The End of a Monolith

The Politics of Military Reform in the Soviet Armed Forces

Eugene B. Rumer
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The End of a Monolith
The Politics of Military Reform in the Soviet Armed Forces

Eugene B. Rumer

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PREFACE

The RAND Corporation is providing analytical assistance to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on the subject of recent developments in Soviet military affairs. This two-year effort seeks to identify and explain the major elements of continuity and change in Soviet military organization, concepts, and goals since the rise of President Gorbachev and his "new political thinking." It looks beyond the rhetoric of glasnost and perestroika toward the underlying motivations that account for the many departures that have occurred in such areas as Soviet declaratory policy, operational doctrine, national security decisionmaking, and defense resource allocation.

This report analyzes the internal conflict within the Soviet armed forces that has developed as a result of the ongoing discussions about a fundamental reorganization into an all-volunteer/professional army or a territorial militia. It follows the rapid progression of the public debate, from its inception in 1988 as an unrealistic idea put forth by little-known radical reformers, to the present stage, where it has become one of the key issues on the Soviet national security agenda. The study identifies the major groups involved in discussions about military reform, examines their arguments, and assesses the impact of these discussions on the Soviet military institution.

The research reported here was conducted in the International Security and Defense Policy Program of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It should be of interest to members of the U.S. defense community concerned with evolving Soviet military policy, civil-military relations, defense policy formulation, and arms control behavior. This report does not reflect events occurring after August 31, 1990.
SUMMARY

The Soviet military is an institution torn by a conflict between the rank-and-file officer corps and the High Command of the armed forces.

Disgruntled about deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, rank-and-file officers have expressed open dissatisfaction with the status quo and, breaking ranks with the High Command, have called for a far-reaching military reform. The central issue of military reform concerns the system of recruitment of the Soviet armed forces. Should the Soviet army abandon the current arrangement—a regular army staffed by career officers and soldiers recruited through mandatory conscription—and become a volunteer/professional army? Debates on this core question have pitted the rank and file, overwhelmingly supportive of the idea, against the High Command, generally critical of it.

The development of the military reform movement was bolstered by the 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, which provided the first reformers with a much-needed independent institutional base and made the movement unstoppable by the High Command alone. Several maverick junior and mid-level military deputies were assigned seats on the newly established Committee for Defense and State Security within the Congress of People's Deputies. Invulnerable to the High Command's retribution because of their status as deputies, they have advanced the military reform agenda in the new legislature.

Their program was made public in the winter of 1990 by one of the most outspoken proponents of military reform, Major Vladimir Lopatin. Its main goal was a transition to a voluntarily recruited "professional army supported by a mobilization reserve on the territorial principle." The transition, which was planned to take four to five years to complete, would be implemented first in the Strategic Rocket Forces, Airborne Troops, the Navy, and the Air Force, and subsequently in the Ground Troops and the Air Defense Troops.

The beginning of the legislative process in the area of military reform marked the end of the High Command's once unchallenged monopoly on representing the entire military institution. Senior officials of the Ministry of Defense were left with no choice but to begin formulating a competing program for military reform.
The idea of military reform and transition to a professional/volunteer military organization has met with a positive response in the rank-and-file officer community because it is seen as a means of redressing the deplorable conditions in the Soviet military. The key factor motivating most Soviet officers to support military reform is their declining standard of living. The military community has split along the “haves versus the have-nots” line. An entire class that was once considered among the most privileged in Soviet society, sheltered from the challenges of day-to-day life, has long been suffering under poor living conditions that until recently had been unmentioned in the Soviet press. For example, the rate of growth of officers’ salaries during the 30-year period 1960–1990 was only half that of an average salary in the Soviet economy as a whole. Nearly half of officers’ families live on monthly incomes of 100 rubles per family member, or, according to some estimates, below the poverty line.

The resolve of many Soviet officers who advocate military reform has been reinforced by revelations of the luxurious lifestyles enjoyed by members of the High Command, who have resisted the reform. Soviet media have described the country houses built by generals using defense accounts as personal slush funds, as well as their cars, airplanes, resort facilities, servants, and other privileges.

In addition to the falling standard of living, another powerful stimulus for military reform has been provided by an unprecedented decline in morale within the armed forces. Part of this was an outcome of the unhappy experience of the Afghan war, heightened by the soldier’s loss of prestige among the general population, a phenomenon fueled by widespread perceptions of corruption in the military.

Another important consideration making the status quo unacceptable and providing a strong push for military reform has been the deterioration of ethnic relations in the USSR. The ethnic problem poses a twofold challenge to the armed forces: first, it concerns the problem of recruiting conscripts for extraterritorial—outside the home district—service from all union republics, many of whom consider the Soviet army an occupation army; second, it leads to the unwelcome mission of quashing ethnic unrest.

The current system of mandatory conscription has proved increasingly ineffective. Draft resistance has reached overwhelming proportions. Soviet military officials revealed the following statistics in June of 1990: in 1987 there were 771 incidents of draft evasion nationwide, 1107 in 1988, and 6647 in 1989. As of June 10, 1990, only 26 percent of the unionwide call-up of conscripts (which began in May and was scheduled to end in early June) had been completed. Of
those recruits who do report for military service, many still present a problem for the armed forces: they make very poor soldiers. Besides their questionable political reliability and loyalty to the regime, members of many ethnic minorities cannot understand simple commands issued in Russian.

Another aspect of the ethnic problem is the mission of putting down domestic unrest. The armed forces' attitude toward this mission has been mixed. The rank and file has publicly condemned the use of the armed forces in domestic policing operations. It is seen as dishonorable and threatening to destroy the bond between the army and the people. Unwilling to compromise this bond, many officers have chosen to resign from the military.

Although representatives of the High Command have also condemned the use of the military in domestic policing operations, a number of senior military officials, including Generals Varennikov and Rodionov and Marshal Akhromeyev, have displayed a disturbing propensity to rely on force to solve domestic political and ethnic crises.

Proposals put forth by the advocates of military reform are designed to prevent the use of the armed forces in domestic policing operations, thus making the concept of military reform even more attractive to the rank and file.

Irrespective of the preferences of the military rank and file, the status quo is unacceptable from the point of view of the Soviet state, which is threatened with the loss of a functioning military machine. The existing military organization is disintegrating, and if this process is not stopped the Soviet military will be able to fulfill few of its missions.

Faced with a powerful challenge from within its own province, the Soviet High Command has found itself increasingly isolated in its opposition to military reform. Unlike lower-level officers, members of the Soviet High Command met initial proposals for military reform with a solid wall of opposition. They criticized every alternative to the existing regular army. But as the debate progressed, the coalition of senior military officers opposed to military reform began to suffer from occasional defections and even outright public reversals by some of its members. The growing popularity of the military reform movement among the rank-and-file officer corps, along with changes in the national security decisionmaking process, pushed the Soviet High Command toward grudging acceptance of the idea of military reform.

The Ministry of Defense began developing its own alternative program for reform. A draft of it was completed in April 1990 and made
public by Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov. Although it may have represented concessions from the High Command, the program ignored many of the major issues raised by rank-and-file military reformers and appeared to be an attempt to dilute their proposals. It reflected most clearly the High Command's continuing foot-dragging on one of reform's central issues, which for many has supplanted all its other aspects: the transition to a volunteer/professional army.

Given the acrimonious climate that has surrounded the military reform debate from its inception, and the building political pressure for reform, the High Command's program did little to heal the split within the military community. Instead, it set the stage for a new confrontation.

The debate about military reform has become inextricable from the broader process of overall political transformation in the Soviet Union. The final results of the military reform process will depend on the outcome of negotiations about the new Union Treaty, which will determine the future composition and organization of the Soviet Union and its constituent republics and thus the armed forces.

Nonetheless, it is safe to predict that a combination of the new political climate in the Soviet Union and powerful political support at both the grassroots and high levels has all but assured a victory for the radical reform movement and the defeat of the High Command on this key issue.

But the passage of military reform legislation and the parliamentary victory of radical reformers is not likely to heal the split within the Soviet military institution. The High Command has been discredited in the eyes of both the rank-and-file military community and the entire Soviet society. For Soviet society at large, the leadership of the Ministry of Defense has become a symbol of corrupt, conservative thinking and a source of danger of a right-wing military coup.

It is very likely that in its growing isolation from the bulk of the military community and from the rest of Soviet society, the current leadership of the Ministry of Defense is fighting its last battle. In the course of it the generals have denied themselves any significant base of support and are thus increasingly expendable from the point of view of the country's political leadership.

In the expendability of the High Command lies a potential cure to the intramilitary split and an opportunity for a radical transformation of the military institution and national security decisionmaking in the Soviet Union. The acrimony of both the reform debate within the military community and the dialogue between representatives of the High Command and other political actors seems to have left no room
for compromise and reconciliation. Under these circumstances, the political leadership of the Soviet Union will be presented with an opportunity to purge the High Command at a small cost but with a huge benefit, which would include the restoration of the integrity of the military and the defeat of a vociferous and potentially dangerous political opposition. A wholesale purge of the High Command would also permit the installation of a civilian leadership in the Ministry of Defense, thus denying the uniformed military elite a powerful voice in national security decisionmaking and taking a major step toward the civilianization of Soviet national security policymaking that began in the early years of the Gorbachev regime.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet military is an institution torn by a profound conflict between the rank-and-file officer corps and the High Command of the Soviet armed forces. Since the beginning of Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as the leader of the Soviet Union, no sector of Soviet society has faced a more profound challenge than the military. External challenges to the defense establishment have come from institutions and individuals and have ranged across the entire spectrum of national security issues, from the military's monopolistic control of the defense decisionmaking process to the negative impact of compulsory military service on Soviet youth. But glasnost has also revealed the existence of a number of internal challenges to the military establishment. Disgruntled about deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, rank-and-file officers have expressed open dissatisfaction with the status quo and, breaking ranks with the High Command, have called for a far-reaching program of military reform.

The concept of military reform calls for a fundamental reassessment of Soviet policies and procedures in all areas of national security, including defense decisionmaking, definition of threat, strategy and tactics, weapons acquisition, and so forth. But the core issue of reform that has polarized the military institution has to do with the system of personnel recruitment. Should the Soviet army abandon the current arrangement—a regular army staffed by career officers and soldiers recruited through mandatory conscription—and become a volunteer/professional army? This question has overshadowed all other aspects of military reform to the extent that the very words "military reform" have become synonymous with the introduction of a volunteer/professional army.

Beginning in 1988, the issue of military reform has appeared with ever-increasing frequency on the Soviet national security agenda. Debates about it have polarized the Soviet military institution. Reform advocacy has been undertaken by a coalition that includes rank-and-file military officers, civilian defense analysts, and representatives of the civilian population at large who are openly opposed to the draft. Resistance to military reform has come mainly from the High Command.

For rank-and-file Soviet officers, military reform holds the promise of better pay and better living conditions. They find the prospective
role of "military professional" appealing as well, because they expect it to guarantee them a higher status in Soviet society and, as many believe, assure their nonparticipation in the increasingly unpopular suppression of domestic unrest.

Representatives of the High Command have opposed military reform on ideological, economic, and military grounds. They have argued that a volunteer/professional army would cost more, be unable to assure the supply of trained reserves needed in case of mobilization, and suffer from the poor morale and low reliability that are common to all armies recruited from mercenaries. Beneath these publicly stated arguments there is another reason for the High Command’s opposition to a volunteer/professional army—namely, the realization that cuts in the size of the armed forces will inevitably accompany such a transition, and those cuts will mean a smaller military establishment and fewer perks and privileges for senior officers.

The military reform debate has pitted the rank and file against the High Command. As discussions of military reform continue, the two sides drift farther and farther apart. The rank and file, driven by the worsening service and living conditions, is increasingly antagonized by the High Command’s seeming disregard of these hardships, its denial of the need for a fundamental military reform, and its attempts to replace proposals for real reform with surrogate measures designed to preserve the status quo. Each side in this debate is defending its fundamental interests, and the outcome of the reform debate, like a zero-sum game, is not likely to result in a compromise solution.

This report traces the history of the debate about military reform from its inception to its current status as one of the dominant issues on the Soviet national security agenda. It identifies key proponents and opponents of military reform and their principal arguments, follows the evolution of their positions, and identifies the key factors that have stimulated the military reform movement. The report concludes with an assessment of the impact of the debate on the Soviet military institution.
II. SETTING THE STAGE

One of the first proposals for restructuring the armed forces appeared in November 1988 in the weekly *Moscow News*. Its author was the previously unknown Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr Savinkin, who received wide acclaim after the article’s publication and reports of it in Western media. Savinkin maintained that the process of change in the military sector had fallen behind the rapid reforms that were under way in Soviet society as a whole. Only an “urgent” military reform program could correct this deplorable situation. The Soviet Union was in no danger of being attacked, claimed Savinkin, and thus its threat-free external environment created favorable conditions for restructuring the armed forces in accordance with the new defensive Soviet military doctrine and strategy.

The Soviet army, Savinkin wrote, had to be organized into a “professional-militia” force, with a small core group of highly trained professionals and a “network of local militia.” This structure would be fully adequate to meet any external and internal security contingency and would be consistent with the principles of reasonable sufficiency and the defensive reorientation of Soviet military strategy.

Using the favorite tactic of Soviet debaters, Savinkin sought to legitimate his arguments with the help of the “classics of Marxism-Leninism” and “true” interpretations of the revolutionary experience. He maintained that a correct application of Marxist-Leninist teachings mandates the replacement of a regular army with a militia. The establishment of a regular army during the civil war was a temporary aberration resulting from the extreme circumstances. The military reform of 1924 corrected it, as the Soviet army was cut from 5 million to 562,000.

But, according to Colonel Savinkin, the development of a professional-militia army in the USSR was cut short because of Stalin’s rise to power. The dictatorial regime required the presence of a large standing army. Savinkin even ascribed the tragic events of World War II’s opening phase to Stalin’s decision to organize the Soviet army as a regular rather than a professional-militia force. In a

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
statement that was most likely a product of the debate's rhetoric rather than his own true beliefs, he attributed the nearly fatal outcome of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union to the fact that the latter had a regular army.

A five-million strong peacetime regular army allowed Nazi troops inside our country as far as Moscow. . . . The army had to be recreated and trained in the course of the war; the partisan movement, the People Volunteers, and a universal military education had to be organized from scratch. All that testifies to the fact that consistent modernization of the professional-militia system could have, if not prevented the Nazi aggression altogether, then at least repulsed it sooner and with significantly fewer losses.4

Implicit in this paragraph, which must have insulted many senior Soviet military commanders, is also the argument that it took something like a professional-militia army to bring the Soviet Union back from the brink of disaster and win the war.

Needless to say, Savinkin argued, the transition to a professional-militia army would solve many of the Soviet Union's current problems just as it had (so he implied) saved the country in World War II. This reform would free up substantial material and human resources at home and rid the USSR of its menacing image abroad. The new army would serve as an effective and credible deterrent, contributing to a more stable international situation. As a people's army, it would also enjoy closer ties to and command greater respect from the Soviet people.5

Although Savinkin's proposal was the most widely covered in the media, it has not been the only proposal of its kind. A number of daring ideas and alternatives to the current size and shape of the Soviet military have been raised by civilians and military officers. One of the most notable events in this area was a roundtable discussion organized in the fall of 1988 by a fringe publication of the Soviet Peace Committee, 20th Century and Peace.6 This meeting was attended by several officers from the Military-Political Academy and the Main Political Administration (MPA) of the armed forces, including the by

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4Ibid.
5Ibid.
6This publication was shut down in early 1989 for being too outspoken, but it quickly reopened on instructions "from above." Subsequently, however, the journal was publicly criticized by the Party leadership for its harsh antimilitary articles.
then well-known Colonel Savinkin, along with a group of civilian academics, journalists, and Foreign Ministry representatives.\(^7\)

The opening statement by Major General N. Chaldymov set the tone for the discussion that followed. In preparing for the meeting, Chaldymov said, he had outlined the following questions that needed to be addressed: "Do we need an army? If the answer is yes, what type of army do we need?"\(^8\) Predictably, Chaldymov's own response to the first question was affirmative, although this view was not shared by everyone present at the meeting. The second question generated an interesting discussion among the participants.

Among the key issues raised by the panelists was the question of how to understand the concepts of threat and security in the modern world. Whence the threat to the Soviet Union? Was it military, political, or economic? What did the Soviet Union need to meet this threat? What kinds of forces were necessary?

Civilian members of the panel had a bright outlook on the Soviet Union's security situation: they maintained that the external threat to the country was minimal. The real threat to national security was in the Soviet Union's domestic economic degradation. It causes damage that cannot be repaired or compensated for by military means. The military is a secretive institution, charged the civilians; it refuses to conduct a constructive dialogue with the civilian community. But national security cannot be treated as an institutional prerogative. The army's monopolistic grip on it must be broken; the subject must come into the spotlight of public debate.

Military panelists replied that it would be unfair to single them out for blame, that the army was merely a reflection of the society as a whole. The armed forces, they claimed, were ready to be an active participant in perestroika and to conduct a constructive dialogue with representatives of other sectors of Soviet society.

The roundtable discussion amounted to nothing less than a call for military reform. The civilians argued that with the demise of real and imagined external threats to Soviet security, the time had come to implement major reductions in the size of the armed forces. A future Soviet army, these representatives of liberal intelligentsia agreed, would have to be a professional army. Such is the imperative of modern technology: only professionals will be able to participate in future military operations conducted by sophisticated and technologically advanced, albeit smaller, military machines.

\(^7\)"Armiya i obshchestvo," XX Vek i Mûr, No. 9, 1988, pp. 18–28.
\(^8\)Ibid. p. 18.
Military representatives agreed with this idea. General Chaldymov said that the Soviet Union no longer had to maintain its armed forces according to organizational principles developed in the immediate post–World War II era. The new structure and organizational principles of the armed forces would have to correspond to the current political, economic, and social situation in the country. The final resolution of these issues, Chaldymov suggested, should be accomplished in the course of an open public discussion.9

This frank (for an active-duty officer) statement about a sensitive political and military subject met with no objections from other uniformed members of the panel. Their subsequent comments and disagreements with General Chaldymov focused not on the question of whether or not to reform the armed forces in principle, but on which alternative structure should be adopted. Some panelists, such as Colonel Savinkin, extolled the virtues of a cadre-militia system as it existed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and as was outlined in his article in Moscow News. Another officer argued that a small professional volunteer force would be suitable for the Soviet Union in peacetime. Yet a third military representative suggested the concept of a small professional force combined with a separate establishment responsible for the training of militia and reservists. Irrespective of any of these options, all military panelists agreed that the “professionalization” of the Soviet army was inevitable.10

Such bold statements by uniformed advocates of military reform certainly did not reflect the consensus of the entire defense establishment. In an afterword to the panel’s proceedings, the journal’s editors wrote that a few days after the meeting,

high-level military authorities expressed their disapproval of such discussions publicly from a high government platform.11

Yet the negative attitude of the Soviet army’s top brass failed to deter further discussions about military reform. On the contrary, the reform movement has become bolder and more authoritative, involving representatives of both the civilian and military communities and moving from left-wing media outlets (XX Vek i Mir, the television show Vzglyad (Look), and the liberal weekly Ogonyok) to mainstream

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9Ibid. p. 22.
11Ibid. p. 28.
publications with such distinguished institutional affiliations as the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12}Some of the most interesting ideas have appeared in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ monthly \textit{Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’}. For example, an interview given to that journal by Vitaliy Shlykov, the author of a provocative series of articles on the NATO–Warshaw Pact tank asymmetry, contained a daring challenge to military professionals in general and to the MPA in particular. Shlykov referred to their arguments as expressions of inertia and incompetence. The General Staff, the MPA, and the services are reported to be at work on the new defensive strategy, he claimed, but these organizations are not capable of dealing with this task, which entails the formulation of economic and political programs and recommendations to the leadership on how to prepare the country for war. Shlykov called for a wide-ranging military reform that would entail the abandonment of the concept of a regular army; the appointment of a civilian to the post of minister of defense; introduction of civilian controls on military spending; creation of an independent civilian intelligence and analytical service similar to the CIA; and establishment of closer ties between defense industries and the civilian sector of the economy. See V. Shlykov, “Pyat’ vecherov s laurateami,” \textit{Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’} (International affairs), No. 4, 1989, pp. 22–26.
III. FROM HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS TO A PROGRAM FOR ACTION

LOOKING FOR HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

One of the boldest early appeals for restructuring the armed forces was written by an active-duty military officer, the previously unknown Lieutenant Colonel G. Alimurzayev. Both the publication of the article in the MFA’s monthly Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’ (International affairs) and the provocative nature of the author’s deliberate challenge to the prevailing Soviet historical and ideological orthodoxy indicate the existence of powerful institutional support for his views within the ministry.¹

Drawing a distinct analogy with the new, strictly defensive Soviet military doctrine enunciated by Gorbachev in 1987, and thus establishing a historical antecedent for military reform, Alimurzayev wrote that the key accomplishment of the October Revolution of 1917 was the establishment of a state with a “strictly defensive military doctrine,” a state that was not even supposed to have a regular army. The need for a regular army was generated by the civil war, which was merely a brief anomaly. According to Alimurzayev, the prevailing view among the founders of the Soviet state was that a workers’ militia would be the only form of military organization consistent with the defensive nature of the new state’s military doctrine. A militia of workers and peasants was considered the most efficient form of military organization, one that would allow military training without interrupting peaceful labor but would at the same time unite citizens in a common cause. Such an army would have little, if any, offensive capability, but it would have great defensive resiliency. At the end of the civil war, the army was cut from several million to under 600,000. According to Colonel Alimurzayev, the combination of a small cadre and militia system, instituted in conjunction with that cut, offered the only opportunity to avoid immense military expenditures and provide military training to the masses. This reform was implemented, Alimurzayev stressed, when the country was alone and surrounded by hostile powers—clearly a much more vulnerable posi-

tion in the international arena than the Soviet Union's current standing.²

However, the militia system did not last. In what must have been a deliberate insult to the military establishment, given the current anti-Stalinist climate, Alimurzayev attributed the militia system's demise and the rise of the regular army, with its offensive strategy, to the rise of the Stalinist dictatorship. He refuted the Soviet army's claim to being a people's army. A regular army cannot be a people's army, Alimurzayev countered, because it is uniquely suited for the support of an aggressive and dictatorial regime. A militia-based army, which is truly a people's army because it cannot be under the political control of just one person or group, was unacceptable to Stalin.

According to Alimurzayev, a key requirement in Stalin's blueprint for a regular army was its ability to control the peasants and put down their rebellions against the regime's agricultural policies of excessive taxation and collectivization, which a militia-based army would not have been able to accomplish. Hence, a regular army emerged, becoming a weapon against the peasant class in the hands of the dictator.³

It is hard to overestimate the political implications of this accusation, particularly in the midst of ongoing debates in the Soviet Union about the fate of the Russian peasant and the future of Soviet and Russian agriculture. Collectivization and the regime's subsequent agricultural policies have now been recognized as some of the darkest chapters in the history of the Soviet state. In effect, they eradicated the Russian peasant class and led to the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Russian villages. In today's political climate, to accuse the regular army of having been a participant in (let alone the key perpetrator of) these ghastly deeds is to deny it any legitimacy and to put it squarely in the camp of enemies of perestroika.

According to Alimurzayev, the bankruptcy of the regular army concept and its offensive strategy was demonstrated by the tragic events of World War II's initial phase. The regular army, he wrote, suffered tremendous losses and allowed the aggressor to reach the gates of Moscow. The Soviet people paid a high price for the regular army's adherence to an offensive strategy and neglect of a defensive strategy. That cult of the offensive, Alimurzayev concluded, has persisted in Soviet military thinking in the postwar period. The country contin-

ues to carry its heavy economic burden, which can be alleviated only by adopting a defensive strategy and implementing a transition to a militia system. 4

Colonel Alimurzayev developed and documented the key arguments that had already been put forth by Colonel Savinkin in his Moscow News article, and in so doing he presented a historical, political, economic, and military rationale for a cadre-militia system. If one follows both authors’ logic, such a system would be an ideal match for the defensive strategy and doctrine adopted by the Soviet leadership in 1987. The publication of Alimurzayev’s article in the MFA’s journal, undoubtedly sanctioned at the ministry’s highest levels, is indicative of strong institutional support for his views. When placed in the context of Foreign Minister and Politburo member Eduard Shevardnadze’s attempts to usurp some of the military establishment’s key responsibilities with respect to restructuring the armed forces, 5 the article signaled the addition of a powerful political and institutional ally to the ranks of military reform advocates. The idea of military reform could no longer be brushed aside as a naive proposal put forth by radical civilians and maverick military officers.

BUILDING A PROGRAM FOR ACTION

The elections to the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies and the Supreme Soviet in 1989 gave the reform movement a much-needed independent institutional base as well as momentum, which made it unstoppable by the High Command. 6 A group of maverick junior and mid-level officers elected to the congress have been assigned seats on the Committee on Defense and State Security. These officers, invulnerable to retribution from the High Command because of their status as deputies, have advanced the military reform agenda in the new legislature.

A group of seventeen Supreme Soviet deputies advocating military reform formulated and made public its program in late winter 1990.

4 Ibid., pp. 120–122.

5 See, for example, Shevardnadze’s speech to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff following Gorbachev’s December 7, 1988, address to the United Nations. Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del, No. 23, 1988, supplement.

6 The degree to which this development has annoyed the High Command is reflected in a recent incident. At the All-Union officers’ meeting, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov issued a loud order to the leader of the maverick military deputies, Major Lopatin: “And you, comrade Lopatin, sit down. This is not the Supreme Soviet for you . . .” See “Kakaya armiya nam nuzhna,” Ogonyok, No. 9, 1990.
The group’s leader—one of the most outspoken proponents of military reform, Major Vladimir Lopatin—outlined the key aspects of the program in February 1990 in an interview with the Komsomol daily *Komsomol’skaya pravda.* The program quickly became known as the “Project of the Seventeen.”

According to Major Lopatin, the main goal of the “Project of the Seventeen” is a gradual transition to a voluntarily recruited “professional army supported by a mobilization reserve on the territorial principle.” Lopatin compared this arrangement to a “powerful fist consisting of uniformed professionals, and reservists training ‘at home.’” The transition, which is planned to take four to five years to complete, would be implemented first in the Strategic Rocket Forces, Airborne Troops, the Navy, and the Air Force, and subsequently in the Ground Troops and the Air Defense Troops.

Lopatin has argued that such an army would be more economical and efficient from the military point of view than the existing Soviet army, which relies on a compulsory draft and as a result suffers from poor quality of recruits and insufficient time for training.

Who said that maintenance of a professional army (I ask you not to confuse them with mercenaries, otherwise it will turn out that our coalminers and professors are mercenaries too) will cost more? . . . Nobody has calculated the damage from breakdowns and accidents of the most complex combat equipment which are the “fault of the personnel,” as they are elegantly described in [official] documents. Having visited the troops I see: officers fulfill the duties of mechanics and technicians more and more, in other words, they are busy doing what soldiers and sergeants are supposed to do. Are they looking for [extra] work? No, they are afraid to let [soldiers and sergeants] near the equipment.

Major Lopatin has not denied that even a gradual transition to a professional army would involve substantial costs. However, he has maintained that the transition would not necessarily add to the overall defense burden on the Soviet economy. Substantial savings resulting from military reform would make funds available for the shift. According to the program outlined by Lopatin, the savings would come from large reductions in the size of the armed forces, cutbacks in the number of military academies, introduction of a more efficient

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8“Proekt semnadtsati.”
system of training of military personnel, changes in command struc-
ture, greater reliance on civilian specialists, greater reliance on dual-
use [civilian and military] technologies, and cutbacks in the amount
of perks and privileges enjoyed by the High Command.

The submission of this program for consideration by the Supreme
Soviet's Committee on Defense and State Security launched the leg-
islative process in the area of military reform—a process that could
not be stopped or ignored by the High Command. This event marked
the end of the High Command's previously unchallenged monopoly on
representation of the entire military institution. Senior officials of
the Ministry of Defense were left with no choice but to begin formul-
ating a competing program for military reform. The stage for a new
era in Soviet intramilitary relations was set.
IV. THE DRIVING FACTORS BEHIND THE MILITARY REFORM MOVEMENT

The idea of military reform and transition to a volunteer/professional military organization has met with approval in the rank-and-file officer community because of difficult conditions within the Soviet military. The key factor motivating most Soviet officers to support military reform is their declining standard of living. In addition to the socioeconomic factors, Soviet officers favor military reform because of a host of problems that are not directly connected with their material well-being but nonetheless make the status quo untenable for many of them. The military community has been divided on many of these issues, sometimes along a “haves versus have-nots” line, and more often than not along a High Command versus the rank and file line. This section explores key factors that created the present unacceptable situation and thus stimulated the military reform movement.

THE ECONOMIC FACTORS

A key factor behind many Soviet officers' unhappiness is an unprecedented decline in their standard of living. To an outside observer, one of the most startling revelations of the current campaign of openness has been the discovery that the Soviet officer corps has to endure substandard living conditions. An entire class that was once considered one of the most privileged groups in Soviet society, sheltered from the challenges of day-to-day life, has in fact long been suffering under conditions that until recently were unmentioned in the Soviet press.

A complete list of the armed forces' collective grievances about deplorable living conditions could fill many volumes and is beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, several examples are worth citing, without which it would be impossible to imagine the challenges of day-to-day life faced by members of the Soviet military. Complaints come from every corner of the Soviet Union and every branch of the armed forces, from junior lieutenants to colonels, active-duty officers and retirees, family members of military personnel, and veterans of
the Afghan War.¹ The subjects of their complaints range from unemployment among officers’ wives and the lack of housing on or off base, to unavailability of health care, lack of artificial limbs for wounded Afghan veterans, and rude treatment by bureaucrats, whose refusal to help may be accompanied by the words: “What do you want from me? I didn’t send you to Afghanistan.”

Although official Soviet statistics describing the standard of living of Soviet rank-and-file officers are incomplete, they nonetheless make it possible to draw a disturbing picture of life in Soviet military garrisons. According to one Soviet published account, the rate of growth of officer salaries during the 30-year period from 1960 to 1990 was only half that of an average salary within the Soviet economy as a whole. Nearly half of officers’ families live on monthly incomes of 100 rubles per family member, or only two-thirds of the officially published average per-family-member income of 153 rubles. Official (and by most accounts too low) estimates of the poverty line in the Soviet Union range from 84–120 rubles per person per month.²

A startling account of military life appeared in the popular weekly Ogonyok. It focused on the conditions at a remote air base, home to a wing of Backfire bombers. The base is situated in a region with a harsh climate: in winter, the temperature is often minus 40 degrees centigrade; in summer, it can reach 40 degrees centigrade above zero.

The introduction of new officers to the base begins with the search for housing. An officer is considered lucky if he is single and can get a bed in the officers’ dormitory, which offers none of the most basic comforts one takes for granted in an advanced industrialized nation: private rooms, hot water showers, well-stocked kitchens, cafeterias. The dormitory buildings are run down, and even though they belong to the base, residents must pay for all the repairs out of their own pockets. Often they are forced to make trips to the local landfill to scavenge discarded heating pipes, faucets, and other supplies for use in dormitory repairs.


Food is also a problem. The base cafeteria is usually closed when officers return to the dormitory after a long shift. The author of the *Ogonyok* article blamed poor diet for the abnormally high incidence of stomach ulcers among officers, whose initial selection for service in the air force depended on excellent health.3

Married officers are worse off than their single colleagues. Finding housing for the family is a nightmare. Waiting lists are years, even decades long. Finding employment for officers’ wives is an extremely difficult problem at this remote base.4 As a rule, wives don’t work. The availability and quality of medical care is very low. Pediatric care is altogether unavailable.

No wonder, notes the *Ogonyok* author, that many officers try to retire as early as they can. Because one year of service counts for two at this base, this often means that officers at the age of 30–35, no matter how much they love flying, find life on the base too much of a deterrent to remaining in the service.5

The terrible circumstances at the air base described in the *Ogonyok* article are not exceptional; they exist throughout the Soviet armed forces. The conditions that drive young officers out of the air force are prevalent throughout the ground forces, the navy, the air defense troops, and the strategic rocket forces. No branch of the armed forces has been spared the difficulty and humiliation of day-to-day life in exchange for a lifetime commitment to military service. Now, in the era of openness and expression of general discontent in Soviet society, military professionals have finally received an outlet for their decades-old frustrations.

The lack of “social protection” is the key theme of military spokesmen complaining about the hardships of day-to-day life. It stems from the argument frequently made in the Soviet media by active-

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3Evidently, the growing rate of premature retirement for health reasons among pilots has become a cause for alarm among Soviet air force leaders. An article in *Krasnaya zvezda* written by an air force physician, Major General V. Ponomarenko, was devoted to the problem of declining health among Soviet military pilots. Recent trends suggest that a number of diseases that can prevent pilots from flying have become “younger,” or, in other words, their incidence among younger pilots has increased. Highly skilled pilots remain on flight status for only 10–12 years. The general attributes this to poor occupational and safety conditions—excessive noise levels, heat, and turbulence—which often exceed all established norms, as well as to the situation on the ground, where proper care and rehabilitation facilities are often unavailable. V. Ponomarenko, “Tsena letnego dolgoletiya,” *Krasnaya zvezda*, July 16, 1989, p. 3.

4For a candid description of the conditions and status of women in the Soviet armed forces, including both officers’ wives and female military personnel, see L. Medvedeva, “Zhenshchina i armiya,” *Znamya*, No. 2, 1990.

duty and retired officers that they and their dependents constitute an entire class that has been denied any social support, and that Soviet society as a whole has not honored its obligations to members of the armed forces in exchange for their service. “We ask you to raise with [utmost urgency] the question of social protection of officers [and their dependents],” wrote a group of Krasnaya zvezda readers in an open letter to their representative to the Congress of People’s Deputies, which was published on the front page of the newspaper.¹

Frustration with the absence of solutions to this situation and with the fact that social protection for military professionals and their dependents has not received a satisfactory hearing in the legislature was reflected in Krasnaya zvezda articles during and after the congress. In addition to publishing angry letters from readers, the newspaper's editors opened its pages to those military delegates who did not get a chance to address the congress. A special section of the paper entitled “Please Include This in the Stenographic Report of the Congress” was devoted to airing the grievances of delegates and their voters.

Thus, People’s Deputy Major General M. Surkov wrote an article in Krasnaya zvezda under the title “Guarantee Social Protection,” which is worth paraphrasing at some length. Military delegates have not been given enough time to speak at the congress, complained Surkov, but they have a lot to say to the nation. Take, for example, the question of defense spending: without any doubts, it should be cut. But the military sector still faces tremendous challenges. High on the list is the issue of housing, of which “catastrophic” shortages exist throughout the armed forces.² Other problems, such as spouse employment, may appear minor when compared to more imposing tasks the congress must address. But to people who have to wait years to get a job and, because of such forced unemployment, are denied the right to a pension, it is no small matter.

¹”Telegrammy v nomer,” Krasnaya zvezda, June 6, 1989.
²The extent of the housing crisis, especially among retiring officers, was the subject of an unprecedented 1989 article in Krasnaya zvezda, which reported that a society of homeless veterans had existed in the city of Ulyanovsk (Lenin’s birthplace) since 1988. The article, entitled “On the Verge of Despair,” began with a heartbreaking story of a retired colonel living through the final days of his battle with cancer. The doctors could no longer do anything for him and told the officer’s wife, “We are powerless. Take the patient home.” The woman, who has suffered for a long time and has cried out all her tears, listened to these disturbing words and absently stared at the window... “Where can we go from here? We are homeless,” [she] replied after a long pause. M. Guk, “Na poroge otchayaniya,” Krasnaya zvezda, July 21, 1989.
Military officers are widely perceived as well-to-do people, Surkov noted. But consider junior officers, who make up the majority of the officer corps: Their average salary is 250 rubles; their spouses remain unemployed (or, at best, underemployed) for years; and they have no apartments. These people live in poverty, and when 10 billion rubles are to be cut from the defense budget, some of that money must be spent on improving their living conditions. Such a step, Surkov argued, would put an end to a stream of retirement applications from noncommissioned and junior officers.\(^8\)

In addition to the harsh realities of day-to-day life, the dissatisfaction among Soviet officers is fueled by comparisons with their counterparts in the West. Although some information about service conditions in the United States and other Western countries may reach the Soviet military community in a somewhat distorted form, that distortion is likely to make the comparison even more depressing for people who live in conditions of abject poverty. In the words of one author, “Naturally, having received the opportunity to compare their service with service in the United States, people draw conclusions.”\(^9\)

It is not hard to imagine what conclusions they draw. An article published in the weekly *Argumenty i fakty* (Arguments and facts, circulation 20 million copies) described service conditions in the U.S. military. The article provided only facts and numbers with no commentary—the only reason to comment would have been to try to somehow soften the impact of those numbers on the readers. The article revealed that in the U.S. armed forces, which have recruited on a volunteer basis since 1973, a private with one to two years of service would get $699–$784 per month.\(^10\) A career sergeant with many years of experience could make as much as $2460 per month.\(^11\) Noncommissioned officers, the article noted, benefit from special attention accorded to them by higher command echelons, for they shoulder almost the entire burden of training and enforcing discipline among enlisted personnel. On the whole, the article stressed, the military leadership in the United States makes a special effort to “instill in enlisted personnel the feeling of social protection” or, in other words,

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\(^10\)These figures, seen by officers whose average salary is 200–300 rubles per month, should be considered within the context of Soviet black market exchange rates, which reportedly can be as high as 20 rubles per dollar, or even more.

\(^11\)These numbers exceed by far the monthly pay of most Soviet officers (including many senior officers and generals).
a sense of economic security. This is done with the help of monthly increases in salaries to compensate for inflation, variable housing allowances, food subsidies, and special reenlistment bonuses, especially in military specialties with a shortage of skilled personnel. The limit on such reenlistment bonuses, the article concluded, is set at $20,000.\textsuperscript{12}

There can be little doubt that this information, appearing in one of the most popular and provocative media outlets during a period of widespread discontent among the Soviet armed forces, has been circulated extensively among Soviet officers and noncommissioned officers, adding further insult to the injury caused by their miserable existence. To an average Soviet officer unfamiliar with day-to-day life in the United States, the numbers cited in Argumenty i fakty must seem astronomical indeed. References to the high priority accorded in the United States to “social protection” of rank-and-file personnel strike a familiar and provocative note in the minds of an audience accustomed to hearing complaints about the lack of the very same protection for Soviet officers and their families.

Furthermore, the article’s reference to the volunteer basis of recruitment in the U.S. armed forces surely received special attention. At a time when military reform had become a topic of intense debate in the Soviet Union, the image of a prosperous, all-volunteer U.S. armed forces must have added fuel to the fire of discontent among Soviet military personnel and intensified their interest in the concept of a volunteer/professional army.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to such unfavorable comparisons with their U.S. counterparts, Soviet officers have had an opportunity to compare their own low standard of living with the conditions enjoyed by members of the High Command, who have resisted the reform so vigorously. Emboldened by glasnost, popular Soviet media outlets have publicized the privileges of the military elite. Luxurious country houses built by generals using defense accounts as personal slush funds, their cars,


\textsuperscript{13}One of the favorite arguments against professional service put forth by senior military officials is that a professional army will cost too much. Chief of the General Staff General Moiseyev has claimed, rather inappropriately, that personnel costs under such a system would be too high. He cited the U.S. experience, in which salaries of the officer corps and generals are 6 to 8 times higher than in the Soviet Union and enlisted personnel costs are more than 100 times higher. M. Moiseyev, “Oboronnyy budzhet SSSR,” Pravda, June 11, 1989. See also Moiseyev, “S pozitajy oboronitel’noy doktriny,” Krasnaya zvezda, February 10, 1989; and D. Yazov, “Byt’ na ostriye perestroyki,” Krasnaya zvezda, July 3, 1989.
airplanes, resort facilities, servants, special stores, as well as many other privileges enjoyed by senior officers and their families, have all come to the attention of the entire impoverished country, where no subject arouses greater controversy and acrimony than the issue of elite privileges. The publication of information about the High Command's luxurious lifestyles, in the midst of a national debate about military reform that the High Command claimed was not necessary, further heightened the intramilitary tensions and strengthened pressure for reform that is intended to raise the standard of living of the rank and file and restore a sense of fairness among the majority of the military community.

THE DECLINE OF THE MILITARY'S MORALE AND PRESTIGE

Besides economic stimuli for military reform and transition to a volunteer/professional army, there are powerful political currents driving the reform movement. According to public opinion surveys, Soviet citizens favor proposals for military reform and a volunteer/professional army by a 2:1 margin (58 percent to 29 percent). An unprecedented decline in the morale of the armed forces and its loss of prestige among the general population have generated powerful pressures for change and have made a popular political issue out of the idea of military reform, which is expected to address these problems.

The military's exemption from public scrutiny was one of the earliest and most visible victims of the new regime's policy of glasnost. Antimilitary sentiments were first expressed by reform-minded intellectuals, who complained about the stifling effects of mandatory service upon Soviet youth, whose academic training was interrupted by the draft and whose creativity and ability to engage in intellectual pursuits suffered from the harsh conditions of military life. Other challenges were raised by proponents of nuclear disarmament, who questioned the morality of nuclear deterrence and criticized the armed forces for adhering to this policy. The use of nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for an attack against the USSR, was immoral, they

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16"Pochemu u nas malo po-nastoyashchemu obrazovannykh lyudey?" Literaturnaya gazeta (Literary gazette), May 13, 1987.
argued: “We don’t want to participate in the killing of humanity, be it first, second, or any other strike.”

These early attacks against the military and the so-called “defense mentality” in general, however, were launched mostly by individuals and did not constitute an open institutional challenge to, and criticism of, the armed forces. The transformation of the public image of the military as an institution was precipitated by the Rust incident in late May 1987. The landing of the West German teenager’s Cessna in Red Square was an outright humiliation to the air defense troops and to the armed forces as a whole. In the incident’s aftermath, an unprecedented top-level charge of corporate incompetence was delivered by the Politburo against the air defense troops and even the Ministry of Defense. Following this episode, the military became “fair game” for criticism from every corner of the Soviet Union and from every stratum of Soviet society.

No examination of the military’s role in contemporary Soviet society would be complete without at least passing reference to two major factors behind the precipitous decline in the army’s prestige among the general population. These two factors are Afghanistan and dedovshchina, or the abuse of first-year recruits by older conscripts.

The disillusionment of the Soviet people over the Afghan War—the senseless deaths of young soldiers, the accounts of atrocities committed by the Soviet army against the Afghans, and the army’s inability to bring the war to a victorious conclusion—and the efforts of the new leaders to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the invasion and to pin it on the old regime, have eroded respect for the military and denied the High Command an opportunity to exploit the war to boost its image as “defender of the homeland.” Attempts to remedy this situation through the use of a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign have not been successful.

Similarly, revelations of widespread corruption in the military have hurt its reputation in Soviet society. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in recent years dedovshchina has become the most powerful symbol of the problems within the Soviet armed forces.

Far from denying that dedovshchina exists, senior military representatives have claimed that the situation is under control and that the armed forces have been successful in rooting out violations of discipline. The army, they have maintained, is not the problem but the solution. It reflects all the ills and shortcomings of Soviet society yet

\[\text{\textsuperscript{17} A. Adamovich, Literaturnaya gazeta, May 6, 1987.} \]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{18} Krasnaya zvezda, May 31, 1987.} \]
tries to correct them by educating young recruits, many of whom are simply bad human material. Against a background of never-ending incidents of abuse of young soldiers, however, these assurances have failed to convince; and the unrelenting frequency of such incidents helps create an impression that the army is itself the locus of many societal ills.

These perceptions have further eroded both the attitudes of the general Soviet population toward the armed forces and the armed forces' morale. The period of stagnation—the Brezhnev era—is now routinely portrayed in the Soviet media as a time of prosperity for the armed forces, which coincided with and, in large measure, caused the decline of the rest of Soviet society. In short, the entire military has been blamed for all the ills afflicting the Soviet Union. But this charge appears as the ultimate injustice to many military professionals who have been denied social protection and who feel that they are paying for the actions of their superiors—actions in which they had no say and which victimized them just as they did the rest of the Soviet population.

To the rank-and-file military community, military reform and transition to a professional army hold out not only the hope of economic prosperity but the promise of a much higher social status, one commensurate with the contribution of uniformed professionals to the well-being and security of their country. Until recently the term “professionalism” was associated in the military community with technical skills and competence. Clearly, to the rank and file this is no longer enough.

THE ETHNIC FACTOR

Glasnost has unleashed a wave of ethnic turbulence in the Soviet Union. Leaving aside the broader issue of ethnic relations in the USSR, one can now state with assurance that the ethnic challenge to the armed forces is among the prime factors leading to military reform. This is a multiple challenge: it entails the problem of recruiting conscripts for extraterritorial service from all union republics, many of which are openly hostile to the Soviet army and consider it an occupation army; and it brings to the fore the unwelcome mission of quashing ethnic unrest.

The ethnic problem is also a subject on which the advocates of military reform, reflecting the view of the rank-and-file military community, have found themselves increasingly at odds with some members
of the High Command who resist significant attempts to change the status quo in the armed forces.

The Draft and Minority Recruits

Draft-related problems and issues of conscript quality have been described in the Soviet media with ever-increasing frequency. The volume of such publications is a reflection of the draft's steady deterioration in every Soviet republic. What began as a trickle of protest against the practice of extraterritorial service and mandatory conscription in some regions of the Soviet Union, particularly in the Baltic republics, rather quickly became a nationwide phenomenon, one that has drained the effectiveness of the draft system in the USSR. A June 1990 roundtable panel of senior military representatives in effect acknowledged the system's breakdown. The numbers cited by panelists spoke for themselves: in 1987 there were 771 incidents of draft evasion nationwide, 1107 incidents in 1988, and 6647 in 1989. As of June 10, 1990, the unionwide call-up of conscripts (which began in May and was scheduled to end in early June) was only 26 percent complete. In other words, three-quarters of the conscripts did not report to call-up stations. Only 8 percent of expected conscripts reported in Estonia, 33 percent in Georgia, and none in Armenia.

But among those recruits who do report for military service, many present a problem for the armed forces: they make very poor soldiers. In addition to questionable political reliability and loyalty to the regime, many of them cannot even understand simple commands issued to them in Russian. To cite just one of many startling examples that abound in the Soviet media, Lieutenant General I. Sergeyev, deputy commander in chief of strategic rocket forces, described the following incident:

I just came back from [the Transbaykal region]. I visited one of the mobile ICBM units there. It is a very complex weapon. There stood before me 40 [recruits from Azerbaijan] from the last call-up and apparently only two of them understand Russian. Two out of forty! What do we do now—teach them the language? Yet, we are held accountable for combat readiness.

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20"Na službě otechestvu" (program on Soviet television), June 10, 1990.
Separatism, Extraterritorial Service, and the Draft

A much-resisted feature of the Soviet version of the draft is extraterritorial service, or the practice of stationing recruits outside their native areas. Because Soviet soldiers are rarely, if ever, allowed home leave, and because travel in the Soviet Union is difficult and costly, mandatory conscription for the majority of young men has meant long-term separation from their families, friends, and cultural (and often religious) communities. Furthermore, language barriers arising from the inability of many recruits' inability to speak Russian, let alone the language of the indigenous population, contribute to these already difficult service conditions.

The resistance to extraterritorial service has gained strength in the current atmosphere of rising ethnic tensions and separatism in the USSR. In some regions with a fairly stable interethnic situation, opposition to extraterritorial service has been fueled by fears among the local population that their sons will be sent to more troubled regions to put down local violence. Unwillingness to participate in such actions and fears of "another Afghanistan" were behind mass demonstrations in the cities of Stavropol' and Krasnodar in January 1990, where groups of women disrupted—and eventually achieved the cancellation of—the call-up of reservists for military duty in Azerbaijan.

Opposition to extraterritorial service has also hardened as a result of the growing separatist tendencies in many republics. Critics of extraterritorial service have called for an end to this practice and for its de facto, or even de jure, replacement with ethnic formations and territorial militia. Many newly elected republican leaders, eager to assert their sovereignty and independence from Moscow, have few issues more important to their constituents on which to show their defiance of the union government. In the republics where the process of separation from the union is already underway, such as Lithuania and Estonia, the first steps toward creating independent military forces have already been taken.

In the key Russian republic—the RSFSR—the declaration of sovereignty following the election of Boris Yel'tsin to the chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation entails the establishment of the post of defense minister without portfolio. The minister, according to Yel'tsin's own statement, will have some 20 military experts on his staff, although not a full-fledged ministry.

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22To cite one of the most significant examples, the Ukraine's President Ivashko called for Ukrainian soldiers to serve in their native republic. *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 120, June 26, 1990.
The minister’s functions will include monitoring troop readiness, drafting and conduct of exercises for forces deployed in RSFSR, as well as their movements and deployment, and construction of military installations and bases on the republic’s territory. It is an important attempt to assert Russia’s control over some key military issues and yet another challenge to the status quo.

In addition to the organized republican military formations mentioned earlier, a number of armed militias, not part of any formal government structure, have emerged in some areas of the Soviet Union. Most notably, they have appeared in the Transcaucasian republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan—areas torn by ethnic conflict and territorial disputes. These militias are a sign of the escalation of ethnic tensions within the Soviet Union. Armed with weapons stolen from military warehouses or obtained in the black market, they jeopardize the ability of the Soviet army to control sizeable areas of some republics. This not only means that recruits from those areas do not report for military service, but that the Soviet government has no control over portions of its own territory! Leaving aside the broader and in every respect fundamental issue of the consequences of these developments for the Soviet state, the emergence of local militias, growing separatist trends, and such relatively minor issues as opposition to extraterritorial military service and the draft in general, all threaten to leave the Soviet army without soldiers and, along with many other problems, make the status quo in the military untenable. It appears, however, that even though the problems discussed in this section provided an early, powerful stimulus for military reform, no military reform alone can solve them. They are only the symptoms of the much larger and difficult issues at stake—issues that are likely to be resolved in the process of fundamental transformation of the Soviet state.

The Military’s Policing Function

There is yet another challenge currently facing the Soviet armed forces that provides more momentum for military reform: interethnic violence and the military’s involvement in domestic policing operations.

This problem reached crisis proportions for the military in the aftermath of the tragic events in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in

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April 1989. Military units were sent to disband a peaceful demonstration in the heart of the city. Ill equipped and untrained for such missions, the troops used chemical weapons to disperse the crowd and brutally assaulted a number of the protesters. According to official reports, 20 demonstrators were left dead and several hundred were wounded.

The events in Tbilisi received extensive coverage in the Soviet media and provoked an unprecedented public outcry. The tragedy, and the armed forces’ role in it, was also a subject of heated debates at the Congress of People’s Deputies (which were shown live on Soviet national television). The commander of the Transcaucasian military district, Colonel General Rodionov, was publicly charged with responsibility for the slaughter of innocent civilians. Denying any responsibility for the tragedy, he in turn appealed to the journalists: “I beg you not to make me a murderer.”24 All parties likely to have been involved in the process of deciding to send in troops and use chemical weapons, including Rodionov, local Georgian Communist Party bosses, and Gorbachev, have denied responsibility for the massacre. But even before blame for these events could be apportioned and the guilty parties made the subject of official criticism, it became clear that the military’s role had been extremely unpleasant and that the tide of public opinion was turning sharply against it.25

Both the High Command and the rank and file have publicly condemned the use of the armed forces for domestic policing operations. A counterpropaganda campaign designed to whitewash the military’s participation in the Tbilisi massacre, best described as “spin control,” has involved many senior figures in the armed forces. Their public message has been that the armed forces want no part of the domestic policing function. It is not their mission, and the use of troops in Tbilisi was a dangerous mistake that should never be repeated. Senior spokesmen for the High Command have portrayed internal policing functions as dishonorable missions that detract from the dignity and high esteem of the armed forces and hurt their ability to fulfill their principal task of guaranteeing the security of the homeland. Thus, in an interview published on May 9, 1989—Victory Day—the

25-The troops involved in the Tbilisi massacre were paratroopers. One of the striking and particularly brutal details of the massacre was that soldiers assaulted demonstrators with the sharp shovels issued to paratroopers as standard equipment. Subsequently, paratroop officers lamenting unfair treatment by the media and the population have complained that when they and their soldiers appear in public wearing their uniforms, people shout “Where are your shovels?”
First Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Warsaw Pact Forces, Army General Lushev, complained about the "unconstitutional" uses of the armed forces that "have an extremely negative effect on their combat readiness."  

But Lushev’s colleague, Commander in Chief of the Ground Troops and Deputy Minister of Defense Army General Varennikov, publicly denied the armed forces’ responsibility for the tragedy in Tbilisi. In an article entitled "Our Army Has Only One Honorable Function," Varennikov argued that the troops sent to Tbilisi had acted properly. One should not forget, reminded Varennikov, that the demonstration in Tbilisi had a definite anti-Soviet theme and had to be put in the proper context.

Such declarations by senior members of the military establishment were consistent with their actions on some notable occasions. The same General Varennikov was dispatched to Lithuania in the aftermath of the republic’s announcement of its independence from the Soviet Union. He was the most senior military commander on the scene, presiding over the show of military force and muscle-flexing designed to intimidate the local population and Western observers. Varennikov’s active personal involvement in this operation and public statements made during his stay in Lithuania revealed no signs that he was suffering any revulsion at having to participate in an operation that he had recently referred to as dishonorable.

Another senior and increasingly outspoken member of the High Command whose statements have reflected a disturbing propensity to perceive force as a useful instrument in domestic policing contingencies is Marshal Akhromeyev. Appearing on the television program "On Service to the Fatherland," he not only condoned the use of the armed forces in domestic policing operations, but referred to it as entirely appropriate. Akhromeyev equated the concepts of security and territorial integrity. According to the marshal, demands for independence from the USSR threaten the country’s territorial integrity and thus jeopardize its security as well. But since the military is the principal guardian of the nation’s security, it has an immediate responsibility to ensure its territorial integrity when it is endangered by Baltic "separatists."

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28Eyewitness accounts.
29Soviet TV, Channel 1, July 22, 1990.
Thus, the High Command's collective attitude toward the use of the armed forces in domestic operations has been at best ambiguous. Having initially criticized such missions publicly, many senior representatives of the military establishment have not denounced them unequivocally. Subsequently, in the midst of escalating ethnic tensions and rising separatist movements, they have demonstrated an alarming proclivity to rely on force.

The reaction to the growing frequency of military involvement in domestic crises has been more consistent within the rank-and-file military community. Domestic policing operations have extracted an increasingly heavy moral price in that community, and growing numbers of Soviet officers have found it difficult to participate in them.

One of the most eloquent military statements on this issue came from Major General M. Surkov, a career political officer and chief of the political department of the garrison in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. In that capacity, he has had firsthand experience with ethnic unrest in Armenia and clashes between the Armenians and the Azerbaijani. Surkov's published appeal to the First Congress of People's Deputies has been cited earlier in this report. In that article, Surkov noted that he had written a memorandum on military policy to Gorbachev, but that unfortunately the Soviet leader had ignored it. Along with complaints about difficult service conditions, Surkov declared categorically that the Soviet army could not be asked to carry out duties that were alien to it. "It is not our function," he argued, "to disband demonstrations and enforce law in the streets. Such responsibilities put the army in opposition to the people."30

Although Surkov did not get an immediate reply from Gorbachev to his memorandum, it attracted the attention of the editors at Krasnaya zvezda, where an extensive profile of the general and his views on the army's role in Soviet society appeared a few weeks later. The article's title, "Memorandum on Military Policy," was no doubt familiar to the military audience that had followed the recent legislative proceedings.31

The armed forces, Surkov told his interviewer, are confronted with daunting challenges. Many urgent problems must be solved in the socioeconomic sphere in order to create decent service conditions for military personnel. But even that is not the most difficult challenge facing the army and the nation today. The armed forces need a

30 M. Surkov, "Garantirovat' sotsial'nyu zashchitnennost'," Krasnaya zvezda, June 4, 1989.
clearly defined mandate, Surkov argued. The nation itself must determine the military's role in Soviet society. The current situation is clearly unacceptable to the people and to their army. The army should never have to participate in actions against demonstrations. Such tasks contradict its fundamental purpose and damage relations between the army and the people.

Surkov recounted his service as a political officer in Yerevan and his difficulties as he tried to explain to his officers and soldiers why they should patrol the streets of Armenian cities to maintain law and order. He recalled how, after a particularly tense confrontation with the local population, he appealed to his superiors in the military district's political administration:

We are destroying with our own hands what we have built and strengthened in the course of decades—the goodwill of the population toward the military! Call Moscow. The army must not participate in this!32

The answer to his plea was that there was no other choice, that there was nobody else but the army to deal with local unrest. According to Surkov, this was a deplorable response to officers and soldiers trained for entirely different missions and hardened by totally different battles. "Isn't there anyone else to stand here?" asked the soldiers, while their officers desperately searched for answers. One officer, recalled Surkov, an airborne captain decorated for bravery in Afghanistan, simply told him: "I am ashamed before my soldiers!" Another colleague, also an Afghan veteran, asked Surkov how the situation could have deteriorated to such an extent that here, on Soviet soil, soldiers had to patrol the streets in bulletproof vests. "How it got to be so bad you know just as well as I do," replied Surkov. "Now we can only carry out orders and hope that [never again] will we have to participate in such measures."33

Participation in domestic policing operations has presented many Soviet officers with a vexing moral challenge. As described by Surkov, many of these officers see the domestic function as dishonorable and threatening to destroy the bond between the army and the people. Unwilling to compromise this bond, many officers have chosen to resign from the military. In June 1990 Moscow News reported that 30,000 letters of resignation from officers were awaiting action

32Ibid.
33Ibid.
by the Ministry of Defense. The newspaper also reported that many
officers instructed by their superiors to “volunteer” for service in such
volatile areas as Azerbaijan and Armenia have chosen to resign from
service. Those who did not resign but have refused to “volunteer”
have been cashiered—in violation of army regulations.34

Other reports from the Soviet Union indicate that increasing num-
bers of officers have contacted leaders of local independence move-
ments in various republics. These officers are reluctant to take part
in domestic policing operations and have sought guidance and advice
from these local politicians.35

It would be incorrect to conclude on the basis of these reports that
the entire Soviet officer corps is about to rebel and refuse to partici-
pate in domestic policing operations. To be sure, notwithstanding
some notable exceptions, the troops so far have followed orders to in-
tervene in such contingencies. But discontent among rank-and-file offi-
cers and enlisted personnel is evidently growing,36 and the unwel-
come task is aggravating an already tense situation in the armed
forces.

The armed forces’ involvement in domestic policing operations has
become one more issue in the movement for military reform. Reform
proposals are specifically designed to prevent the use of the armed
forces in such operations, thus making the concept of military reform
an even more attractive solution to the problems associated with the
status quo.37

35Personal interviews.
37Furthermore, in its attempts to find an alternative to the use of the armed forces
in domestic policing actions, the Soviet government has decided to establish pro-
essional internal security forces under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Personnel for
such units are recruited for pay on a voluntary basis. These forces receive special
training and equipment designed specifically for dealing with domestic contingencies.
(See I. Baranovskiy, “V soldaty po kontraktu,” Rabochaya tribuna, June 13, 1990; and

Although the establishment of professional internal security forces is intended to
alleviate the intolerable situation caused by using the army in domestic policing con-
tingencies and thus (at least indirectly) relieve pressures for military reform, it is most
likely to create an additional stimulus for it. As organizations of uniformed profes-
sionals, the new units of internal security troops provide a precedent that helps legiti-
mize the concept of a professional military organization and facilitates the progress of
military reform.
THE UNTENABLE STATUS QUO—THE KEY STIMULUS FOR MILITARY REFORM

The overview of the existing combination of economic, political, and ethnic factors in the armed forces presented in this section indicates that the status quo is unacceptable to the majority of the Soviet military community. This very untenability has played the major role in shaping the response of the Soviet military rank and file to the idea of military reform. To them, reform holds the promise of better material rewards and improved service conditions, higher status and greater prestige in Soviet society, and a guarantee of nonparticipation in shameful and unpopular operations designed to quell domestic unrest.

Irrespective of the preferences of the military rank and file, the status quo is also unacceptable from the point of view of the Soviet state, which is threatened with the loss of a combat-ready and reliable functioning military machine. The existing military organization is disintegrating. If this process is not stopped, the Soviet military will be able to fulfill few of its missions.

The status quo is not acceptable to anyone, in fact, except the High Command, which has stubbornly resisted the search for a meaningful solution to the problems that have caused the current crisis in the military. Over time, however, some cracks have begun to appear in that once-united front.
V. THE HIGH COMMAND: FROM OPPOSITION TO GRUDGING ACCEPTANCE OF MILITARY REFORM

Unlike lower-level officers, members of the Soviet High Command met initial proposals for military reform with a solid wall of opposition. They criticized every alternative to the regular army structure currently existing in the Soviet Union and spoke disparagingly of “mercenaries” and those who wanted to “steal the army piece by piece to their [ethnic] corner.”

But as the debate progressed, the coalition of senior military officers opposed to military reform began to suffer from occasional defections and even outright public reversals from former critics of military reform. The growing popularity of the military reform movement among the rank-and-file officer corps, retired military personnel, and civilian observers, enhanced by a more relaxed political atmosphere in the Soviet Union, changes in the defense decisionmaking process, and the overall decline of the military's prestige in Soviet society, pushed the Soviet High Command at least toward public (and obviously grudging) acceptance of the idea of military reform.

TOP-LEVEL MILITARY RESISTANCE TO REFORM

The debate about military reform progressed against the general background of political change in the Soviet Union, and in particular the 1989 electoral campaign to the Congress of People's Deputies. Both advocates and opponents of reform ran in these elections, and the campaign provided a convenient setting for bringing the debate before a wider audience. Many reform-related proposals featured in various candidates’ platforms provoked strong criticism from senior military representatives. Specifically, these proposals included plans for establishing territorial and ethnic units, reducing the term of compulsory military service, and rejecting extraterritorial principles of military conscription.¹

Such alternatives to the regular army that now exists in the Soviet Union were dismissed by leading military candidates, who maintained that these proposals were the naive expressions of untrained amateurs. The electoral platform of the chief of the General Staff, Army General Moiseyev, which was presented in a meeting with voters and published in the main military newspaper, *Krasnaya zvezda* (Red Star), contained the following statement:

There exist widespread ideas about the necessity of a 50 percent cut in the size of the army. [There are proposals] to switch to the militia-territorial system of staffing [the armed forces] and in effect to create a mercenary army. Naturally, these proposals are unacceptable and our attitude toward them must be unambiguously negative.2

Moiseyev’s uncompromising attitude toward the idea of military reform reflected views held by many senior military representatives, some of whom have gone on record expressing their opposition to it.

A particularly outspoken critic of the concept of a militia, volunteer, or professional army has been the chief of the Main Political Administration of the Army and Navy (MPA), Army General Lizichev. In an interview given to the Communist Party journal *Kommunist*, Lizichev noted that over its 70-year history the Soviet army has experimented with various organizational approaches. It has settled on the current regular army system developed by the Communist Party and tested by World War II, in the course of which it proved absolutely reliable. According to Lizichev, this reliability is the key argument supporting current arrangements. True, the current system could benefit from some improvements and from a more efficient approach to the development of the armed forces (as mandated by the principle of “reasonable sufficiency”), but completely replacing the system would be counterproductive.3

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4Lizichev expressed similar views at the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Main Military-Political Administration: “There have appeared many proponents of a mercenary professional army, ethnic military formations, militia-territorial system of staffing and training. In connection with this, let me express the opinion of the majority of military Communists: Our army must remain cadre-based, educated in the spirit of patriotism, friendship of peoples of the USSR and proletarian internationalism, staffed on the basis of universal military service and extraterritoriality, closely connected to the people, and firmly supporting the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet government.” See “Boevyye organy partii,” *Krasnaya zvezda*, May 17, 1989, p. 2. Note that Lizichev, along with several other
General Lizichev addressed the subject of military reform in a speech before the Congress of People's Deputies. He told the congress that the armed forces, like every other sector of Soviet society, faced many difficult problems. He assured the deputies that realistic attitudes prevailed among members of the Soviet armed forces, who welcomed fair and constructive criticism and were eager to make the necessary adjustments and corrections. In other words, Lizichev admitted that not all was well in the military, but he also insisted that these problems could be fixed from within the institution through marginal adjustments rather than radical solutions imposed from outside. Lizichev complained that some critics of the military institution—the “extremists”—were going too far, that some of them would like to replace the existing regular army with an army of “mercenaries,” while others want to “steal it away piece by piece” to their ethnic regions. Worst of all, lamented Lizichev, these attacks on the military often receive no proper ideological rebuke.4

His speech reflected the view of the status quo-oriented conservative military establishment, adamant about protecting the armed forces' current structure and, with it, the traditional military interests in their most simplistic and crude formulation—“the more the better.” Another outspoken advocate of this view was Lieutenant General V. Serebryannikov, a “political general” who occupied the post of Deputy Chief of the Higher Military-Political Academy. Previously, Serebryannikov had acquired a conservative reputation for his criticism of civilian “pacificists,” whose uneducated and uninvited meddling in defense matters, he claimed, could only hurt the nation's security.5

In an article in Krasnaya zvezda, Serebryannikov chose as the target of his attack those who, under the guise of the “correct interpretation of Lenin, Marx, and Engels,” have launched the campaign for restructuring the armed forces according to a militia, territorial, or mixed system. These would-be well-wishers of the military have argued that the current regular army is a “product of Stalinist perversions.”6

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6military representatives, has chosen the term mercenary to describe the proposed alternative to the Soviet army's current system of organization. The term has a highly negative connotation in Russian.

4Pravda, June 7, 1989, p. 4.

5Incidentally, in the last two to three years this has been one of the principal arguments of military conservatives, and the MPA representatives among them, against civilian criticism of the military. Another prominent exponent of this line has been the writer Aleksandr Prokhanov, “the nightingale of the General Staff,” who is rumored to have close ties to the MPA, the General Staff, and other high-level military organizations.
sions,” contradicting the principles of socialism. Serebryannikov found these claims misguided at best. He asserted that their proponents had misunderstood Marxist-Leninist teachings on the militia, which is capable of defending only against similar forces and is no match for a regular army. Citing every authority on military affairs from Engels to Marshal Zhukov, Serebryannikov rejected his opponents’ proposals as uneducated and ill conceived. Militia-based armies that proved unreliable in the era before the technological revolution in military affairs, he argued, would not be able to cope with the sophisticated battlefield of the future. Any transition to such a system, warned Serebryannikov, would immediately result in the loss of military-strategic parity. He charged that proposals for military reform were shortsighted at best, that their authors’ activities are counterproductive to the positive reform processes already generated from within the military institution.6

Criticism of military reform has also come from the minister of defense, Army General Yazov, who complained about “lightweight” proposals to restructure the armed forces in a speech before military media representatives. A professional army would undoubtedly constitute a more effective force, he admitted, but those who advocated such an army for cost-cutting reasons had to understand that it would be much more expensive. Besides, because of the limited number of trained reserves, a “mercenary” army would be unable to wage a protracted war. Such a force could not guarantee the security of the motherland and the inviolability of its borders. In addition, Yazov maintained, professional soldiers serving for money would have poor moral qualities, and an army recruited on the principle of greed would have a very poor fighting spirit.7

Yazov was even more critical of a territorial-militia system, which would be unable to supply the necessary pool of trained military specialists proficient in the use of modern weapons. Tied to their territories, militia units could not be counted on to redeploy to the region where they were needed. Because they would train in their native areas, Yazov claimed, they would not be able to familiarize themselves with the prospective theater of military operations and could not be counted upon to defend the country against aggression.8

8Ibid.
Yazov concluded that the country’s security could be guaranteed only by preserving the current universal system of military conscription. Under this system, all key posts are occupied by professional military officers, while service periods of two to three years assure adequate training for recruits. The validity of this approach, according to Yazov, had been confirmed throughout World War II and the entire postwar period.9

The adamantly rejection of military reform by Yazov, Lizichev, and Moiseyev undoubtedly reflected the attitude that initially had been prevalent among the military establishment. But as the public debate about military reform progressed and the idea gained popularity, statements by some senior officers began to show signs of change in what had once seemed like a united front of top-level military commanders.

ACCEPTING THE INEVITABLE?

One of the earliest signs of change appeared in an article written by the chief of staff of the Warsaw Pact Military Organization, Army General V. N. Lobov. He discussed Soviet defense policies in the 1920s and 1930s and their current implications.10 Lobov’s interpretation of that experience certainly reflected a much more positive, albeit guarded, attitude toward military reform than the views expressed by his colleagues from the High Command.

General Lobov credited the 1920s and 1930s with an exceptionally rich contribution to Soviet military science, a contribution that, he wrote, unfortunately had not received due attention and recognition in the USSR. Yet, he insisted, many works of this period can help resolve some key questions currently facing the Soviet military community. In particular, Lobov focused on the works of former chief of the General Staff Marshal B. Shaposhnikov. The latter, it turns out, was a proponent of the militia system and had projected that militia-based armies would become a permanent feature of future military organizations. Shaposhnikov had written (and Lobov apparently agreed) that such armies should not be considered a sign of weakness.

A remarkable feature of these pioneering discussions of Soviet strategists, according to Lobov, was their relevance to current conditions. Unfortunately, he wrote, the study of strategy in the prewar

9Ibid.
period was cut short by the rise of the Stalinist regime. The nearly fatal consequences of this malicious neglect of military strategy became evident in the early days of World War II. Lobov concluded that the intellectual heritage of the 1920s and 1930s required careful study and objective evaluation because it offered important practical lessons.

Lobov's defection from the previously unbroken ranks of High Command opposition to military reform was followed by changes in the public positions of other senior officers. Important signs of waver- ing on the issue of military reform appeared in statements of Defense Minister Yazov. Perhaps his retreat from his early critical stance on military reform and the notion of a professional army was made easier by the nature of his arguments against them. As mentioned earlier, Yazov had acknowledged that a professional army would be more effective than a regular army of draftees. One of his reasons for rejecting it had been economic—an all-volunteer professional army would cost too much, the minister had warned, and thus burden the Soviet economy even more. Thus, at least in principle, Yazov had acknowledged certain advantages of a professional army. This was his view throughout 1989.

However, his more recent public statements begin to show signs of change. For example, in an interview to the Communist Party newspaper Pravda that appeared on Armed Forces' Day 1990, he said that

> it would be hardly correct to reject a [volunteer army] out of hand. Our army was established on voluntary principles. Today, on its birthday, it is appropriate to remember it.

An abrupt change has evidently occurred in the views on military reform held by chief of the General Staff General Moiseyev. In early 1990 he shifted his previously uncompromising position on this issue. In an interview with the government newspaper Izvestiya, also published on Armed Forces' Day 1990, Moiseyev referred to the advantages of a volunteer/professional army—better service and material conditions for officers and a higher quality of recruits. The general assured his audience that possibilities for introducing a volunteer/professional army were being studied and that such a move

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11 Yazov had also been critical of a territorial-militia system.
would be implemented as soon as “the international, economic, material and spiritual prerequisites are ripe for such a transition.”

Perhaps the most startling and uncharacteristically radical reversal occurred in the views on military reform held by General Serebryannikov, whose writings, cited earlier, had earned him the reputation of a leading conservative military spokesman. In an interview with the armed forces’ political journal Kommunist vooružennykh sil (Communist of the armed forces) published in May 1990, Serebryannikov, who had recently retired from military service, explained the change in his views.

Serebryannikov ascribed his conversion to advocacy of a fully professional volunteer military organization to his study of reforms in military establishments in Eastern Europe and China and the experience of Western countries with professional armies. Positive shifts in the international climate and the Soviet domestic environment had made such a transition feasible and advisable for the Soviet army as well. Serebryannikov predicted that the share of professionals—officers and NCOs—who already make up nearly one-third of Soviet military personnel, will inevitably increase as a result of cuts in the armed forces dictated by future arms control agreements. It will be a much better trained and more competent force, recruited exclusively from volunteers. It is time to “remove the ‘taboo’ from the question of a professional army and conduct a national referendum” on this issue, Serebryannikov told the interviewer. He concluded:

Transition to a professional army can be implemented in three stages. First, [implement] the transition to voluntary recruitment of sergeants and technicians who service the most complex military-technological systems. Second, make the same transition for the most [technologically advanced] branches of the armed forces (S[trategic] R[ocket] F[orces], the Navy, Airborne Troops, etc.). In my view, it will be possible to make a full transition to voluntary principles in 5–7 years. Thus, I don’t see any answer to the question about a professional army except for the affirmative. We can raise the armed forces’ quality and prestige only through a radical military reform. Their gradual and [carefully planned] professionalization must be at the core of this reform.

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14 “Kakaya armiya nam nuzhna?” Kommunist vooružennykh sil, No. 9, 1990.

15 Ibid. p. 38.
FROM WORDS TO ACTION?

One can speculate about the sincerity of these statements, but what is certain is that the attitudinal changes described in them occurred in a new national security decisionmaking environment, in which the Supreme Soviet plays a new and enhanced role at the expense of the Ministry of Defense. As was mentioned earlier, the inclusion in the Supreme Soviet's agenda of a concrete program for military reform formulated by the group of seventeen deputies could be neither ignored nor reversed by the High Command.

The Ministry of Defense began developing its own version of "the law on defense" (which would codify the main directions of military reform) to be considered by the Defense and State Security committee of the Supreme Soviet. A draft of this law, representing the ministry's official position, was completed in April 1990.16 It demonstrated how enduring was the ministry's opposition to a volunteer/professional military.

An overview of the draft law's major points was presented by Defense Minister Yazov in a lengthy article published in early June 1990.17 At the core of the ministry's vision of military reform, which will encompass every aspect of Soviet defense policy and affect many sectors of Soviet society, will be a comprehensive transformation of the armed forces. This transformation will cover the following key areas:

1. Organizational structure, composition, and quantity of the armed forces.
2. Practice of the principles of defensive strategy, operational art, and tactics.
3. Improvement in the system of recruitment and training of the armed forces.
4. Party-political work within the military.
5. Development of effective social guarantees for military personnel and democratization of the entire military sector of the society.

These changes will be accomplished through greater economic efficiency in the defense sector of the economy and improved planning in the weapons acquisition process; major cuts in the size of the military

bureaucracy; and a "radical increase" in the number of professionals in military service.

Clearly, this step toward greater professionalization of the army (and with it, perhaps, even tacit acquiescence to the idea of a professional army) was not easy for Yazov to agree to, despite his earlier acknowledgement of certain advantages of a professional force. Within the space of three consecutive paragraphs, he restated the High Command's longstanding argument against military reform and a professional army, namely, that the Soviet army already had a high number of professionals (one-third of the total); declared that a mix of professionals and draftees was currently (emphasis added) "the most appropriate" form of recruitment; and conceded that "nonetheless, an experiment [dealing with the problems of recruitment] is planned within the framework of reform."

This experiment, according to Yazov, will begin in 1991. Initially it will be limited to the navy, where some recruits will be offered the option of either serving for two years as regular draftees at the current—extremely low—levels of pay or signing up for a three-year term at 150 rubles per month or more. Subsequently, this experiment can be expanded to other branches of the armed forces.

Although this program might have represented significant concessions from Yazov and other senior military officials on the issue of a volunteer/professional army, it certainly fell far short of the demands articulated by reform advocates. Reflected most clearly in the draft law on military reform prepared by the Ministry of Defense was the High Command's continued foot-dragging on one of reform's central issues, which for many has supplanted its all other aspects: transition to a volunteer/professional army. Notwithstanding the defections of some former critics to the camp of reform advocates, Yazov's last-ditch defense of the current—mixed volunteer-draft—recruitment practice, the extremely limited nature of the experiment in the navy, and merely a possibility of its expansion to other branches at some future date, all suggest that on this core issue the High Command in-

\[18\] The number of generals' billets will be reduced by at least 30 percent, while the size of the bureaucracy in central military institutions and the staffs of military districts and armies will be cut by 15 to 20 percent.


\[20\] Yazov reiterated yet again his opposition to territorial-militia units. Given the high levels of ethnic tensions in many regions of the country, such a measure would be "fraught with very negative consequences."
tends to stall for as long as possible, attempting meanwhile to diffuse the pressure for reform by promoting a weak surrogate instead of a real solution.

The depth of the High Command’s reluctance to contemplate far-reaching military reforms and address the problems facing the military community was illustrated in a roundtable discussion that took place on a Soviet television show devoted to military issues, “Na službe otechestvu” (In service to fatherland), broadcast on June 24, 1990. Describing the Ministry of Defense’s proposed plan for military reform, deputy chief of the General Staff Colonel General Krivosheev never even uttered the words “professional army” or “professionalization.” According to Krivosheev, the reform would take ten years to implement and would consist of the following three stages:

1. Withdrawal of troops from Eastern Europe, their redeployment and resettlement, reductions in military training institutions, and restructuring of the military-administrative system, all of which is expected to take two years.
2. More troop reductions and cuts in strategic forces, which will take three to four years; further resettlement of troops.
3. Completion of troop cuts and resolution of social problems in the armed forces.

Most of these measures are already being implemented, and have little to do with military reform. Their inclusion in the reform agenda by General Krivosheev reflects his (and probably many of his High Command colleagues’) attempts to divert the public’s attention from the real issues of reform and create the impression that the leadership of the armed forces is responding in a timely fashion to the key issues facing the military and is solving its many problems. Changes in the Soviet military prompted by external political developments are presented to the public as examples of real reform accomplishments.

Members of the High Command refuse to take constructive steps designed to improve the economic conditions of the rank and file, and they resist meaningful changes in Soviet defense policies. For example, General Krivosheev was critical of the idea of cuts in the defense budget, saying that they would prevent the Ministry of Defense from improving the socioeconomic conditions of military personnel. He maintained that it would be “very undesirable” to reallocate funds from acquisition of weapons for these purposes, because the army

--21--"Na službe otechestvu" (In service to fatherland) broadcast on June 24, 1990.
needed more weapons. Furthermore, Krivosheev implied that the deplorable socioeconomic conditions within the military community were not the result of longstanding policies and spending priorities, but a recent development caused by troop withdrawals from Eastern Europe and Mongolia.  

Krivosheev also expressed opposition to the core element of military reform—transition to a volunteer/professional army:

Those who say that the military is against professionals [are wrong]. We are for professionals. The issue here is: [some say the professional army will be 2–3 million strong]. Any conflict will require a multimillion-man army—at the end of World War II we had 12 million people under arms. But we’ll have no reserves. Every male citizen of the USSR must have military training. Therefore, [if the draft is abolished and a volunteer army introduced] we’ll have to establish a network of training centers across the entire country. But this will cost the state a pretty penny.  

Krivosheev was unwilling to yield even on such minor issues as reducing the term of mandatory service from two years to 18 months. He said that it was out of the question because the armed forces were already experiencing shortages of recruits.

Such statements by senior military officials, their persistent unwillingness to confront the problems facing the military community at large and search for constructive solutions, and their continuing equivocation on key elements of military reform, reflect the great extent to which the High Command remains opposed to real reform; the nominal acceptance of the notion of reform by the leadership of the Ministry of Defense was little more than an attempt to divert attention from the real problem. Given the acrimonious climate that has surrounded the military reform debate from its inception and the building political pressure for reform, the High Command’s program did little to heal the split within the military community. Instead, it set the stage for a new confrontation with the military reform movement.

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
VI. CONCLUSION

Whatever its eventual outcome, the military reform debate has polarized the Soviet professional military community. The military rank and file has embraced the cause of military reform enthusiastically. The High Command of the Soviet armed forces has waged a stubborn campaign against it, first to suppress the reform movement and extinguish any discussions of its causes, and later to dilute radical reform proposals and substitute a moderate program for incremental changes on a much smaller scale. Although the High Command has softened somewhat in its public statements on military reform, its response has been too little, too late.

In many crucial respects the debate about military reform has become inextricable from the broader process of overall political transformation in the Soviet Union. Therefore, any discussion of military reform outside the general context of political reforms in the USSR is somewhat artificial. The final results of the military reform process will depend on the outcome of negotiations about the new Union Treaty, which will determine the future composition and organization of the Soviet Union and its constituent republics and thus its armed forces.

Nonetheless, it appears that a combination of the new political climate in the Soviet Union and powerful political support at both the grassroots and high levels has all but assured a victory for the radical reform movement and the defeat of the High Command on this key issue. Whether the organization that emerges is the Soviet army or the Russian army, it is safe to predict that it will be a volunteer/professional military organization, possibly with some territorial units. A number of factors—the support of such powerful political personalities as Yeltsin; the apparent transfer of the military reform discussion from the conservative Committee on Defense and State Security to the more progressive Committee on Science, Technology and Culture in the Supreme Soviet; a virtual barrage of negative media coverage of the High Command and favorable coverage of the reform movement and its key participants; and most importantly, the strong political appeal of the core element of military reform, the professional army—make the passage of such reform merely a matter of time.
However, the passage of military reform legislation and the parliamentary victory of radical reformers is not likely to heal the split within the Soviet military institution. The High Command has been discredited in the eyes of both the rank-and-file military community and the entire Soviet society. To the rank and file the High Command represents a corrupt, conservative group fighting fiercely to defend its numerous privileges, not only ignoring the problems facing the armed forces but actively resisting attempts to solve them. For Soviet society at large, the leadership of the Ministry of Defense has become a symbol of corrupt conservative thinking and a source of danger of a right-wing military coup. The names of the conservative military spokesmen Generals Rodionov and Makashov will not be forgotten soon by the Soviet people. Nor are they likely to forget the names of such radical military reformers as Major Lopatin, whose persecution by the right-wing Main Political Administration was given ample coverage by the national media, and who has been closely aligned with and supported by the Soviet Union's most popular politician, Boris Yeltsin. Thus the High Command is becoming increasingly isolated from both the rank and file and the Soviet population at large.

It is quite possible that as a result of that growing isolation, the current leadership of the Ministry of Defense is fighting its last battle. The generals have put themselves in opposition to President Gorbachev by criticizing his foreign and defense policies, stopping only just short of explicit personal attacks on him. They have alienated the new republican governments, most notably the government of the Russian republic led by Boris Yeltsin, siding with his key conservative opponent, the leader of the Russian Communists, Ivan Polozkov. They have also diverged from the popular trends in Soviet domestic politics, which reflect growing support for progressive political parties and democratic movements. In sum, in the course of this battle the generals have denied themselves any significant base of support and are thus becoming increasingly expendable from the point of view of the country's political leadership.

In the expendability of the existing High Command lies a potential cure to the intramilitary split and an opportunity for a radical transformation of the military institution and national security decision-making in the Soviet Union. The acrimony of both the reform debate within the military community and the dialogue between representatives of the High Command and other political actors seems to have left no room for compromise and reconciliation. Under these circumstances, the political leadership of the Soviet Union will be presented
with an opportunity to purge the High Command at a small cost but with a huge benefit, which would include a restoration of the integrity of the military institution and the defeat of a vociferous and potentially dangerous political opposition. A wholesale purge of the High Command would also permit the installation of a civilian leadership in the Ministry of Defense, thus denying the uniformed military elite a dominant voice in national security decisionmaking and further accelerating the civilianization of Soviet national security planning that began in the early years of the Gorbachev era.