

# **The Soviet Turn Toward Conventional Force Reduction**

**The Internal Struggle and the  
Variables at Play—Executive Summary**

Harry Gelman

**RAND**

**PROJECT AIR FORCE**

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December 1989

A Project AIR FORCE report  
prepared for the  
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## PREFACE

The Executive Summary that follows presents key observations drawn from R-3876-AF, a RAND study that examines the relationship between the Soviet force posture toward Western Europe and the political struggle that is being waged in the Soviet Union for control over the priorities of military deployment policy and military-industrial decisionmaking. The report gives a detailed overview of the intertwined issues that have been the key battlegrounds in this contest: how to define the Soviet military budget, how far and how fast to cut it, how far to reduce Soviet conventional forward deployments in Europe, how much asymmetry to accept in such reductions, how to reorganize forces for "defensive" purposes, and whether to move away from the traditional Soviet mass, conscripted army in the direction of a professional army. The study then considers prospects for the future.

The report has been sponsored by the U.S. Air Force as part of an ongoing project on the contingency of Soviet force reduction in Europe and Asia, within Project AIR FORCE's National Security Strategies Program. An earlier study published in this project was:

S. W. Popper, *The Economic Cost of Soviet Military Manpower Requirements*, R-3659-AF, March 1989.

The work builds on the findings of a related study prepared for another project in the National Security Strategies Program:

H. Gelman, *The Soviet Military Leadership and the Question of Soviet Deployment Retreats*, R-3664-AF, November 1988.

The study is intended to be of assistance to Air Force officers and planners concerned with the evolving strategic environment. It should also be of interest to other readers following the evolution of Soviet policy. This report considers information available through December 1989.



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This report has benefited from helpful comments on the draft by Arthur Alexander, Charles Cooper, and Robert Nurick, as well as from useful insights about the Soviet military reorganization provided by Edward Warner. The author is, of course, solely responsible for any errors that may remain.





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## **THE SOVIET TURN TOWARD CONVENTIONAL FORCE REDUCTION: THE INTERNAL STRUGGLE AND THE VARIABLES AT PLAY**

Over the last three years, the future of the Soviet force posture toward Western Europe has become increasingly affected by an intense political conflict in the Soviet Union over control of military deployment policy and military-industrial decisionmaking. Gorbachev's close associate Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze has become the "point man" in an ongoing struggle within the elite to weaken the influence of the General Staff and to change Soviet political, economic, and military priorities. The intertwined issues of how to define the Soviet military budget, how far and how fast to cut it, how far to reduce Soviet conventional forward deployments in Europe, how much asymmetry to accept in such reductions, and how to reorganize forces for "defensive" purposes have all been key battlegrounds in the contest for influence. The struggle at the top over decisionmaking authority has given impetus to a widening Soviet public debate about the future size and structure of the Soviet armed forces. The very existence of this debate has greatly alarmed the military leadership.

Those in the Soviet elite who shared the goal of raiding the military budget for other purposes tended to share an optimistic view of the rewards Soviet policy could obtain in the West from unilateral or heavily asymmetrical Soviet force cuts in Europe. These people stressed that such rewards would not be limited to the formal Western reciprocal concessions that might be obtained in arms negotiations. The payoff for Soviet conventional force reductions, it was hoped, would also encompass a great many equally important unilateral actions and inactions by individual Western nations, driven by domestic political pressures, that might tend over time to degrade NATO's military capabilities while exacerbating political difficulties within the Western alliance.

To this end, Gorbachev began a series of major and unprecedented changes that promise, when implemented, to reduce the threatening appearance of the Soviet force posture. Gorbachev pledged to substitute a radically different, "defensive" force posture as the basis for building a new set of political and economic relationships with Western Europe, and particularly with West Germany.

## THE REORGANIZATION

As yet it is too soon to tell how far the reorganization of the Soviet armed forces now under way will in the end provide the reassuring “defensive” configuration announced by Gorbachev.

- Some of the discernable force changes so far—such as a planned 50,000-man reduction in the Air Defense Forces—appear to be driven more by a need to parcel out the military budget cut than by any consistent overall plan to become more defensive in orientation.
- The promised removal of six tank divisions and more than 5000 tanks from the forces in Eastern Europe—the biggest concrete step toward such a defensive transformation—appears to be going forward, and when completed will indeed greatly reduce the Soviet short-term threat potential.
- In the process, the Soviets are evidently replacing a tank regiment in each of their 24 remaining divisions in Eastern Europe with a motorized rifle regiment. Six of these motorized rifle regiments are apparently to be obtained from the six tank divisions being withdrawn, and as compensation, six tank regiments will be removed from among the divisions remaining. Each remaining and restructured tank division will then have two tank regiments and two motorized rifle regiments, whereas each remaining motorized rifle division will evidently have four motorized rifle regiments. The restructuring will apparently require the strengthening of all the remaining divisions with numerous additional infantry fighting vehicles, some of which are being transferred from the divisions being withdrawn.<sup>1</sup>
- Meanwhile, Soviet intentions regarding the disposition of artillery remains ambiguous, and their contradictory statements and general reticence on this subject are disquieting. It is possible that the reassuring reduction of the tank strength of the divisions left in Eastern Europe is being partly compensated by some increase in artillery strength, among other things. This is important because the introduction of self-propelled artillery and the massive increase in overall artillery holdings were central features of the Soviet conventional buildup after the mid-1960s, and artillery fire appeared to play a key role in traditional Soviet thinking in creating breakthroughs to be exploited by tanks and motorized infantry. The Soviet advantage in

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<sup>1</sup>For elaboration, see the testimony of Edward L. Warner III to House Armed Services Committee, September 13, 1989.

artillery in Europe was second in importance only to their advantage in tanks as a factor contributing to military disequilibrium in Europe. On the other hand, the Soviets may also consider artillery important in a defensive role, as helping to achieve significant attrition on the attacker.

- In addition, the General Staff apparently desires to use the occasion of the withdrawal of six divisional structures and many tanks from Eastern Europe to increase the level of modernization, and possibly the readiness, of the divisions remaining that are being "restructured." The final result envisioned may be the creation of forces that indeed have a greater defensive capability and are less of a short-term offensive threat, but that nevertheless have a new flexibility and considerable offensive potential.
- On the other hand, recent Gorbachev statements suggest that because of economic pressures he has compelled the military to accept changes that have tended to erode the Soviet mobilization potential. Gorbachev has publicly revealed the liquidation of 101 military units, which he described as "so-called divisions" (*divisii*), and which he has denounced as "feeding troughs" without combat value. Gorbachev's statement would appear to refer to major changes in the table of organization of the ground forces that have already been accomplished—that is, prior to the reorganization that is now under way. He did not elaborate further on the nature of the units involved and all interpretations of his remarks are necessarily speculative. But one plausible hypothesis is that he was alluding to skeleton organizations existing largely but not entirely on paper, with minimal permanent headquarters staffing—units intended to be activated and staffed only in the event of full-scale wartime mobilization to provide follow-on forces after active low-category reserve divisions are filled out.

If such inactive structures have existed in addition to the Soviet divisions normally identified as such by the West, their elimination will evidently have little or no effect on readiness, as Gorbachev indeed contends. He may have regarded them as "feeding troughs" because he saw them as sinecures for high-ranking personnel, maintained against an eventuality (protracted conventional war) which he regarded as increasingly improbable, but which added nothing to Soviet current combat potential. Yet this change could have some significance for the Soviet longer-term reinforcement potential. This Gorbachev decision was therefore probably resented by many in the Soviet military leadership.

Moreover, there is reason to suspect that the reorganization plans that have now been set in motion are neither completed nor immutable, and could well be greatly affected by future economic and political realities.

Already, General Staff plans for staging the reductions and reshaping the divisions in Eastern Europe have been considerably disrupted by Gorbachev. Despite Minister of Defense Dmitri Yazov's vehement public protests, Gorbachev in July 1989 insisted on early release of 176,000 drafted students, many of whom, according to Yazov, help make up the junior officer corps. Yazov has since bitterly complained that the "overwhelming majority" of the released students "were serving in posts of the most complex specialities, those most important for combat readiness." He asserts that as a result, "for at least a year, and two years in the navy, there will be practically no one to take the place of the discharged student servicemen," adding that "over 700 tanks and 900 infantry fighting vehicles will be left without crews in Groups of Forces alone." Thus, regardless of the General Staff's intentions, for the time being readiness has probably been degraded rather than bolstered as a result of the reduction and restructuring process. Such unpleasant surprises may recur. Dynamic factors are at work in Soviet society that seem likely to continue to erode the stability of the new structure being created.

Finally—and perhaps most disturbing to the General Staff—as part of the policy shifts accompanying the force cuts, Gorbachev has accepted, and even encouraged, rapid and momentous changes in Eastern Europe. These changes are weakening Soviet control mechanisms over the region and placing in question Soviet ability to preserve Eastern Europe's most important military value to the Soviet Union—its service as a buffer zone. The Soviet forces remaining in Eastern Europe have been placed in an increasingly uncomfortable military position by the growing fragility of their East European support mechanisms. The dramatic events in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia in the summer and fall of 1989 have, among other consequences, raised the prospect of a political erosion of the Warsaw Pact infrastructure supporting the Soviet troop presence in Central Europe.

Gorbachev's acceptance of this rapid loosening of the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe is generally seen in the West as powerful additional evidence of the genuineness of the Soviet change of course. While the limits of change tolerable to the Soviet Union are in fact still undefined, Gorbachev does appear to be opting for a radically new definition of Soviet net interests, in which many, although not necessarily all, former Soviet military advantages are being incrementally traded

for new political advantages. What has been at issue within the Soviet elite has been the terms of this trade—that is, the adequacy of the reward to be expected from a given sacrifice of Soviet military advantage.

The recent drastic changes in Eastern Europe, superimposed on the unilateral Soviet force reduction, have given new prominence to the issue of German reunification and have simultaneously greatly strengthened Western perception of a decline in the Soviet military threat. Both considerations will almost certainly contribute to a multiplication of strains within the Western alliance and to a more rapid erosion of willingness to commit resources to the alliance. Indeed, the new events have put an effective end to the political possibility of NATO short-range nuclear missile modernization, and have precipitated a strong tendency throughout the Western alliance to reduce forces unilaterally. To this extent, the hopes Shevardnadze's adherents in the Soviet elite had held out about the anticipated Western reaction to a decisive Soviet change of course have proven justified.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the new atmosphere created by Gorbachev's unilateral force reductions and the radical political changes taking place in Eastern Europe are placing the structure and coherence of the Warsaw Pact under much more severe pressure than that of NATO. The Eastern alliance has much weaker roots than its Western counterpart, and the asymmetrical consequences of change are now visible. Under these circumstances, recriminations are likely to persist in the Soviet Union over whether Gorbachev is allowing the Soviet military position in Central and Eastern Europe to be undermined faster than is justified, despite the reciprocal reaction in the West.

### **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GENERAL STAFF**

The campaign against the General Staff has been in high gear since July 1988, when Shevardnadze convened a large Foreign Ministry conference attended by many of the country's senior national security elite. Shevardnadze publicly insisted on the right of his ministry to "verify" all future major innovations in Soviet defense development. He called for a new mechanism for defense decisionmaking, and attacked as foolish and harmful to Soviet net interests the prejudices of "certain strategists" and the assumptions built into the Soviet military buildup of the Brezhnev era.

The antimilitary salvos fired at this Foreign Ministry conference were accompanied and followed up in the summer and fall of 1988 by

an increasingly outspoken press campaign hostile to traditional General Staff authority and priorities, and military prestige generally, over a wide range of issues. This coordinated and sustained propaganda offensive was led by the ministry's journal *International Affairs*. The onslaught appeared to intensify considerably after the late September shakeup in the Soviet leadership. An important milestone was reached in mid-October, when the Politburo publicly criticized the Ministry of Defense rather severely.

In the aftermath of the 1988 campaign, part of Shevardnadze's objective in his attacks against the General Staff appears to have been obtained, but other aspects of his future relationship with the military have not yet been settled. A long list of steps that were taken at the end of the year had the cumulative effect of confirming that a watershed in the political status of the military leaders had been reached.

Among these steps were the Politburo decisions to implement significant unilateral withdrawals from Eastern Europe, to make overall cuts in the Soviet armed forces, to order a reorganization of the Soviet armed forces, to announce reductions in the Soviet military budget, to ordain severe party criticism of the work of the General Staff, and to arrange extensive changes in the personnel of the Soviet high command. These changes reflected considerable Gorbachev unhappiness with the performance of the General Staff over the past year. Since these events, the military leaders have become involved in simultaneous, ongoing public controversies over such matters as the future structure of the armed forces, the army's relationship with assertive minority nationalities around the Soviet periphery, and the disastrous consequences of the army's employment in an internal police role.

Thus far, one institutional change has emerged as a result of the events of 1988—the establishment of an arrangement for oversight of major military policy decisions by a committee of the new Supreme Soviet. The extent of the influence this committee will have on decisionmaking in practice remains to be seen, but it has already become a factor of some importance in the ongoing political debate.

## **MILITARY RESISTANCE**

When Shevardnadze launched the propaganda offensive against the General Staff in the summer of 1988, the leadership appears to have already reached a decision in principle to make some unilateral force reductions and some reductions in the military budget. It appears, however, that the scope of what was to be done under both headings



remained controversial in the elite for many months. As the Politburo moved during 1988 toward its eventual parallel decisions to unilaterally withdraw six divisions and 5000 tanks from Eastern Europe and to begin cutting the military budget, there was evidently a great deal of resistance from some Soviet military leaders.

This resistance existed despite the fact that many in the Soviet military leadership have seen long-term military problems for the Soviet Union in adherence to the status quo. The concerns centered on the implications of the technological race in threatening the Soviet military's ability to maintain its existing advantage in Europe in the future. The new political and economic pressures from civilians to reduce the threatening Soviet military appearance—and above all, to reduce the degree of emphasis on tanks—may have been welcomed by some who saw an opportunity to accomplish long-obstructed shifts in resources within the military budget in order to give higher priority to a more rapid military assimilation of advanced technology.

Many in the military leadership, however, remained extremely reluctant to give up the traditional instruments of the inherited force advantage, notably the huge surplus of tanks. They were particularly resistant because the military budget as a whole was now under increasing threat. Some far-sighted Soviet military leaders have evidently recognized that some temporary resource transfers from the defense sector were in the long-term interests of the armed services themselves—as the inevitable price that had to be paid to modernize the technology of the civilian economy on whose performance military industry was increasingly dependent. But the terms and value of this tacit deal were always highly ambiguous and far from generally agreed upon within the Defense Ministry. Moreover, as the difficulties of *perestroika* have grown more grave, the ultimate reward that has been held out to the military leadership—in a more technologically advanced civilian industrial base—has tended to recede in time, while the price being demanded of the military leaders in the next decade has tended to grow.

The present chief of the General Staff, General M. A. Moiseyev, has acknowledged that many officers consequently “dragged their feet” in working on implementation of a “defensive defense.” In July 1989, Gorbachev alluded to this resistance in a speech to the Supreme Soviet, asserting that he “began to receive information that the Defense Council and its chairman [Gorbachev] were moving too sharply, and the Marshals requested me to bear this comment in mind.” The most outspoken officer was Deputy Defense Minister and Air Defense Forces commander Army General Ivan Tretyak, who in February 1988 warned in a dramatic interview that the Khrushchev troop cuts of the late

1950s had been disastrous for the Soviet Union—a “rash” step that “dealt a terrible blow at our defense capacity.” He demanded that “any changes in our army should be considered a thousand times before they are decided upon.” A year later, Tretyak violated party discipline by publicly protesting the major cut imposed on his service.

### THE ECONOMIC CATALYST

As this struggle went on, the bad economic news appears to have been a major catalyst in the debate. The leadership was driven in 1988 to challenge the military priority more seriously than before because it simultaneously became aware of both the extent of the political dangers attached to the severe consumer goods shortage and the extent of the enormous and growing budget deficit. Unless drastic steps were taken to deal with that deficit, steps that almost inevitably would have to include significant cuts in the military budget, there was little hope of finding the resources to begin to attack the consumer shortage on a scale remotely commensurate with the gravity of the crisis.

The Politburo had not necessarily become more optimistic about the results to be obtained from this transfer of resources. There were plenty of voices, inside and outside the country, to warn that the resulting benefits would be painful and slow. But even if the payoff in consumer goods production was not equivalent to the sacrifice—not proportionate to the funds transferred from military purposes—the leadership now had little choice but to begin.

Thus it seems indisputable that economic pressures have been of overwhelming importance in driving Soviet conventional force reductions. Although the Soviets value the political advantages Gorbachev seeks to obtain in the West through this process, they are a useful byproduct, not the main factor pressing the Soviet Union toward unilateral cuts and asymmetrical concessions. The main factor has been the grave and worsening state of the Soviet economy.

After the decision to cut the military budget and the forces had been announced, many of the political tensions within the elite over resource allocation to the military became focused on the issue of estimating and disclosing the Soviet military budget. Defense Minister Yazov wished to minimize perception of the extent of the military burden in order to minimize the military’s political vulnerability to pressure for reductions. Opponents associated with the Foreign Ministry wished, for the opposite reason, to maximize the estimate of the burden.

The version of the total military budget eventually announced by Gorbachev in June 1989 was much lower than the version estimated in

the West. It seems likely that the most important reason for this was the radical price distortion involved in Soviet procurement expenses. During questioning before the Armed Services Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in July 1989, Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev made an admission tending to support this hypothesis.

There is increasing reason to believe that up to now many of the prices paid by the Soviet Union for military hardware have been kept artificially low for political reasons. Inadequate profits or even nominal losses suffered by military plants for this reason have apparently been traditionally compensated by state loans that are never paid. These costs were evidently not included in Gorbachev's calculation of Soviet military expenditures. At the same time, part of the potential loss that would be faced by military plants is apparently avoided through the imposition of artificially low prices on their suppliers. The suppliers themselves must then often be subsidized through loans or otherwise compensated in order to remain in operation. Thus, the financial costs engendered by the political priority enjoyed by defense may all along have been broadly diffused outward through the Soviet economy in a manner not recognized in the plan—or in Gorbachev's new depiction of the military budget.

A new calculation that was supposed to reflect military procurement prices better had been expected to be furnished by a general Soviet price reform, but such a reform has now been postponed for several years. In the absence of this reform, and given the pressure from abroad to make a statement about the military budget, the Soviet leadership appears to have consciously decided to issue a budget figure that did not adequately reflect General Yazov's procurement subsidies, and that consequently was attuned much more closely to Yazov's conception of the military burden than to that of his opponents. This announcement will inevitably remain controversial within the Soviet elite, and may indeed be retroactively altered when and if a price reform is eventually carried out.

The 14.2 percent reduction in military spending that Gorbachev has promised to accomplish by 1991 will bite less heavily into Soviet military programs than initially thought in the West, since the amount of the reduction in rubles will be much smaller than Western estimates of the size of the military budget had implied. Nevertheless, the implications for the Soviet armed forces remain quite serious. Force reductions of at least the scope of those announced will be required as part of the measures needed to accomplish the budget cuts, and other military programs could be adversely affected. Indeed, Soviet discussions of the force reorganization now under way suggest that the nature of this reorganization has been significantly affected by the new budget constraints as well as by military and political considerations.

## PROSPECTS

Substantial economic and political pressures are gradually accumulating for larger cuts in both the Soviet military budget and deployed general purpose forces, over and above the cuts already announced. The Soviet leaders have indeed held out the prospect of such cuts over the next decade. There are many variables at play, however, that will affect the scope and timing.

Probably of most immediate importance is how successful will be the short-term efforts the regime has already undertaken to deal with its two most pressing economic headaches—the budget deficit and the consumer goods deficit. If significant progress is not made on these two fronts in the next two or three years, fear of the political consequences could drive the leadership to take more resources from the military, and sooner than it wishes to. In this connection, the series of widespread, spontaneous miners' strikes that began in the Soviet Union in July 1989 has certainly added to the leadership's sense of gathering crisis.

The second most important factor in terms of timing of further reductions is the nature of the reciprocal concessions that the Soviet Union can obtain from the West in the Vienna negotiations on conventional arms reductions. The Soviet political leadership may feel it has a considerable stake in obtaining compensation it can use to justify the large asymmetrical concessions it has already offered in the negotiations. The Gorbachev leadership is particularly likely to feel this way in view of the difficult political struggle it was forced to wage to compel the General Staff to yield half a million men in a preliminary uncompensated reduction advertised within the country as necessary to "prime the pump" for future Western concessions. The Soviet leaders are also probably acutely sensitive to the impression of negotiating weakness created by their grave economic difficulties and their series of past negotiating retreats.

At the same time, however, Gorbachev is also aware that the Soviet negotiating position is in fact not strong. In addition to the economic pressures the Soviets face, the momentous events in Eastern Europe in late 1989 have confronted the Soviet leaders with a spontaneous and unexpected change for the worse in the Soviet military position in the region as a result of the sudden new erosion of the value of the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, this trend toward degeneration of the Pact will go further, since it is being driven by East European internal pressures that Gorbachev has allowed to be released and that he will find difficult to contain in the future. This prospect has added to the pressure on the Soviet Union to obtain a face-saving agreement, one that would

provide an international framework for the changes in the Soviet relationship with Eastern Europe and a measure of Western compensation for Soviet reductions.

### **THE INTERNAL ISSUES AT STAKE**

Meanwhile, the political status of the Soviet military leaders appears exceptionally fluid at present. The campaign Shevardnadze launched against them in the summer of 1988 has achieved some of its objectives, but by no means all. It does not appear, for example, that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has yet achieved the right to "verify" all "major innovations in defense development," claimed for it by Shevardnadze in July 1988.

Since the force cuts and the reorganization began, the Foreign Ministry journal has published the first detailed argument and blueprint for a massive further reduction in the armed forces. In addition, the General Staff has had to contend with growing clamor for radical changes in the force structure in ways that are anathema to most of the senior military leaders. Although there are many variants to these proposals, the two most politically important elements are (a) the demand that conscription be ended entirely and that the Soviet Union shift, like the United States, to an entirely professional army, and (b) the demand that the army be reorganized on a territorial-militia basis, a notion that is incompatible with many of the present missions of the armed forces. Much to the indignation of the Ministry of Defense, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze have given protection and in some cases prominence to certain of the advocates of these radical reforms, and Gorbachev has publicly rebuked General Yazov for his disdainful attitude on these issues.

However, after a long series of humiliating rebuffs and purges and incessant harassment in the press, the military in the spring of 1989 at last found some support within the Soviet leadership—reflected in a Central Committee Secretariat resolution—for its resistance to these pressures. Such support was obtained from former Politburo member Viktor Chebrikov, among others. There is reason to believe that even after Chebrikov's ouster from the leadership, the treatment of the military remains a subject of contention in the Politburo. The struggle over the status and priorities of the General Staff has not ceased, and now centers on the national debate over whether—and when—to move toward a professional army. In this situation, both the nature of the emerging Soviet force reorganization and the future evolution of the Soviet negotiating position on conventional force reductions are likely

to be strongly affected by the ongoing economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union.

The deepening crises in both the Soviet economy and in internal nationality relations have evoked some leadership tendencies toward economic and political retrenchment, and have increased the regime's awareness of its stake in countering the spread of centrifugal antipatriotic and antimilitary sentiment. In the future, the further Gorbachev feels obliged by these pressures to retreat along the conservative path, the more likely the retreats are to have the incidental effect of helping to shore up the political status of the military leadership. On the other hand, throughout 1989 many aspects of Gorbachev's political reform movement were still expanding—notably movement toward freer elections and a more independent Supreme Soviet. These trends are not likely, in the long run, to be helpful to the General Staff's efforts to defend the remnants of its formerly entrenched position. Moreover, the same economic pressures that have induced the regime to take steps that are retreats from economic reform are also continuously pushing the Politburo in the direction of seeking additional help at the expense of the military budget.

Over the next few years, much will depend on whether the leadership can agree to carry out a fundamental price reform that will come to grips with the issue of the subsidies that underlie the Defense Ministry's cheap hardware procurement prices. Such a reform would require adoption of a new version of the military budget that would describe the military share of resources and the military burden on the economy in terms much closer to the picture commonly accepted in the West than to the version of reality presented in Gorbachev's June 1989 depiction of the military budget. Willingness to publish a closer approximation of the truth would probably go hand in hand with willingness to cut more deeply into the military priority thus revealed.

The rate at which the Soviet Union moves in this direction is, however, a matter of fierce dispute in both the military and civilian elites. When and if such a general price reform is eventually prepared, the General Staff will expect its military hardware to become more costly, and will therefore expect to be able to buy fewer copies of each item than heretofore if the military budget is no longer allowed to grow. This in itself would appear to imply some future reductions in the corresponding forces. Even in the absence of a price reform, pressures in that direction are already facing the Ministry of Defense because the economic crisis is generating increasing demands by economic leaders for an end to the subsidies to loss-making plants. It is such direct and indirect subsidies that have up to now sustained the abnormally low prices attributed to military hardware, and in turn the Ministry's

ability to procure weapons on a scale commensurate with the present size of its armed forces.

In addition to this threat to its resources, the Soviet military leadership must now reckon with the long-term implications for its force structure of the growing call on the leadership's instruments of coercion to deal with popular disturbances repeatedly arising on a mass scale in widely separated places. This trend has imposed severe strains on the regime's resources for such purposes. One consequence of this dilemma over the next few years is likely to be a growing inclination by the leadership to divert money and scarce Slav manpower away from the Ministry of Defense to build up and train the forces of the Interior Ministry. The need for policing troops is so vital to the regime that this trend, which has already begun, will almost certainly go on. It is therefore likely to create a new drain on the resources available to the Defense Ministry for its external missions, both in terms of funds and in terms of politically reliable and sufficiently educated Slav manpower.

Because of all these factors, important forces in the Soviet elite—symbolized by Chairman V. L. Lapygin of the new Supreme Soviet Committee on Defense and State Security—now appear to believe that an eventual major contraction of the Soviet conventional forces is inevitable, and should be accepted to protect Soviet capabilities in military R&D. Lapygin—a conservative defense manager who is a friend of the Soviet armed forces (if not to all its leaders), and who seems sincerely dedicated to optimizing Soviet future military strength within the foreseeable economic constraints—appears to see a growing and inevitable resource conflict between preserving the investments and expenditures needed for large Soviet conventional forces, on the one hand, and pursuing advanced military technology sufficient for Soviet needs, on the other. He has taken a public position sharply at odds with the military leadership on this central point, and could prove a formidable factor in the future debate. His views furnish a respectable underpinning for the growing movement advocating change to a smaller, all-professional army.

More important, Lapygin was carefully selected by Gorbachev for a post that was known to have great political sensitivity. His opinions on the military tradeoffs facing the Soviet Union were almost certainly known to Gorbachev before his selection. If Gorbachev prevails, those views could prefigure the evolution of the Soviet elite consensus.

But the military leadership and its sympathizers in the Soviet political elite will fight vigorously to delay and minimize these changes. Most senior Soviet military leaders will continue to oppose a professional army, partly because it would necessarily be a much smaller

army, but above all because it would be detrimental to the massive mobilization capabilities to which they attach great importance. They are likely to be particularly concerned to avoid being forced to hasten the further contraction of the Soviet armed forces in advance of the arrival of those qualitative technological improvements in Soviet hardware that are supposed to compensate for quantitative reductions. The prospect of becoming "leaner but meaner" may indeed have attractions to some in the high command, but not if the rate at which the Soviet armed forces become "leaner" outpaces the rate at which they achieve greater "meanness."









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