structural modifications have been introduced, and military academics have been warned that if they hope to keep their jobs--which provide them with their comfortable standard of living, including access to special stores, housing, good schools, as well as career and geographical stability--they will have to meet higher standards in the future.

Poor Leadership. Because of the command structure within which they operate, Soviet military officers have long feared to show initiative. To do so often
meant serious problems within the military hierarchy. Yet, modern warfare is
placing increasing demands on initiative and creativity. The chances that Soviet
officers will lose contact with their headquarters—at all levels—has increased with
the lethality of conventional and nuclear weapons.

Willingness to accept personal responsibility for one’s actions and to show
creativity and initiative goes to the heart of perestroika. For example, Marshal
Sergey Sokolov and General Aleksandr Koldunov were ousted in May of 1988
following the landing of the youthful West German pilot Mathias Rust in Red
Square. Had Sokolov and Koldunov not been ousted, it would have been a sign to
the rest of the country that the military was exempt from the rules of perestroika.

During the past three years a major review of the personnel files of all
officers has been carried out to ensure that only the best officers are retained in
the military. Normally such evaluations are done every four years. But faced with
the need to reduce at least one hundred officers, the High Command instituted a
procedure whereby every officer was evaluated by a special commission sent from
Moscow. Those who did not pass this examination have been placed in the
reserves.

Similarly, one of the lesser known—but very important—anomalies of the
Soviet officer personnel system is about to change. Up to this point, when a young
man graduates from an officer school, he signs on for a twenty-five year
obligation. The only way out is through physical, emotional, disciplinary, or service
problems. A number of officers who have served eight to twelve years are asking
to be discharged into the reserves. As one journalist noted, "There were many
more people wishing to be discharged than had been assumed, especially among
junior officers. For example, about 40 percent of officers applied in just one
regiment of the Moscow Military District Air Defense Forces. And that was
happening in the Moscow Military District." (25) Yet these people are the most
valuable. Consequently, the military has often refused to release them, thus
placing them in the embarrassing situation of having to violate a disciplinary
regulation to be let out of the military. (26)

Low Morale. The military’s loss in prestige and the lack of housing and poor
living conditions facing Soviet officers--especially those who have been withdrawn
from Eastern Europe--are a major source of concern. Faced with this situation,
large numbers of young officers have asked to be discharged from active duty.
Furthermore, there has been a sharp fall-off in applications for officer training
schools.

The High Command is aware of the serious morale problems facing the
military, and is fighting to alleviate the problems. Yazov, Moiseyev, and Lizichev,
as well as other Soviet generals, have been outspoken in their calls for civilian
assistance in housing discharged officers, and in pushing for job retraining and
better job opportunities. Similarly, they have led the charge in combating civilian
attacks on the prestige of the armed forces.

The High Command has enjoyed some limited success in the latter area.
While the civilian attacks on the military continue unabated, the military was singled out for special attention at the May 1 celebration in 1990; Yazov was promoted to marshal in April; five Politburo members attended the Armed Forces Day celebration in February 1990; the financial allowance for officers and warrant officers was increased; civilian authorities were ordered to assist in resolving housing problems; and pensions were increased. Moreover, by 1991, officer pay was increased by 90 to 150 rubles, and the pay of draftees will be raised by 30 to 55 rubles per month "depending on their post." Conscripts will also be permitted annual leave for the first time. (27)

Nevertheless, the High Command has a long way to go, both in terms of morale and prestige. This is most evident in continuing disciplinary problems in the military, stemming largely from the quality of individuals being drafted.

**Problems with Draftees.** Colonel General Grigoriy Krivosheyev claimed that in the fall of 1989, for the first time since the end of World War II, "military commissariats with the exception of the Moscow and Odessa Military Districts were unable to fulfill their quotas." (28)

To make matters worse, the pool of recruits is shrinking because of the decision to grant college students a deferment. As V. Kosarev laments: "At the moment only 49 out of 100 eligible are being drafted. This has resulted in a decline in the quality of recruits joining the Army and the Navy." (29)

Furthermore, desertion from the military is up, and Yazov, in his speech to the 28th Party Congress, said that four thousand positions in the armed forces remain
Disciplinary problems have been increasing. The exact extent of crime in the Soviet military is secret, but according to Lopatin, it is growing: "I can say that in 1989 alone the USSR Supreme Soviet reviewed about 70 cases on depriving servicemen of their decorations after they committed crimes." (31) These seventy cases represent only the tip of the iceberg since the Supreme Soviet reviews only the most serious crimes. For example, "in 1989 over 43,000 people with criminal records were drafted into the Armed Forces, which is one-third more than in 1980." (32)

In an effort to improve the quality of enlisted personnel, the High Command has initiated an experiment of staffing several navy ships with professionals only—and there has been serious discussion of offering recruits the option of signing up for three years in return for a substantially higher rate of pay and specialized technical training. Such proposals are currently aimed at naval personnel, where the time a conscript has to serve is being reduced from three to two years. If these proposals are successful, they will be extended to other services, such as the Strategic Rocket Forces and Air Forces.

**The Political Apparatus.** Calls for the abolishment of political organs within the armed forces have increased since the political leadership's decision in March 1990 to change article 6 of the USSR's constitution, thereby ending the Communist Party's monopoly of power within Soviet society. Indeed, political organs have already been dissolved in the Merchant Marine and in the internal
Security Forces. Even within the military, the party-political structure has been under open attack by those who believe it is increasingly less relevant. After all, if no party plays a leading role in society, why should the Communist Party—and communist political officers—occupy a special position within the armed forces? If the party-political structure is to remain, then it should begin to play a more meaningful role by dealing more effectively with personnel, education and welfare issues.

Before the suspension of the CPSU following the failed coup, the High Command came to the defense of the political apparatus, arguing that its continued presence within the armed forces was critical for maintaining stability. At the same time, however, senior military officers did acknowledge that the role of the political apparatus would change. The late Marshal Akhromeyev even raised the possibility of an end to the party apparatus as it existed.

When a multi-party system is introduced, however, the possibility of other parties taking power cannot be ruled out, military personnel are being trained by party organizations in the spirit of believing in socialism, but I think that in the future they will be trained in the spirit of allegiance to the motherland and people. I think that, even if a multi-party system is introduced, it will not be possible for a variety of political parties to exist in the Armed Forces. I think the Armed Forces will become a non-partisan organization. (33)

Faced with this situation, the Main Political Directorate (MPD) tried to fight back. After all, the situation in Eastern Europe shows that when the MPD becomes irrelevant, it is disbanded. Furthermore, as mentioned above, political organs have already been abolished in the Soviet merchant fleet and in the Internal Security Forces.
In the end, these political organs, like the communist party, went the way of those that had existed in Eastern Europe. They were both eliminated. A new structure devoted to education and training was put in their place. The obvious problem such a situation creates—from the standpoint of the High Command—is that it removes a major disciplinary device from the hands of the country’s military leaders. In the past, since almost all officers were members of the Communist Party, it was always possible to exert discipline by evoking party discipline. Likewise, since all soldiers and sailors were forced to attend party lectures, it was also possible to enforce (at least superficially) a unitary view of events outside the armed forces on the troops. Now, however, this tool is gone.

**An Aging Officer Corps.** For many years, one of the Soviet military’s most difficult problems has been its inability to force senior military officers into retirement. Rather than give up the many benefits that go with active service—the dachas, the free cars, access to special stores, etc.—the generals and admirals have refused to retire. Such a situation cannot help but have an adverse impact on officer morale as well as operational efficiency.

Recognizing the problem, Gorbachev and some segments of the High Command have pushed for a turnover in the top military leadership. And changes have occurred. During the first four years of Gorbachev’s regime, the average age of the High Command dropped from 65.2 years to 63.3. (34) While this is a step forward in the eyes of many Soviet military officers, the High Command is still too old. For example, during the course of a round-table discussion in February of
1990, Lopatin complained that "of the 13 Deputy Ministers of Defense only one is less than 60 and 11 are over 66." (35) Most of them, he went on to argue, are thirty years older than he. These officers are from a different generation, he maintained, and as long as they are around, it will be difficult for the officers to understand the depth of the problems facing the armed forces and the radical nature of the changes required to deal with them.

**A Professional Military?** Prodded by glasnost and the recognition that they will have to do more with less, the high command is attempting to deal directly with the internal problems discussed above. In its attempt to deal with these problems, the High Command is being pushed toward some form of professional military. Indeed, a professional military—regardless of what it looks like in practice—may be the only way out of the personnel problems the High Command is facing.

As far as the High Command is concerned, the primary issues relative to a professional military are monetary and bureaucratic. Almost every officer who discusses the issue, either in the press or in private discussions, openly admits that he favors a professional military. The problem, however, is coming up with the money to pay for it and deciding who will make the relevant decisions—the High Command or civilians and mid-level officers in the Supreme Soviet?

The complexity of the internal issues facing the armed forces as well as the difficulty of finding a way to deal with them are forcing the High Command to focus almost all of its attention on this issue. And the situation is not likely to get better in the immediate future.
Attitudes Toward the Political Leadership. Since Gorbachev came to power, the attitude of the High Command toward the political leadership has gone through several stages. During the first part of Gorbachev's tenure, the attitude of the High Command was one of suspicion. Indeed, while all of the country's senior military officers gave lip service to the new policy of perestroika, very little was done to actually implement it.

Subsequently, this attitude began to change. Akhromeyev, in particular began to support Gorbachev seeing in him a political leader who not only understood the depth and seriousness of the country's problems, but an individual who was prepared to do something about them. Gorbachev not only talked about these problems, but gave every indication of having a strategy to deal with them. As a consequence, while some segments of the High Command continued to oppose this jump into the unknown, the majority of the country's generals began to support the new policies as the only way to get the country out of its deep moral, political and economic crisis.

CONCLUSION

During the first half of 1991, a number of Soviet generals openly expressed their reservations with regard to Gorbachev and his policies. Indeed, in some cases, these officers were openly hostile accusing Gorbachev of undermining stability in the country. The August 1991 coup led to the beginning of a new period in civil-military relations. From the standpoint of the High Command, the
primary problem facing the armed forces is to retain its cohesion and institutional identity. Opposition on the part of some republics to centralized authority in Moscow—especially in the military sphere—brings up the real possibility that the Soviet armed forces may cease to exist as a national institution in the near future. Even if it does survive, it is clear that the republics will have greater power than in the past. As a consequence, the generals had little alternative but to continue supporting Gorbachev. He is the only leader in the country pushing for something resembling a unified military. But he is now gone, leaving Yeltsin as their hope. He at least is pushing for something resembling a unified military.

In addition to worrying about retaining a centralized armed forces, the generals are also so overwhelmed with managerial problems that they have little time or opportunity to worry about broader political matters. Within the last couple of years around 1.3 million officers and men have been released from active duty. Indeed, the Soviet military will find itself with only 3 million men under arms. And this is not likely to be the end of the process. There are suggestions in conversations with Soviet officers that the number will probably go down to 1.5 or 2 million in coming years. In addition, major structural revisions are under way. The party has been disbanded, and some 92,000 political officers have been thrown out of the military.

Given the chaos that currently besets the Soviet armed forces, it probably comes as no surprise to suggest that the country's top military leaders are in a state of shock. The old world they grew up with is gone. They are uncertain
what the country or the military will look like in six months, uncertain of whether they will have a career let alone a place in the new reality facing them. As a consequence, problems like the loss of Eastern Europe have become relatively insignificant.
Footnotes


(2) Based on the author’s conversations with a variety of Soviet naval and military officers.

(3) While there were signs of this angst in the writings of individuals such as Ogarkov, conversations with a wide variety of senior Soviet military and naval officers have only served to reinforce this impression. In private conversations statements on the inferiority of Soviet weapons systems are commonplace. For a discussion of the Soviet attitude toward high technology during the pre-Gorbachev period, see, Robbin F. Laird and Dale R. Herspring, The Soviet Union and Strategic Arms, (Boulder, Westview, 1984, and Herspring, The Soviet High Command, 1967-1989.

(4) A discussion of these issues is contained in Ellen Jones, Red Army and Society, (Boston, Allen and Unwin, 1985). For Ogarkov’s views on these problems, see Herspring, The Soviet High Command, 1967-1989.

(5) I include Marshal Ustinov, the defense minister among the political leadership since he was not a career military officer and often was at odds with Ogarkov. For biographical details on Ogarkov, see Herspring, The Soviet High Command, 1967-1989, pp. 308-309.

(6) "Kakaya armiya nam nyzhna?" (What Kind of an Army do we Need?), Ogonek, Nr. 9, (February, 1990), p. 29.

(7) A. Borbrakov, "S tochki zreniya professionala," (From the Point of View of a Professional) Krasnaya zvezda, February 22, 1990.


(11) V. Gavrilov, "Rassudok zryachiy protiv zla slepogo," (The Reason of the Sighted Against the Evil of the Blind), Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil, No. 2, 42-49.


(15) "Roundtable Discussion of Itnerethnic Relations in the Military."

(16) Ibid.


(18) "Pora pereyti k dely," (Time to Get to Work), Literaturnaya Gazeta, No. 9, March 1, 1989.


(20) "So what did happen with our Army?" JPRS, UMA, April 20, 1989 from Komsomolskaya pravda, January 18, 1989.


(27) Krasnaya zvezda, November 18, 1990.


(35) "Kakaya armiya nam nyzhna?" (What Kind of An Army do we Need?), Ogonek, February, 1990, p. 29.

(36) This section is based on numerous conversations with Soviet military officers as well as a careful reading of the Soviet press. For the period up through 1989, see, Herspring, "On Perestroyka, Gorbachev, Yazov and the Military" and Herspring, "The Soviet Military and Change."