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**Perestroika
and
Soviet Military Personnel**

By Robert B. Davis

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**THE INSTITUTE OF LAND WARFARE
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Perestroika and Soviet Military Personnel

by

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FOREWORD

This paper reviews the changes taking place in the Soviet military as it attempts to adapt military personnel policies to the demands placed on the armed forces by Mikhail Gorbachev's programs of *perestroika*, *glasnost* and *democratization*. The political, economic, and social changes sweeping the USSR are likewise having a major impact on Soviet military institutions.

The military role of the individual soldier is changing as are his expectations of service to Mother Russia. Ideology and the Party are in disrepute and inappropriate to fostering the commitment and loyalty of the Soviet soldier. Military leadership is turning more to the behavioral and social sciences for answers and methods to address problems confronting the individual soldier.

The Soviet military is only just beginning to come to grips with its manpower crisis. The Soviet military ethos must be reshaped to correspond to the political declarations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Merritt', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

JACK N. MERRITT
General, USA Ret.
Executive Vice President

October 1990

INTRODUCTION

Soviet Reform Under Mikhail Gorbachev

Within a few weeks of Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to General Secretary of the Soviet Union's Communist Party in the Spring of 1985, the Central Committee ratified his plan declaring that the USSR was now in the "Era of the Human Factor."¹ The economic and social changes triggered by that edict over the past five years could not have been envisioned from the onset. Gorbachev inherited an economy on the brink of disaster, a rusting Warsaw Pact alliance, and several hostile non-Russian republics: the state of affairs was due largely to the Soviet government's disenfranchising itself from its people. On an individual level, alcoholism, crime, low productivity, and poor workmanship were symptoms that the average Soviet citizen has become apathetic.

The "Era of the Human Factor" declaration is an attempt to humanize the Soviet government and the economy. Also, Gorbachev's reliance on his personal charisma and his frequent contact with the public bespeak his recognition that the Soviet people need a Western-style leader who motivates through leadership rather than a patriarch who demands obedience by virtue of his position.²

Because the Soviet armed forces are so large and the practice of universal conscription brings well over half of the available male population into the military, its ties to the people are pervasive. As a result of these ties, the same political, economic, and social changes taking place throughout the USSR are also rampant in the military. Like it or not, one military writer reflected:

The changes initiated in our society, the growth of political activism of the people, and the comprehensive social changes have affected the armed forces as well. They [the military] are being joined by people of different mood [ones that do not toe the Party line]. To work with them the way we worked 5 years ago, let us say, is impossible.³

Gorbachev has taken every available chance to remove high-ranking military officials who oppose his reforms. Marshal Dmitriy Yazov was chosen by Gorbachev as Defense Minister for his early support of perestroika and his progressive approaches to military personnel issues. While there are signs that Yazov is not a complete disciple of Gorbachev and is reluctant to make *some* substantive changes to the armed forces (i.e., quick conversion to an all-volunteer force), he has supported modifications (large manpower and equipment reductions) *demand*ed by his mentor, Gorbachev. Yazov and Gorbachev share the view that reform must be made in how the military deals with its personnel, especially considering the problems that these personnel bring with them from modern Soviet society. While Gorbachev and Yazov may disagree as to the depth of these changes (i.e., the extent of glasnost in military affairs), they do agree that changes similar to those ongoing in the greater Soviet society must be made in the military as well.⁴

After over 70 years of dehumanization, Gorbachev's "Era of the Human Factor" is a phenomenal admission by the Soviet leaders that emphasis on the mass motivation of society promoted by a centralized cell of bureaucrats cannot be accomplished if the fundamental element of the equation, *the individual*, is left behind. The Utopian process of averaging out work and wealth to the masses has the catastrophic effect of destroying the personal incentive to excel and exceed the minimum requirements of society. As one Soviet writer summarized the past failures of the communist system⁵ and present attempts at humanization:

Practically since childhood we have memorized it: Public interests are always higher than personal rights. The price of all this was backwardness, deficits, and years of stagnation. When each individual person is robbed, all of society is robbed. It would seem that in turning to the individual, to his rights, and freedoms, we are beginning to understand this.⁶

The Soviet armed forces has long suffered from these same symptoms. In the next five years the Soviet military will be groping to find its place in modern Soviet society. As indicated by the harsh critical attacks on the armed forces by the press and the public, the military's ancient primacy with the Party and the people has been lost. Embroilment in violent suppression of political dissent cannot help but further damage the image of the military. Participation in housing and transportation construction and in disaster relief will be the means by which the military improves its image with the public. Such actions would show that the Soviet military is an integral part of Gorbachev's attempts to bring the "human factor" back into the Soviet Union and make true strides in improving the condition and psyche of the average citizen. As Shakespeare put it: "... when leniency and cruelty play for a kingdom the gentler gamester is the soonest winner." (*Henry V*, Act III, Scene V)⁷

THE SOVIET UNION IN TRANSITION

Origins and Dilemmas of Soviet Youth

Demographic Factors — Until 10 years ago individuals of Slavic⁸ origins outnumbered the other ethnic groups in the USSR and dominated the political infrastructure. Many of the political changes now occurring in the Soviet Union are significantly influenced by two major demographic shifts away from Slavic domination :

- The Slavic population group, whose birth rate is insufficient to replace itself, is losing ground to other ethnic groups, whose birth rate is as much as five times greater than that of the Slavs.

- The Soviet social environment is becoming increasingly urbanized (whether it be in large cities or city-like collective farms).

Under Gorbachev's program of glasnost, long-repressed interethnic hostilities have surfaced and have become more violent. In the past, ethnic parochialism was often manifested by a "heel dragging" reluctance to participate in many of the national programs mandated by the Moscow regime. One example was conscript resistance to assimilating the Russian language (which clearly diminishes a recruit's military effectiveness since Russian is the language of the Soviet military).

Recent studies of Russian fluency among non-Slavic ethnic groups show that the number of non-Slavs who comprehend Russian is not rising as rapidly as their population is growing.⁹ Belligerence towards Moscow can be subtly hidden by lackadaisical participation in mandated Russian-language programs in the schools. The number of functionally Russian-illiterate conscripts now may be as high as 10 percent for the navy and 20 percent for the army.¹⁰

Lack of fluency in the Russian language can have tragic consequences even in peace-time. In January 1988, a non-Slavic driver stalled his tank on train tracks in East Germany. In a panicked state, the driver failed to understand the Russian orders given by the tank's Slavic commander. As a result, the driver was not able to restart the tank. An East German train struck the tank, killing six and injuring 30 of the train's passengers and crew.¹¹ The number of conscripts entering the armed forces without an understanding of Russian increases by nearly 5 percent each year.¹² There is no indication that this trend will change.¹³ Weapons that require more highly trained soldiers, combined with a psychologically stressful battlefield, will aggravate these pre-existing problems created by Russian nonfluency. As the various non-Slavic ethnic groups test their political limits, disdain for the Russians and the politics of Moscow and animosity toward the Russian language will grow, rendering larger segments of the manpower pool politically and technically useless.

A decline in the language fluency rates, population shifts, secessionist tendencies in several Soviet republics, and anti-Moscow sentiments may force the military away

from its 1980s attempts at what was generally described as a program of "Sovietization." This program sought to include larger numbers of non-Slavic conscripts in a greater cross section of the armed forces. Sovietization was an attempt to bring young men into the USSR's social, political, and technical mainstream while they were in the military. It was theorized that, as conscripts, young men could receive intensive indoctrination in communism, train in a technical specialty, and thereby have their perceptions of the Soviet state enhanced. Sovietization was not only a social experiment but a demographic necessity. Over the past two decades, birth rates in the Slavic population groups have declined to the point where the number of births is lower than the number of deaths. The birth rates of other groups (especially Muslim) have also declined but not as rapidly. As a result, over half of the available conscript manpower pool is ethnically non-Russian.

Ethnic dispersion under military Sovietization reached its zenith from 1986 to 1988. During this time, many Soviet regiments were manned by conscripts from 20 different ethnic groups. In 1986, a proud regimental commander pointed out that one of his rifle squads was composed of two Russians, three Uzbeks, one Bashkir, one Mordvinian, one Chuvash, one Kirghizy, and one Kazakh. Unfortunately, he admitted that of the 10-man squad, only six spoke Russian well.¹⁴ Because of the increased criticism of the military in the press and heightened sensitivity of the non-Slavic ethnic groups, Sovietization is now referred to as "suppression of national self-consciousness" and "forcible Russification."¹⁵ While some aspects of the Sovietization program were effective and racial discord in the army decreased for a time, in the past year ethnic clashes have increased and have become more violent. The Soviet military is now rethinking the Sovietization program.¹⁶

Today, less than 25 percent of the Soviet population live in small rural agricultural communities.¹⁷ To accommodate this mass migration of people to the city, the Soviets have constructed millions of tiny apartments. However, construction has never quite kept up with demand; and two or more generations of a family are typically packed together in a space the average childless American couple would consider too cramped. To earn enough money to live in this urban environment, both parents must work. Therefore, urban couples are having fewer children. Even people involved in agriculture often live in farm collective communities where they are housed in the same type of massive apartment complexes as city dwellers. The result has been pollution, increased crime, rampant alcoholism, and growing drug abuse.

Drugs, Crime, and Health— All of these factors affect the quantity and quality of the young men available to the Soviet army as conscripts. Recently, the Soviet military has lodged complaints over the poor moral, emotional, and physical condition of young men from drab urban meccas. In particular, the crime rate has escalated astronomically within the USSR. While still lower than the overall crime rate in the United States, serious crime in the USSR grew by 40 percent from 1988 to 1989.¹⁸ Juvenile crime rose by 86 percent in some cities during the same period.¹⁹ Crime among youth has been increasing at such an alarming rate that as many as 20 percent of the conscripts in some units have criminal records,²⁰ and the number of conscripts with previous criminal records doubles each year.²¹ A criminal record clearly limits the sensitivity of work a conscript may perform and the geographic area to which he can be assigned. In 1989, 60,000 young men were not conscripted because of the severity of the crimes they had committed. However, due to the manpower shortage, 50,000 young men with criminal convictions were reluctantly sent to the construction troops and line units.²²

The mental and physical health of Soviet youth is also deteriorating at an alarming rate. One million six hundred thousand Soviet adolescents are presently being treated for mental illness.²³ Alcohol abuse is partially responsible. In the Moscow region, over one-third of the area's approximately 890,000 chronic alcoholics are raising children.²⁴ Additionally, in the Soviet Union, especially in the Slavic areas, alcohol abuse among women of child-bearing age is increasing faster than in the population as a whole. Incidences of unhealthy, deformed, and retarded children born with fetal alcohol syndrome are steadily increasing. According to Soviet medical researchers, 37 percent of the children of alcoholic mothers are born with birth defects and 16 percent are still-born.²⁵ Young men suffering from birth defects are unacceptable to the military.

Drug abuse is no longer exclusively a Western problem. Soviet law-enforcement personnel report a disturbing increase over the past five years in the number of drug addicts, the number of crimes committed under the influence of drugs, and the incidences of drug seizures by the police. According to the Soviet estimates, there are approximately 1.5 million regular drug users in the USSR.²⁶ Of this total, 80 percent are estimated to be draft-aged youth. As a result, the chief of the armed forces' Main Political Directorate, General Lizichev, confided that the military "cannot be selective in the choice of recruits today. Once again we are drafting many young people who already have a criminal record and physical or moral defects, and who have already used drugs and alcohol."²⁷

Because there are limited recreational outlets for young people, today's conscripts are in poorer physical condition than were their predecessors. In some areas military-oriented athletic programs and events are established for Soviet youth who are seen as having too much free time. The goal of these sports programs is the production of youth with the stamina for work as conscripts. No secondary-school sports program in the United States involves marksmanship, grenade throwing, and military obstacle courses; these are standard activities in Soviet schools. In the desert mountain terrain of Afghanistan these physically unfit soldiers had extreme difficulty performing their missions. Presently, military physical training is being changed to emphasize endurance and upper-torso strength, traits the Soviets believe young men need to possess in order to perform well in modern combat.²⁸

The effects of environmental pollution on the health of conscript-aged young people have just begun to be publicized. While the nuclear-powerplant accident at Chernobyl has heightened public awareness of the effects of radiation exposure, water and air pollution loom as widespread problems that affect almost all Soviet citizens. Pesticides, fertilizers, and industrial waste are affecting the health of Soviet women of child-bearing age. Incidences of children born with mental and physical deficits are on the rise. The effects of environmental pollution and alcohol abuse on Soviet women of child-bearing age are the major causes of the mental handicaps that afflict 1,185,000 children in the USSR.²⁹

Environmental pollution in the USSR also adversely affects children as they mature. Nearly 40 million Soviet citizens live in cities where the pollution level is 10 to 50 times higher than acceptable by Soviet standards. Diseases of the respiratory tract are the most prevalent manifestation of the pollution problem. City-dwelling children are twice as likely to have these diseases as other children.³⁰ In many cases, the damage done by these diseases is permanent. Environmental catastrophe will be the legacy of communism in Europe, and its victims will include increasing numbers of young Soviet men who will be physically unsuitable to the armed forces.

Presently the Soviet military is facing frustrating manpower problems that are only going to get much worse. It is losing the ability to be selective in its assignment of conscripts and, to some degree, officers. Gorbachev's 500,000-person reduction in the armed forces may be due principally to the unavailability of quality manpower to meet the needs of the military. Further cuts are likely to be necessary as the Soviet republics alienate themselves from Moscow and the psychological and physical health of potential conscripts further degenerates. Additional manpower concessions to NATO treaties may therefore be tendered in future negotiations or as a display of good will.

Pacifistic and Antimilitaristic Attitudes of the Soviet People

Military leaders have lately been accusing news reporters, educational personnel, and a variety of public officials of "pacifism" in a wave of unprecedented criticism of the Soviet armed forces. In turn, civilian officials and large segments of the population are questioning the need for a large conscript army, military-like youth organizations, and premilitary training in the public schools.^{31 32} Also, since mid-1989, public animosity towards the military has turned violent.

The Red Army has always been depicted as an invincible force, able to protect the Motherland and deliver harsh retribution on the most technically and economically sophisticated enemies of the Soviet people. Then came the invasion of Afghanistan. This huge army was unprepared for an unconventional war. Military theory, tactics, and troop control that had been developed and made overly rigid for warfare in Europe handicapped Soviet military commanders. Public disillusionment, engendered by the defeat, made the Soviet people skeptical. While official Soviet propaganda has attempted to whitewash the retreat from Afghanistan by declaring it a withdrawal after "fulfilling their internationalist duties," glasnost has allowed the general public to receive enough information to develop a contrary opinion. The belief that has emerged is that the Soviet armed forces are too large, are too expensive, and have been granted too many special privileges.³³ A Soviet interviewer accosted the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces with the assertion that:

For too long we've lived in the world of myths. One of them is that the "Army is the beloved offspring of the people." It was hammered home to us from childhood.³⁴

Coupled with this swelling pacifism, Young Pioneer, Komsomol (Young Communist League), and DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy) memberships have dramatically fallen off, and public support of these activities has dwindled dramatically.^{35 36} Recent reports state that half of the classes, clubs, and other groups conducted by these organizations "exist only on paper."³⁷ Soviet youth no longer find these organizations of interest as sources of recreational activity. Instead, "informal groups" (those that do not have affiliation with nor the blessing of the Party) have sprung up to fill the void. These groups vary from youth gangs to the Boy Scouts. One critic stated that the adult leaders of the Boy Scouts are "instilling nationalistic [secessionist] ideology and hostility towards Soviet rule in the minds of adolescents and even children."³⁸ Such groups and activities show that today's young people are turning away from Party-orchestrated activities that mix the interests of adolescents with large doses of propaganda and ideology. One high-ranking military officer commented that antimilitary "ideas are finding many supporters among young people and are becoming the basis for the creation of unauthorized organizations of youth of an extremely pacifistic nature who reject Army service and express antipatriotic views."³⁹

Recent Soviet newspaper reports have provided shocking details of how gun thefts have become widespread and often include automatic military weapons. In the Georgian Republic, during a three-month period, 4,555 firearms were confiscated—including 11 machineguns, 285 assault rifles, and 1,764 kg (3,894 lb) of explosives.⁴⁰ These weapons are often purchased illegally from military personnel or are stolen from police, DOSAAF, and military facilities. It is no wonder, then, that the rebels in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan were armed with a surprisingly potent array of machineguns, RPGs, and rifles. The resulting small battles required the Kremlin to supplement Internal Troops with regular and airborne army units. In addition to those injured and killed during ethnic rioting, soldiers and officers are being physically assaulted and shot at by citizens who view the Soviet military as an “army of occupation in their country.”⁴¹ The cause is attributed to antimilitary and anti-Soviet views held by peoples in the non-Russian republics.⁴²

Many Soviet citizens view the military withdrawal from Eastern Europe as the final validation that the government’s intimidating armed forces are actually a bottomless pit for manpower and economic resources sorely needed by the national economy. Retreat from Eastern Europe is an admission that the Soviet military has been defeated—not on the battlefield, but in the hearts and minds of the people and the Party it was to defend.

Draft Resistance in the USSR

Soviet television and newspapers have reported that the Fall 1989 and Spring 1990 conscript call-ups met with unprecedented nationwide resistance. Military conscription is seen as the most significant and most visible encroachment of the Soviet State into regions where the people are experiencing a reawakening of nationalistic fervor (exemplified by the independence movement growing in the Baltic regions).⁴³ In addition to espousing antimilitaristic and anti-Soviet sentiments, many young Soviet men fear the “hazing” and interethnic strife found in the armed forces.⁴⁴

Although draft resistance and desertion has been strongest in the Baltic and Transcaucasus regions, in one Moscow Rayon (district) during the Fall 1989 call-up, half of the young men notified to report to the military commissariat failed to respond.⁴⁵ Protests against conscription have occurred in other regions as well. In Georgia, 1,500 young men failed to appear for induction,⁴⁶ and young men staged sit-ins and hunger strikes.⁴⁷ In Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and in the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, protesters attempted to disrupt the dispatch of young men into the armed forces from regional assembly points. Demonstrators seized the Idzhevskiy Rayon military commissariat building to prevent the processing of draftees. Major General A. Arutyunyan, the republic military commissar in Yerevan, was attacked and beaten.⁴⁸

Public officials in the several non-Russian republics have passed regional laws suspending conscription, openly supported draft resistance, and have called for new national legislation governing conscription.⁴⁹⁵⁰ These officials and numerous outspoken Baltic nationalist activists have made proposals to restrict the assignment of young men from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania to the Baltic regions from which they came.⁵¹ Young men from these regions are generally better educated and healthier than the average Soviet conscript and therefore highly sought after by the military.

In the past, resistance to conscription was sporadic. Officials were bribed by the families of young men, records were falsified, and illnesses were faked.⁵² Today defiance of the draft is widespread, well planned, condoned by certain officials, and

freely publicized. Soviet military officials feel such actions are traitorous and call into doubt the primacy of the armed forces as the defender of the Party, Motherland, and people.

The Soviet press reports that prosecution of draft resisters is not uniform. Of the more than 6,500 young men who refused service during the Fall 1989 call-up, only a few have been prosecuted. Criminal action has been taken against a few draft resisters in the Moscow region, but in a number of the Baltic and Transcaucasus republics no formal criminal proceedings have even been instigated. Much to the dismay of Soviet military leaders, no action has been taken against public officials or private citizens who promote draft resistance.⁵³

Draft resistance questions the authority of the Soviet State and the sanctity of the Soviet armed forces, and hinders the Marxist-Leninist⁵⁴ indoctrination of Soviet youth by the military. How and where to assign draft resisters will be a significant problem. Their political reliability, performance in combat, and utility in suppressing internal discord are a matter of grave concern, and the types of positions they are deemed fit to hold in the military will be limited.⁵⁵

In an interview, Marshal Yazov vehemently criticized the Soviet national and regional press for the extent to which they publicized draft resistance during the Fall 1989 induction cycle.⁵⁶ In light of the press coverage given to these problems, it is no wonder that only 50 to 75 percent⁵⁷ of the young men called into service during the Spring 1990 call-up appeared for induction as of 1 July 1990.^{58 59} Given the present tensions of Lithuania and Armenia towards the Kremlin, draft resistance in these areas has been momentous. Massive draft resistance will have a proportionally disastrous effect on troop morale and effectiveness.

THE FUTURE SOVIET SOLDIER

New Roles for the Soviet Soldier

Soldiers as Policemen— There are a variety of complex roles emerging for the Soviet soldier as the last decade of this century brings forth changes. The first role is transformation from soldier to policeman.

The Soviet soldier has traditionally been portrayed as the defender of the Motherland from capitalistic attackers who wished to crush communism. Today the threat to the Soviet Union is internal rather than external. Civil disorders in the Central Asian and Transcaucasus republics witnessed Soviet soldiers shooting and bludgeoning the Soviet citizens they were sworn to protect.

In the past, the Red Army has often been used to suppress disturbances and control the general population. What has changed? There is growing ethnic and nationalistic discord throughout the Soviet Union. In late 1989 and early 1990, the army was sent into Azerbaijan and Armenia to put down interethnic turmoil. Now with growing tensions in the Baltic, troops are being used to halt Lithuania's secession from the USSR.⁶⁰ Georgia or Moldavia could be next. Growing fear among soldiers that retribution could, at some later time, be unleashed on their own ethnic group may limit their willingness to carry out orders to fire on civilians. In the past, army units manned by Ukrainians were believed to be effective in suppressing strife in Central Asian areas. Now these young Ukrainian men realize that an army unit manned with Central Asians may just as likely be used to suppress strife in the Ukraine. While some historic animosities will raise an Armenian soldier's willingness to attack Azerbaijanis, Moscow's communist government is now the main focus of nationwide scorn.

Young men no longer fear punishment for not following orders. At one time the Soviet soldier was expected to be blindly obedient to orders on pain of death. Older Soviet military officers now complain that the new soldier is suffering from "rampant consumerism" and is no longer willing to make the personal sacrifices of his forebears.⁶¹ In conflict with the premises of Marxist-Leninism, these youth are more interested in the trappings of a comfortable Western life-style than in ideology. Possessing such an attitude, these young people are less inclined to respect or fear authority. Orders to fire on civilians will likely be questioned as never before, and the strong possibility of mutiny exists.

There is a possible dark side to the use of army troops in crowd control that cannot be easily dismissed. Most armies have experienced problems in the use of soldiers as policemen. The problem is a matter of calculated use of force. Police officers are generally trained and counseled to use minimum force in subduing an adversary. Soldiers, however, are trained and encouraged to use deadly force. The Kremlin will continue to call on politically dependable military units, the most trustworthy being the airborne units in the army followed by the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). The Soviet airborne and Internal Troops' savage suppression of distur-

bances and early nationalistic protests in Tbilisi demonstrates that these soldiers have little reservation in the use of lethal force.⁶²

Soldiers as Builders — As large numbers of units are withdrawn from Eastern Europe and alternative service provisions are enacted, there is a possibility that these military manpower resources could be used to perform work in aid of the civilian economy. Gorbachev's plan for the "Era of the Human Factor" calls for drastic improvements in the rail transportation system and in the availability of housing. Both of these needs coincide with existing capabilities of the military. Historically the Soviet army has assisted during the harvests, construction troops have built apartment houses, and railway troops have repaired and laid track. Military manpower is extremely cheap in comparison to its civilian counterpart. The military could therefore be effectively used as a training ground for the skills desperately needed by the Soviet economy. Such activity would also raise the image of the military in the eyes of the Soviet people.⁶³

The employment of military-aged men in the economy is not without its problems and critics. Work in the economy diminishes overall military readiness. Soldiers would not be training in a military occupational specialty and then gaining the experience necessary to make them proficient in combat. Some officials contend that when a military unit leaves its barracks for other than war, it is not performing a legitimate mission of the Soviet military.

The Changing Manpower Pool — The pool of healthy, dependable and motivated young men is shrinking for the Soviet armed forces. Ethnic strife is the first factor diminishing the supply. As mentioned in earlier sections, drugs, alcohol abuse, crime, and the environment also act to narrow the field. There is evidence that the military hierarchy is not completely rigid and incapable of adapting to these changes. The movement away from an "extraterritorial" army is one example of moderate flexibility in their personnel policies in the face of the widespread changes in the USSR.

The Soviet army has always prided itself on the "extraterritorial" composition of the troops. As a normal practice, young men were sent far away from their native region for military duty. This prevented soldiers from returning home AWOL and, it was hoped, gave young men an appreciation of the scope of Soviet culture. Should the need arise, Soviet leaders also believed that soldiers stationed in a particular region, but not native to that territory, would have fewer qualms suppressing local civil disturbances. This policy and its underlying premises cause the residents of the various republics to view the Soviet military as "an army of occupation."

Demands for regional services are staunchly opposed by the Soviet armed forces, although there is evidence that concessions are being made. In Armenia and other selected regions, the number of conscripts serving their tours in that region has risen from as low as 0.5 percent in 1988 to 20 percent to 24 percent today.^{64 65 66} As indicated by recent events in Lithuania, these concessions have not assuaged nationalistic fervor nor diminished contempt for the edicts of the Kremlin.

Military districts manned by indigenous forces present problems for the selection and placement of conscript personnel. The Soviet armed forces have used regional differences in conscript education levels, physique, and language ability to allocate conscripts among various military occupations. Unless the system of Soviet republics breaks down, the military is unlikely to convert totally to territorial armies because this would concentrate personnel with homogeneous education, cultural traits, and political

outlooks. A heterogeneous military force, on the other hand, dilutes political dissension and ethnic discord. Minister of Defense Marshal Yazov summarized the military's perspective on the problem when he stated:

... with this type of territorial manning system it is impossible to ensure the necessary level of combat readiness of the Army and Navy, the manning of formations and units with servicemen of the relevant specialties, and the training and accumulation of sufficient mobilization resources.⁶⁷

The Soviet military is in the midst of unprecedented personnel turmoil. The young Soviet male who will man the armed forces is growing up in an increasingly complex society. As the physical and electronic communications borders tighten around the Soviet Union, the interchange of cultures with the West is accelerating faster than Marxist-Leninist ideology can be modified to counter this threat. Glasnost has opened the flood gates of criticism of the government, the economy, and the military. Until the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union was portrayed to the youth as a nation well on its way towards a workers' paradise. But because Western TV and radio broadcasts are no longer jammed, information on the West and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe cannot be hidden from the people. In 1990, the uncharitable truth about their country's past, present, and potential future is open for public scrutiny.

Towards a Professional Military

The Soviet military and Communist Party officials have never been able to make young men believe the military is an attractive career choice. Over the next few years the attitude of Soviet young men toward military service will further erode. Due to the shrinking numbers of trainable and trustworthy individuals, every attempt must be made to retain them. A movement to a professional enlisted force may be the only viable alternative. Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Yu. Yashin has stated that the conversion to a professional military is one of four major thrusts of the military's reform program.⁶⁸

Changing the Soviet armed forces from conscripted to voluntary servicemen has become the subject of a heated debate. Until recently Marshal Yazov had been adamantly against this transformation. He and other high-ranking military officials argue that a volunteer armed forces would be prohibitively expensive at a time when the overall goal of the government is to reduce costs.⁶⁹

In addition to higher salaries, retired Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev asserted that 1.5 million apartments will need to be built for the soldiers and sergeants with families. Also, Marshal Akhromeyev pointed out that these new military families will require the building of servicemen's communities with schools, medical facilities, day care, food services and stores.⁷⁰ Although cost is a key consideration in Akromeyev's arguments, he also cites an inability to continuously train vast numbers of reservists as the main reason for retaining the draft system. The Soviets have long believed that a huge force of reservists was essential in the event of war. To supply this demand, universal conscription has been a necessity, followed by discharge into the reserves until the age of 50. Other reasons he cites for continuing conscription are as follows:

- There is no history of a volunteer army in the USSR.
- The USSR is surrounded by enemies of the Soviet people and communism and therefore a large military is required.

- The Party would lose the ability to indoctrinate large numbers of young men in Marxist-Leninist ideology.
- A volunteer force would alter the “close” ties the military has to the Soviet people.

Marshal Akhromeyev’s arguments have been countered by The Committee on Defense and State Security of the Congress of People’s Deputies, which is supported by members of the press and by liberal Kremlin factions.⁷¹ According to this commission, a volunteer force would save money in the long run by:

- Reducing equipment and material losses resulting from their misuse by insufficiently trained personnel.
- Cutting back on officers who perform technician duties because experienced sergeants are in short supply.
- Eliminating the continual process of training a new conscript force every two years.
- Reducing the bureaucracy required to support conscription.
- Hiring more civilians to provide a trained work force with continuity.

The outcome will probably be a gradual metamorphosis, whereby the armed forces and the Internal Troops of the MVD are incrementally converted to a voluntary manning system. The Internal Troops are already in the process of switching to such a system. The navy in the near future will experiment with options which offer young men a choice of either a two-year tour as a poorly paid conscript or a three-year commitment as a higher paid volunteer.⁷² If successful, the air force and Strategic Rocket Forces will probably be the next to convert, followed by the Air Defense Forces and then select groups within the ground forces.

The early conversion of the Internal Troops to a professional force is intended to ensure that this force is manned with politically reliable soldiers for use in suppressing regional dissent and uprising. In some instances, the performance of conscripts in regular army units during domestic disorders has been questionable. According to one member of the Congress of People’s Deputies, “It is immoral to call upon our 18-year-old children and grandchildren to restore order in the country, [control of internal rebellion] ... is a matter for professionally trained soldiers.”⁷³

The total conversion of the ground forces to an all-volunteer service is not expected to occur in the near future. In the meantime, a “hybrid” system of mixed professional and conscript personnel will prevail.⁷⁴ Presently, 35 percent of the Soviet armed forces are “officers, non-commissioned officers [presumably this refers to “extended service personnel”], warrant officers, and women.”⁷⁵ Many Soviet military experts believe that a conscript/professional ratio of 1:1 is achievable and economically sound. It is likely that conscripts would continue to be needed as riflemen in motorized infantry units and as laborers on construction and railway projects—jobs suitable for politically unreliable youth. Associated with this plan are changes designed to “humanize” the armed forces: elimination of hazing, protecting the rights of soldiers, and improving the relationships between soldiers and officers.⁷⁶

If the Soviet military were to shift from a conscript force to voluntary enlistment, the building of a long-tenured noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps would be one of the first priorities. After interaction with US personnel, Soviet officers have been very

impressed with the technical depth and leadership breadth of U. S. NCOs. Because their military has no history of a professional NCO corps, they may seek information on the U. S. and British programs. As a Soviet writer put it:

The Soviet sergeant is in most cases the purest fiction, with pips on his shoulder boards. In the meantime the sergeant is the central figure in every other army of the world.⁷⁷

Manpower cuts beyond the 500,000 announced by Gorbachev may result in an armed force small enough to economically implement an all-volunteer system. As Colonel General D. Volkogonov said, "By the year 2000, it must be assumed that the Army will be considerably smaller. ... Perhaps it will be one half or a third its present size."⁷⁸

There is evidence that resistance on the part of high-ranking military leaders to a volunteer military may be softening. The Warsaw Pact's commander, General P. G. Lushev, reflected this vacillation when he said,

It is my opinion that the principle of manning the Army and Navy on the basis of compulsory military service will be retained in the future. However, this does not mean that it [his opinion] is unshakable.⁷⁹

The Officer Corps in Transition

In the past, service in the Soviet military was presented to the people as a quasi-religious experience. Recently, under severe and unprecedented criticism and disdain in the press (often referred to as "blasphemy" or "anti-military hysteria" by military writers), the religious aura with which the Soviet military views itself has been called into question. This has shaken the morale of officers of all ranks.⁸⁰

Along with the Party officials it protects and serves, the military officer corps has been an extraordinary class within a "classless communist society." In the past, officers' pay, housing, food, travel, and entitlements were better than those of their civilian counterparts. Their families shopped in special stores, while propaganda extolled their sacrifices to the country's people. Today the Soviet populace is becoming intolerant of privileged groups like the officers.⁸¹

Under the Gorbachev administration the prestige of being a military officer has dramatically plummeted. Pay raises have not kept pace with the rising costs of living, promotions have been slower, and the guarantee of a life-time job has been reduced. Also, one-fifth of Gorbachev's 500,000-man cut will come from the officer ranks: the equivalent of a bloodless purge of the military. Those officers who are being discharged often cannot find housing on the civilian market and in some cases cannot find jobs. Many officers resent having to abandon the higher standard of living they enjoyed in other Warsaw Pact countries.⁸²

Two-thirds of the 35,000 officers leaving Czechoslovakia and Hungary because of troop withdrawals and conventional-force reductions will be unable to obtain housing in the USSR.⁸³ While the military is now experiencing the same housing shortage as the remainder of the Soviet people, extraordinary strides are being taken to make apartments available for officers and warrant officers. To accomplish this, 30 percent of all capital investments in the Soviet Ministry of Defense have been allocated to the construction of

housing, schools, and supporting services for military families. The air force alone intends to spend 70 percent of its capital construction funds on housing. At the present time, 166,000 officers' families do not have apartments, and another 8,800 live in substandard (even by Soviet precepts) housing and barracks.^{84 85} The goal is an apartment for each service family by the year 2000.⁸⁶ Lack of housing is the most critical problem troubling Soviet society today. If the general public perceives that the military officers are receiving preferential treatment in housing, the image of the military will further deteriorate.

Of the 100,000 officer positions to be cut by 1991, 50,000 will be warrant officer allocations. Since its inception in 1972, the rank of warrant officer (*praporshchik*) was to provide the Soviet armed forces with technically trained personnel who had acquired work experience through longevity. The warrant officer program apparently did not completely live up to initial expectations and there have never been enough warrant officers to meet the demand. The warrant officer ranks have also drawn in a number of undesirable personnel.

As the Soviet armed forces shrink in size but continue to adopt weapons that require a high degree of technical competence to operate, maintain, and repair, the need for well-trained and technically competent warrant officers should increase. The Soviet military has found that developing large numbers of these personnel takes longer than expected. To expedite growth in the number of technically competent warrant officers, over 20,000 women have entered this rank. The majority are in clerical, medical and communications fields and usually hold these positions for long periods of time. Because of their stability and the types of jobs they hold, female warrant officers will continue to be recruited, despite reductions in the numbers of their male counterparts.⁸⁷

As with the warrant officer system, the Soviet military is unable to keep pace with the rapid changes taking place in the civilian sector. Whether because of nationalistic fervor or chronic disrespect for authority in general, officers are losing the respect of the society they are tasked to defend. A sad illustration of this current trend is an increase in the number of officers murdered: from two in 1988 to 59 in 1989. These officers were murdered by civilians—often by gangs of youth acting out their antimilitary resentment.⁸⁸ This figure does not include officers killed by their subordinates or those who have died during insurrections in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus regions.

The families of officers have also been attacked. These assaults have been sporadic throughout the country, but have reached such a critical level in Azerbaijan that over 35,000 military dependents have been evacuated. Half of them are being housed by the Moscow Military District in hotels, guest houses and barracks.⁸⁹ Every officer understands that there is an element of danger in his job, but fear for the safety of his family within the borders of the USSR makes being a career officer less attractive.

For these and other reasons, 12,000 young and highly skilled junior officers requested and were granted early discharges. Many more requests to leave the service have not been approved. This figure is in addition to the 70,000 officers who have already been discharged as a result of Gorbachev's cuts.⁹⁰ Also, approximately 2,500 officers "who could not cope with the burdens of military service"⁹¹ were the subjects of personnel reviews and were presumably dismissed. Many young, promising officers are leaving because the Soviet armed forces is no longer as economically and socially attractive as it once was. They know that jobs in the civilian sector are now paying more, provide better job security, are more prestigious, and are less dangerous.

Gorbachev has been opportunistic in simultaneously diluting the power of the military and reshaping it. (Khrushchev failed because he attempted the latter first.) As a result, Soviet officer morale is probably at its lowest point since Stalin's bloody purges of the military during the 1930s. Gorbachev's reforms have not yet spurred the military into political action, only disgruntlement. The average officer now feels that the changes the military is being forced to go through are beyond those expected by Soviet society as a whole. Add to this the attacks on the officer corps in the press and the physical attacks on individual officers on the streets. For these reasons, according to Minister of Defense Yazov, enhancing the image of the officer in the eyes of the public is now the armed forces' "number 1 problem."⁹²

The Impact of Soviet Military Behavioral Sciences

If present trends in Soviet politics and culture continue, in the next five years there will be significant changes in the military's personnel policies. Military behavioral sciences will have an important role to play in supporting these changes. Organizations like the newly established Center for the Study of Social and Psychological Problems are examining means to improve the professional relationships between officers and enlisted personnel. The center is also tasked with the following functions:

- Devise methods to make training more effective.
- Study and seek to solve problems of discipline.
- Develop ways of eliminating hazing.
- Devise techniques for incorporating increasing numbers of non-Slavic personnel into the Soviet armed forces.
- Produce morale and opinion surveys for the military.
- Institute procedures for increasing the effectiveness of troop control.

Eventually this center's work will be implemented by military psychologists, who in theory are to be deployed in all regiments and on ships. Another goal is to place military sociologists on the staffs of large units and in military academies.⁹³

The center has been burdened with the herculean task of changing many long-standing traits of Soviet military society. New regulations for the military⁹⁴ have recently been issued that attempt to redefine the social interactions of military personnel. In particular, hazing (*dedovshchina*) of new conscripts by older soldiers has been singled out for elimination. Additionally, the center is expected to address age-old problems and conflicts arising from mixing the various Soviet nationalities in the military.

It is unlikely that the new center will be able to offer new or substantive solutions to ethnic tensions; realistically, its staff can be expected only to gauge the effect of such conflict on the morale of a particular unit. Placement of the new center under the control of the Main Political Directorate (MPA) will not establish its image as a scientific enterprise. If the military leadership had placed the center under the administration of the Main Personnel Directorate instead of the MPA, the work of this center would be more professional and less likely to be burdened with a specific ideological orientation.

Development and use of opinion and morale surveys by the new center are novel phenomena for the Soviets and especially for their military. While these surveys are used extensively in Israeli and other Western armed forces,⁹⁵ the Soviet military has traditionally been unconcerned with the opinion of individual soldiers. In the past, the

Soviets assumed (1) their soldiers were single-mindedly motivated by communist ideology, (2) fear of persecution would suppress individual discord, or (3) dissension simply did not matter.

As the Communist Party⁹⁶ loses its exclusive monopoly over Soviet politics and society, it will lose it in the military as well. Within the military the system of military commissars (zampolit) would then become superfluous. Zampolit are Communist Party members assigned to all Soviet company and higher level units. These personnel are responsible for the political indoctrination and agitation of the troops. In addition, if the military were to convert to voluntary service, there would be less need to politically motivate the soldiers, because they would be in the army by choice. Work presently being conducted in the Center for Sociological and Psychological Problems to place psychologists in each regiment may indicate that the Soviets envision a movement away from a zampolit towards a behavioral scientist who performs morale and opinion assessments, monitors the effectiveness of training, and provides officers and commanders with a feedback link to their troops. As the Communist Party increasingly becomes the focus of scorn, the presence of a behavioral scientist will be more acceptable to a wider cross section of soldiers than a political officer. These behavioral scientists will also be better prepared for the socio-cultural problems that young men bring with them into the military.⁹⁷

Today Soviet leaders, especially those in the military, find that traditional methods of effecting social and behavioral changes do not work. In the past, increasing the amount of political indoctrination was the panacea for the nation's ills. For this reason, political indoctrination eventually took up as much as a quarter of the conscript's training time. If indoctrination failed, terror or the threat of swift and severe punishment was employed. In searching out new means to inspire and control Soviet youth, the military has turned to the behavioral sciences for answers. The odds are against them. Change in the Soviet Union is occurring simply too fast for the Kremlin, much less the behavioral sciences, to react effectively. The Soviet military will be going through dramatic changes as this century comes to a close. These changes will likely be driven by ongoing social forces (the human factor) rather than by any State plan.

CONCLUSION

Simultaneous with Mikhail Gorbachev's assuming power he declared that the USSR was now in the "Era of the Human Factor." This program was intended to "humanize" the Soviet system. Soviet military leaders would have preferred to distance themselves from these changes. Instead, the armed forces have taken center stage, as the focus of reform. As a result, the military, often grudgingly, has had to reexamine its place in modern Soviet society, the relationships between officers and conscripts, how it motivates and trains its personnel, how it deals with internal discord, and a variety of other issues. Also, the deterioration of communism in Eastern Europe and domestic strife have forced the government in general, and the military in particular, to reevaluate the image they project to the Soviet people.

The most substantial proposed change, the proposed conversion of the military from a conscript to a volunteer force, is presently the subject of heated debate. Over the next few years, as the Soviet military undergoes further manpower cutbacks, a professional armed forces will be established incrementally.

The growth of nationalism in the non-Russian republics has called into question the loyalty of large numbers of young men. For the first time, the Soviet government faced large-scale organized draft resistance during the Fall 1989 conscription cycle. Due to rapidly growing anti-Soviet and antimilitary sentiments in the non-Russian republics, the number of draft resisters will significantly increase in subsequent call-ups. Because of the questionable trustworthiness of young men from the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union, the military is facing a manpower pool that is shrinking smaller and smaller.

The Soviet military has long prided itself on fusing the Party and the people. Recently, however, the stalemate in Afghanistan and subsequent Soviet withdrawal from that land have shown that the deity-like military is actually very mortal. Under glasnost, press and public criticism of the military's high costs and wastefulness has been as widespread as it is unprecedented. This criticism has been especially detrimental to the morale of Soviet officers. The military realizes that fundamental changes in how it deals with the Soviet people in general, as well as with its own soldiers, need to be made quickly.

The roles and expectations of the Soviet soldier will change drastically over the next five years. His role will probably shift from protector of the Motherland from outside aggression to a more domestic one. The new internally-focused roles can have both positive and negative consequences. For example, use of soldiers in the brutal control of internal strife will likely further alienate the military from the people it is sworn to protect. On the other hand, a more positive image of the Soviet soldier may result from his increasing employment in the construction of housing, his work improving transportation, and his assistance in the rehabilitation of the Soviet economy.

Military leaders are turning to the behavioral sciences for solutions to the human factors issues they face. While the Soviets have touted the importance of the "human factor" in the past, much of their rhetoric was the hyperbole of propaganda. The recently established Center for the Study of Social and Psychological Problems is chartered to study and help solve the personnel problems of the military such as interethnic strife and hazing. Unfortunately, the military is but one customer for the small Soviet behavioral

sciences community. Economists, politicians, educators, the military, and society are all competing for behavioral sciences resources during the "Era of the Human Factor."

The dramatic rise in drug and alcohol abuse, crime, gangs, and violence among Soviet adolescents is also diminishing the number of acceptable young men available for conscription. If these problems were not enough, the erosion of Soviet youths' physical health from the detrimental effects of environmental pollution and poor health care are only now beginning to be recognized.

Faced with the deterioration in the health and reliability of Soviet youth, the Gorbachev administration may be willing to make conciliatory manpower cuts beyond the 500,00 reduction previously announced. The Soviet offer of further manpower cuts—characterized in the press and during treaty negotiations as a generous concession—probably results from the shortage of faithful, physically fit young men required by the Soviet military. While the most obvious and most publicized reasons for the military's manpower crisis are the independence movements in the non-Russian republics, the detrimental effects of drug and alcohol abuse, crime and environmental pollution are less well-known contributing factors.

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