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M J Orr

The Russian Ground Forces & Reform 1992-2002

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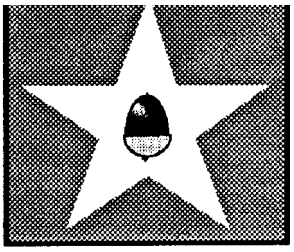

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The Russian Ground Forces & Reform 1992-2002

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The Russian ground forces have always been the largest and most important of the armed services; indeed the Russian word "armiya" can equally well translate the English words "army" and "armed services". It is only comparatively recently that Russians have begun to use the terms "vooruzhenyye sily" (armed forces) and "sukhoputnyye voysk" (ground forces) to distinguish the two concepts. In May 1945 the Soviet Union had over 11 million men under arms and 80% of them served in the ground forces. The Great Patriotic War was basically a land war and the other services played subsidiary roles. The development of nuclear weapons, however, threatened the ground forces' pre-eminence and the newly-created Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) became the senior branch of the armed forces. The ground forces remained the largest of the armed services, absorbing nearly half of the ministry of defence's manpower and recovered from their eclipse under Khrushchev in the nineteen sixties, but the other Soviet armed forces benefited even more from the great expansion of Soviet defence spending between 1975 and 1985. Nevertheless, the ground forces continued to dominate in senior appointments, such as minister of defence and chief of the general staff and with two million troops and over 200 divisions, the Soviet Union remained the predominant land power in the world.[1]

Remembering this background helps to understand why the Russian Federation has found it so difficult to reform its ground forces over the last decade. The legacy of the Soviet Army to its Russian successor is not merely a collection of buildings and equipment; this chapter will show that the enduring Soviet mind-set is the major obstacle to change. It is therefore essential to understand what sort of war the Soviet ground forces were intended to fight and how they were organized.

In the middle of the 1980s the Soviet ground forces contained about 210 manoeuvre divisions. About three quarters of them were motor rifle divisions and the remainder tank divisions; in addition a large number of artillery, air defence, engineer and other combat and service support formations were available. However even the Soviet Union could not maintain this force at war-time readiness. Formations were divided into three readiness categories (A, B & V, after the first three letters of the Cyrillic alphabet). Category A divisions had at least 80% of the wartime manpower establishment and were fully provided with modern weapons and equipment. Divisions located in the groups of forces outside Soviet territory were kept at a high alert state which was frequently tested. The USSR was divided into 16 military districts. The border military districts contained mostly B and V category divisions, usually with one category A "Show" division; they were intended to provide "follow-on" forces within a few days of mobilization. The internal military districts commanded mostly category V divisions and even some so-called "mobilization" divisions which were little more than stores of obsolete equipment and hardly ever conducted any field training.

The Soviet ground forces therefore were designed to wage a high-intensity, high technology war (possibly involving battlefield tactical weapons). They were intended to deliver an overwhelming armoured punch in the initial phase of a war, backed by

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a capability to continue to generate forces over a prolonged period. The "probable enemy" for most of this army was NATO and although the North Atlantic states had superior manpower and economic resources, the Soviet system gave the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies a potentially war-winning advantage in the short and medium term.[2]

The experience of the Afghan War (1979-1989) did not alter the Soviet ground forces' preoccupation with large-scale conventional or tactical nuclear warfare. Counter-insurgency, peace-keeping and the other tasks that western armies now call "Operations Other Than War" did not feature in Soviet military education. Despite formal references to the importance of morale and training, the focus of Soviet military thinking was technology and organizational matters, rather than human problems. In the nineteen eighties and nineties the ground forces were most concerned about the impact of the Revolution in Military Affairs, especially factors such as precision guided weapons and automated command systems. Traditional military structures were coming under review because new forms, based on army corps and brigades, were considered more manoeuvrable and flexible than the classic army/division/regiment chain of command.[3] Political pressure halted these experiments, when Gorbachev imposed a shift to "defensive" structures, reducing the proportion of tanks, heavy artillery, assault crossing assets and other "offensive" weapons systems.

The ground forces' leadership conformed but never accepted a military justification for this aspect of "perestroyka", except perhaps to buy a breathing space while they re-equipped for the Revolution in Military Affairs. But while they were struggling to cope with these changes, their strategic assumptions were nullified by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union. Obviously so rapid and overwhelming a shift in world affairs would challenge any military system but the Russian military have undoubtedly failed to cope with the changes of the last decade.

At root this is because they have concentrated too much on the technical, military aspects of the strategic situation and failed to understand the political significance of the end of the Cold War. This is not at all surprising. The Russian high command were (and are) graduates of Soviet military academies which provided a superb training for operational commanders and staff officers but in political matters taught an ideology rather than educated students in world affairs. Thus the end of the Cold War was assessed basically in terms of drastic change in the correlation of forces to Russia's disadvantage in a potential war against NATO but without asking if such a war had become less likely.

With such a mind-set the strategic picture was inevitably bleak. The generals concentrated on the loss of the forward bases in Eastern Europe and the better prepared divisions in the frontier military districts (which mostly became part of newly independent republics). Russia did not have the economic resources to build a slightly scaled-down version of the Soviet military machine, but the system did not have the intellectual resources to develop alternative concepts. It is instructive to examine the report on a military-scientific conference on "Future Russian Security Policies" held at the Military Academy of the General Staff in May 1992.[4] Although some speakers referred to the increased possibility of local wars and low intensity conflicts, the overwhelming concern of the conference was to discuss how the Russian armed forces could best prepare for a full-scale war against NATO. This is particularly obvious in the paper "Allocation, Missions and Composition of the Ground Forces" given by Colonel General F M Kuz'min, head of the Frunze Military Academy. It discusses the need for smaller, more mobile and flexible

formations which will be required, given the lower force-to-space ratios to be expected in future operations and the improvements in command and control and firepower which will follow from the military-technical revolution. In other words, the aim is to find new ways of conducting traditional missions and there is little, if any, awareness that the ground forces might have to undertake new missions requiring fundamental changes in their doctrine and organization. Nevertheless this conference and similar studies continued to set the tone for doctrinal debates about the role and structure of the Russian ground forces throughout the first decade of their existence.

Another significant indicator of how the military leadership was thinking was their persistent claim that the strength of the armed forces should be calculated in terms of a standard norm, such as a flat rate of at least one per cent of the national population or a correlation between manpower and the length of national borders. Naturally Russia, with its 22,500 km of frontier, fares badly when compared to states such as France or Germany in terms of the latter "scientific" norm. Such an approach neglects crucial issues such as the nature of the threat against which the state must be defended or whether the vast expanses of Russia's Arctic coastline actually require more than their natural defences. Force-to-space ratios may be a useful tool when calculating a divisional frontage in a military academy exercise but determining the size of a nation's armed forces surely requires more sophisticated assessment.[5]

One reason why such simplistic arguments went unchallenged was that there was no real civilian involvement in strategic debates within the Soviet Union. There was no equivalent of the discussions within parliaments, the academic world and the media which occurs in Western countries. Strategic studies were a military monopoly and in any case usually conducted under a security classification. The military were very contemptuous of outside expertise; by their definition, anyone who had not served in the armed forces and studied at a military academy was an amateur and their views irrelevant. When he was head of the General Staff Academy, General Igor Rodionov, a future minister of defence, sensed the need for civilian involvement but his solution, that politicians, journalists, civil servants etc should attend courses at military academies, would have indoctrinated them with the military view of the world rather than encouraged a fruitful exchange of views.[6]

Thus there was little public debate when the Russian Federation began to create its own armed forces. Actually it is misleading to talk of Russia “creating” its armed forces at all; Russia took over the ministry of defence and general staff, all the armed forces on Russian territory and as much of those located abroad as it could hold on to. The initial aim was to save as much as possible from the wreck of the USSR, not to begin again from first principles.

The ministry of defence almost immediately produced a programme for developing the Russian armed forces, divided into three stages. The first stage, occupying the rest of 1992, was to involve the organization of the ministry of defence itself, defining the structure of the armed forces and supervising the withdrawal of forces from outside Russia. During the second stage, 1993-1994, the withdrawal of forces would be almost completed and there would be some reorganization of the armed forces onto a smaller manpower establishment (2.1 million as opposed to 2.7 million men). A mixed manning system would be introduced, in which so-called “contract servicemen” would serve alongside conscripts. Alternative civilian service would be introduced. A new military infrastructure would be built, to provide barracks and training facilities for the forces withdrawn from abroad. The existing

5 armed services would be retained, as would the military districts. In the final stage, from 1995 to 1999, the troop withdrawal would be finally completed and the new peacetime structure of the armed forces would take shape, on a manpower establishment of 1.5 million men. It was proposed that military districts would be replaced by new "territorial commands" and the number of formations, especially cadre formations, would be drastically reduced. Those formations would be deployed to create groupings which met Russia's new strategic requirements. Finally there would be a "reorganization of the types of armed services and their branches".[7]

The programme set the pattern for the reform projects which have succeeded it. Almost all seem to involve 3 phases, prudently organized so that real change does not occur to the final stage, by which time the project has been replaced by a new scheme. From the ground forces' point of view the real problem with the 1992 programme was that it assumed that the armed forces could proceed at their own pace and took no account of external factors such as local conflicts which broke out throughout the former Soviet Union. The ground forces had to provide peacekeeping troops for these conflicts and might have to meet other eventualities. There was a need for deployable forces, which the ground forces, in the confusion of the re-deployment of forces from outside Russia and with their reliance on "heavy" tank and motor rifle divisions were ill-equipped to provide. The solution, proposed by officers with an airborne forces background, such as Pavel Grachev, the new minister of defence, was to create a new structure, the Mobile Forces. It would be an inter-service force and possibly even a separate branch of the services altogether. The Mobile Forces would be formed from existing organizations, such as the Airborne Forces (VDV) and the Naval Infantry, with new airportable "light" motor rifle brigades, backed by formidable air assets and other combat support. These would form the "Immediate Reaction Forces" and a second element, the "Rapid Deployment Forces" would include three new army corps and other high-quality ground forces formations. The missions of the Mobile Forces were to be firstly, to protect Russia's borders from external aggression by rapidly reinforcing frontier troops and covering forces in the threatened sector and secondly, to provide peacekeeping or peace enforcement units to operate under CIS or UN auspices in local wars and inter-ethnic conflicts.[8]

In theory, the Mobile Forces were not a bad idea but, in practice, there was no possibility that Russia could afford to create and maintain such a large, high quality force; it was military planning which took no account of economic reality. From the point of view of the ground forces staff, the plan also threatened to deprive them of their best forces, leaving only the operational control of mobilization reserves. The idea was discussed for a couple of years before its impracticality was finally accepted but its chief impact was to distract staffs from realistic thinking about the development of the ground forces and to embitter the already strained relationship between the ground forces and the airborne forces.

In any case two factors made effective planning for the future of the ground forces almost impossible. The first was the virtual collapse of the manning system and the second was the war in Chechnya. Inevitably the Russian Federation had a smaller population base than the USSR and long-standing demographic problems made this worse. Although the Russian Federation had 55% of the Soviet population, the proportion of Russians who were 18 or younger was much less. Declining health standards made the problem more acute, but the real difficulty was the unpopularity of military service. Families were increasingly unwilling to see their sons serve in the armed forces. President Yeltsin responded by increasing

educational and social exemptions from conscription and what had been a problem at the end of the Soviet era became a crisis almost overnight for the Russian armed forces, especially for the ground forces. Because the ground forces had tried to retain as large an order of battle as possible, rather than make a realistic assessment of threats and capabilities which would have entailed major force reductions, they were left with formations which were well described as "flags on a map". Understrength units could not train effectively and resources were wasted trying to maintain unused vehicles and empty barracks. As formations were brought back from Eastern Europe the ground forces hardly had the men to guard its vast stockpiles of arms and ammunition. The experience was particularly depressing for officers and their families. Returning from garrisons where they generally had a comfortable standard of living, they were often dumped in tents or huts in open fields, or at best forced to share unsuitable accommodation. Some units were so short of men that the officers had to stand guard duty in the barracks. Not surprisingly many officers, and many of the best officers, began to look for another career.[9]

The Chechen War demonstrated clearly that the manpower crisis had destroyed the ground forces' combat capability. An army with over 70 divisions in its notional order of battle struggled to raise a handful of deployable units. Officers and men who had never served together before were sent into battle in "composite regiments". The reputation of the army never recovered from the disaster of the battle for Groznyy in the winter of 1994-95. Some units were performing better by the end of the war but although some generals have since claimed that they were on the point of victory by August 1996, the soldiers on the ground and most Russians were only too relieved when the war ended in an ignominious withdrawal.

From August 1991 until the post was abolished in December 1997 the commander-in-chief of the ground forces was Colonel General Vladimir Semenov. Interviews and articles in the military press give an instructive insight into the thinking of the ground forces' professional head during this period of crisis. He was born in 1940, commissioned into the motor rifle troops in 1962 and then followed the classic route to high rank, through Frunze and General Staff military academies and suitable command and staff appointments, mostly east of the Urals. Competent, but probably not outstanding, his major qualification for the post of commander-in-chief may have been that he was away from the centre during the turmoil of the Gorbachev years and especially the August 1991 coup. In an interview in April 1993 Semenov said that local conflicts appeared more likely than a large-scale war but it was clear that, under his direction, the ground forces' main priority was to develop combined-arms formations that would be "combat super-systems", with unified C^3I and combat support systems and equipped with modern artillery and missiles. Comparisons were made with the American army and the Gulf War experience was used to justify retaining the existing "heavy" structure of armies and divisions. He was opposed to the creation of Mobile Forces as a "monster that would bleed dry all the other branches of the armed forces". He was keen to reduce the number of cadre formations and increase the number of properly manned and trained units. The introduction of contract service is mentioned but there is no discussion of the impact on the ground forces or how far professionalization should go.

In an article published in March 1995, at the start of the First Chechen War, Semenov was still focused on structural and technical problems, although manpower problems have a significant place in his agenda. Contract service was mentioned, but only as a way of compensating for the shortage of conscripts, not as

something which might change the character and organization of the ground forces. By the time he was interviewed for *Krasnaya Zvezda* in October 1996 his view of the ground forces" development had not changed but he was clearly becoming pre-occupied with bureaucratic politics. Although Semenov claimed to favour reducing the number of under-manned formations, the new minister of defence, General Rodionov, was proposing to reduce the ground forces to only 12 divisions (as opposed to the current figure of 40). Semenov argued for the need to retain a traditional mobilization capacity even though he admitted that the ground forces did not have even one fully manned division at the time. Eventually Rodionov issued an order sacking Semenov but he continued to go to his office every day until the row was ended by Rodionov's own dismissal in May 1997.[10]

Rodionov was replaced by General Sergeyev, previously commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces whose appointment signalled a sharp decline in the political influence of the ground forces. Sergeyev convinced Yeltsin that military reform could be achieved by relying on nuclear weapons to deter not only a world war but a range of lesser threats. Ground troops would be required for peacekeeping operations and minor conflicts but otherwise significant economies could be made. The reduced status of the ground forces was made clear when Sergeyev not only appointed Strategic Rocket Forces protégés to senior General Staff appointments which had traditionally been held by ground forces officers but even abolished the Main Command of the Ground Forces. Its functions were distributed among a dozen or more general staff directorates and the senior ground forces officer was only head of the main directorate of the ground forces. In theory this implied that the ground forces were no longer an independent branch of the armed services ranking with the air force or navy.

This "reform" was a military nonsense, justified only in terms of internal politics within the Ministry of Defence and these political and personal arguments continued to distort the development of the ground forces. The well-publicised dispute between general Sergeyev, the minister of defence and general Kvashnin, the Chief of the General Staff, had its roots in personal ambition as well as inter-service rivalry. Some significant changes were made; the number of ground forces formations was reduced and they were organized in a more sensible structure. The number of military districts was reduced from eight to six and each military district was given an operational role as the headquarters of a strategic direction.[11] Within the military districts formations and units were ranked by readiness status. A new category of "Permanent Readiness" formations and units was introduced, initially composed of three divisions and four brigades in the Moscow, Leningrad and North Caucasus Military Districts which were to be fully equipped and at least 80% manned. The next grade was "Reduced Strength and Cadre" formations which would still be fully equipped but have only 10-50% of their manpower establishment during peacetime. There were to be 21 divisions and 10 brigades in this category which would require up to 30 days to reach combat readiness. Finally the "Strategic Reserves" were little more than equipment storage depots.[12]

Although in outlining this structure the head of the Ground Forces main directorate, Colonel General Yuri Bukreyev, said that "A possible aggression against Russia is not foreseeable in the near future. Local armed conflicts pose a threat to its security now," he was still eager to compare the number of formations in the Russian army with the 54 divisions which he claimed were available to NATO.[13] The contradiction in the ground forces' planning was plain. They could not abandon their Soviet fixation with NATO, even with a second Chechen war on the horizon. When that war broke out, in August 1999, the permanent readiness forces

were immediately fully committed. The improvements in the mechanics of mobilizing and deploying forces were obvious; the chaos of 1994-95 was not repeated. However the performance of those forces demonstrated that, in doctrine and training, the ground forces were still not prepared for limited war or counter-insurgency.

Nevertheless, the second Chechen War rescued the ground forces. The war demonstrated the irrelevance of nuclear deterrence forces in local conflicts and General Sergeyev's credit declined steadily. In the following year Bukreyev was openly critical of the decision to suppress the ground forces headquarters.

> *"Disbanding the Main Command of the Ground Forces and creating a new structure in its place, dividing the command and control of the ground forces among a multitude of directorates which are subordinate to a variety of authorities and lack a united command and staff, has led to the erosion of responsibility for the ground forces as an armed service. In turn this has prevented the setting of priorities in their organization, development and training, making it impossible to concentrate efforts on the most important directions and obstructs the establishment of a single view on everyday issues concerning the forces and how they are to be trained and employed."*[14]

After three wasted years the Ground Forces Main Command was re-established and was actually re-born as a more powerful organization with increased command responsibilities. The six military districts were subordinated to the ground forces headquarters rather than the General Staff and the commander-in-chief of the ground forces was also made a deputy defence minister, making him senior to his fellow heads of service in the navy and air force. Colonel General Nikolai Kormiltsev was brought from the Siberian Military District to be the new professional head of the ground forces. The appointment was an interesting choice. Kormiltsev is an officer in the mould of his Soviet predecessors. He is an armoured infantryman and has spent almost all his career east of the Urals. He is not a member of the North Caucasus clique around General Kvashnin and appears to have no personal experience of local wars, counter-insurgency or peacekeeping operations. He is not therefore the obvious man to re-focus the ground forces on the challenges of the twenty-first century. He is credited with the successful amalgamation of the Siberian and Transbaikal Military Districts and was probably seen as a safe pair of hands to rebuild the ground forces command structure.

Kormiltsev's articles suggest he is an administrator rather than an innovator.[15] Although they often refer to the need to study and apply the lessons of the Chechen wars there are other indications that he is a tactical conservative. At the start of 2002 a new set of Combat Regulations appeared in draft form for experimental use. They follow the pattern of the existing 1989 edition, apart from the introduction of one chapter entitled "Actions To Localize And Terminate Armed Conflicts". This occupies 36 pages in a volume over 550 pages long.[16] In addition during 2002 more money has been available for the ground forces training budget. The way this money has been spent is a significant indicator of Kormiltsev's priorities. There have been a number of mobilization exercises and although there has been some joint training with other ministries with counter-insurgency themes, most attention has been paid to high profile exercises featuring assault river crossings with tanks driving underwater. In fact the scenarios of these exercises closely resemble the test exercises which were such a feature of the training year in the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany during the Cold War.

While Kormiltsev has been in command the question of professional manning of the armed services has been the most prominent aspect of military reform. His attitude is ambivalent; although he claims to be in favour of "contract service" he has not objected to the slow process recommended by the General Staff. In fact he has argued that a professional army should be introduced over an 11-15 year period, "in the most favourable circumstances". In fact, Kormiltsev does not favour a completely professional system. Permanent readiness forces would be fully manned by professionals but a short period of obligatory military service would have to be retained to provide a mobilization capability for the cadre and reserve formations. The spectre of 1941 still influences Russian strategic thinking.

So far this paper has deliberately concentrated on the ground forces' policy makers but it is time to ask how well their pronouncements fitted the realities of the last decade. Firstly, the leadership of the ground forces was slow to adjust to the change in Russia's geostrategic position. They continued to think in terms of strategic rivalry with NATO and because they saw this as a zero-sum game were fixated by the fear of a growing NATO threat. They did not notice that once it became obvious that a Soviet resurrection was unlikely NATO countries began to view Russia as an obstacle rather than an opponent.

While it is true that the military as a group proved more attached to Communism than most of Russian society, serving generals were willing to adapt to the new political order. However they found it much more difficult to accept that the Russian empire as well as the Soviet Union had passed into history. National pride and strategic logic argued against Russia's new borders and the generals' nightmare was that the Russian state might shrink even more. Where successor republics lacked the political authority to control the Soviet military assets on their territory, the ministry of defence in Moscow was eager to assume the responsibility, in Moldova, the Transcaucasus republics and Tajikistan instability and often civil war followed. Russian-subordinated ground forces were implicated to varying degrees in those instabilities and the result was generally the deployment of a Russian-led peacekeeping force, often involving the same troops.[17]

While Yeltsin was president there was no attempt to calculate the long-term costs and benefits of maintaining a Russian military presence in the former Soviet Union. Under President Putin economic realism has been allowed to influence decision-making and a programme of reduction and withdrawal is in progress. However it comes too late for several hundred Russian servicemen who have lost their lives in regional conflicts over the last decade, to say nothing of the thousands who have died in Chechnya. (The civilian death toll is of course much higher and almost impossible to calculate with any accuracy.) The social costs to servicemen and their families of living in worsening conditions in isolated garrisons and the impact this had on retention and recruitment of personnel are also hard to calculate. By the time that the withdrawal began it was too late to undo the distrust of Russian intentions among Russia's neighbours. It is noteworthy that this policy change has met with considerable opposition in the press and parliament, often expressed as personal abuse of the Defence Minister or Chief of the General Staff. The comments indicate that there is still no general understanding of the need for real reform in the Russian defence community.

The debate about professionalization of the armed forces has been conducted in the same climate. The need for a conscript army to provide a strategic reserve or mass army has been almost universally accepted by military professionals. It is only in the last couple of years that something like a debate has begun but the lack of

independent commentators has been very obvious. One legacy of the Soviet era is that there is no tradition in Russia of subjecting defence policy to informed debate by politicians or the public at large. Military decision-making is a sealed environment and is not subject to civilian accountability as in the West.

But rather than discussing the theory of manning systems it might be more useful to look at the army which the present system actually produced. Some of its problems are well known. The increasingly poor health of Russian youth is reflected in the difficulty the army has in finding fit conscripts. Over 40% of the age group are found to be unfit for military service and many of those who are recruited have medical limitations on how they serve. This is a particular problem for the ground forces because other branches of the armed services, such as the airborne and special forces or the navy get first call on the fittest recruits. Yet service in the combat arms of the ground forces is physically arduous. In the same way, about 40% of potential recruits claim the higher education exemption. Other services have priority in picking from the limited pool of better educated recruits although the modern soldier must operate highly technical weapon systems. The days of the infantryman with musket and bayonet are long past, even if the Russian army's equipment is rapidly ageing, with no prospect of large-scale modernization for several years at least. Overall, therefore, the Russian ground forces have to cope with what they can get, rather than select the most suitable recruits. It is a bitter joke to say that they are once again "an army of workers and peasants".

But there are more serious problems than obsolete equipment or poor recruits. The Russian armed forces are rapidly losing the esprit de corps or military ethos which makes a military organization an effective fighting force (and politically reliable). The indicators of that decline have been obvious for some time, often dating back to the Soviet era. One of the consequences of Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy was to draw attention to the problem of *dedovshchina*, institutionalized bullying by older conscripts. The often drunken and violent rituals by which conscripts live are a better indication of where power lies inside the barracks than the official chain of command. In a normal military system officers are entitled to obedience from their subordinates but in turn have a duty of care towards them. That vital link has been broken in the modern Russian army. According to official figures, there are about a thousand non-combat deaths each year in the Russian armed forces but the well-informed Soldiers' Mothers Committees claim the true figure is closer to 3,000 deaths a year. Analysis of the figures shows that at the root of the problem is the officer corps' failure to look after their men. A high proportion die in accidents which could be prevented if soldiers were properly supervised. Decent barracks and food would reduce the numbers who pick up some disease while in the army. But the most preventable deaths are those caused by bullying and the suicides of soldiers who cannot face the bullying any longer.[18]

It is hard to see how any professional officer corps could tolerate this pattern of behaviour but in fact dedovshchina became prevalent because too many officers shirked their responsibilities. The lack of a professional corps of non-commissioned officers was a crucial factor here. Russian officers were effectively being asked to do the jobs of sergeants as well as their own and too many were prepared not to ask questions about bruised faces on morning parade if it meant a quieter life. By now, physical abuse is such an accepted part of Russian military life that many officers routinely use force themselves to discipline their soldiers; only the exceptional cases come to public notice. For example, in October 2002 a Captain Ilyasov was court-martialled in Yekaterinburg. He would regularly wake his soldiers up during the night for a snap inspection and if he found anything amiss would beat the culprits

with a rubber dildo. In September 2002, after a drunken escapade by some conscripts who had nearly completed their service, the chief of staff and some officers of an artillery battalion beat five likely offenders with spade handles and threatened the rest of their soldiers with similar treatment. That incident came to light because 54 of the soldiers left camp and marched into Volgograd to complain. Officers are not even ashamed to assault fellow officers. In the Siberian Military District in October 2002 Major General Komissarov was court-martialled for beating up one of the colonels on his staff.[19]

Officers will also often hire out their soldiers for cash or favours. Like physical abuse, it is a commonplace part of Russian military life which only receives attention when something goes wrong. For example, Private Kiselev died when the trench he was digging collapsed on top of him in July 2002. He was not digging a defensive position but a drainage ditch for a dacha belonging to a friend of his colonel.[20] This sort of exploitation, like physical abuse of soldiers, indicates that the average Russian officer does not see his soldiers as fellow servicemen or even as fellow human beings. There is no relationship of mutual respect between leaders and led and it difficult to see how a professional army can be created without one. At the moment, officers often despise contract servicemen even more than conscripts. "Kontraktniki" serving in Chechnya and other "hot spots" are often called mercenaries and marauders by senior officers.

Of course, a military officer's responsibilities are not only to his soldiers. He also takes on a duty to serve and defend the state. But a significant proportion of Russian officers are not only lax in performing their duties but eager to find every opportunity for corruption that their profession offers. Some might try to justify this by arguing that the state has failed to live up its part of the bargain. Until this year a lieutenant or captain's pay was not enough to put his family above the official poverty line and the impact of the changes in military pay, allowance and tax scales in 2002 is still uncertain. For long periods in the last decade even these beggarly wages went unpaid, forcing officers to find second jobs if their families were not to starve. The urge to find some unofficial way of making military service pay is understandable and Russian officers have shown considerable ingenuity in their graft. Military commissars can take bribes in return for exempting young men from conscription or to arrange a comfortable posting close to home. Alternatively a bribe can ensure a contract serviceman a posting to a peacekeeping unit in the Balkans, where salaries are $1,000 a month. Unit commanders will take bribes to allow soldiers to stay at home. (In one interesting variation on this theme, Lt Col Nikitin in Kostroma received R23,000 over 18 months for allowing soldiers to dodge service and spent the money on improving facilities in his barracks.)[21]

No-one has ever been able to put a figure on the scale of theft in the Russian armed forces overall. Rations are sold while soldiers go hungry. Arms and ammunition disappear, perhaps to hunters, or gangsters or terrorists but no-one knows. Fuel, spare parts and vehicles can be bought; recently at Mulino, home of a permanent readiness motor rifle regiment, tanks ran out of fuel on the ranges because it was being sold by the tanker-load to local businesses. A motor rifle regimental commander sold all his unit's lorries, becoming, briefly, a millionaire. Vital parts of weapons are sold for the precious metals they contain. In May 2002 the chief of the general staff said that "Theft and robbery are rampant in the Russian army and its officers receive no punishment for abuse of power". In April 2002 the minister of defence, visiting 20 Guards Army in the Moscow Military District, described the volume of theft there as "simply impermissible", which raises the intriguing possibility that the ministry recognises an acceptable level of theft.[22]

These stories of abuse, theft and corruption are well-known. The danger is that they are taken for granted when military reform is being discussed, so that structural change or professional manning can be discussed in a form of vacuum. In fact, the choices about the size and composition of the armed forces or the details of reform programmes or equipment purchases are almost irrelevant in the light of the human problems afflicting the Russian military. This is particularly true of the Ground Forces which are the most manpower intensive of armed services. To put the problem at its simplest, if a programme for professional armed forces could be agreed and funded, how could it be put into practice by the Russian army? Where will Russian officers learn how to treat soldiers as fellow-professionals? How can a professional ethos be created in the armed services as they exist today?

As this paper was being written it was announced that Sergei Ivanov, the minister of defence, at the end of a discussion of military reform, asked President Putin to restore the five-pointed star as the insignia of the armed forces. There could hardly be a better illustration of the reasons for the failure of reform in the ground forces or the armed forces as a whole. It is typical of the fixation with the Soviet past rather than a Russian future and demonstrates a preference for symbols rather reality. Will an officer be less likely to beat a soldier or steal his pay and rations if both are wearing stars in their cap badges? Most importantly, will putting a star on a flag check the continuing collapse of the Russian military system?

ENDNOTES

[1] A G Lenskiy & M M Tsybin, *The Soviet Ground Forces in the Last Year of the Soviet Union*, no publisher given, St Petersburg: 2001, pp5-10; V A Zolotarev (ed), *A History of Russian Military Strategy*, Moscow: Kulikovo Pole, 2000, pp457-479; J Erickson, L Hansen & W Schneider, *Soviet Ground Forces: An Operational Assessment*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1986, pp1-30.

[2] Besides the works cited in Endnote 1, see the appropriate annual issues of *The Military Balance*, published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, (London). The best account of the Soviet military system is C N Donnelly, *Red Banner*, Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group, 1988.

[3] R Hall, *Where Next for the Soviet Division?*, Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review, December 1990; V S Kalyuzhnyy *What Sort of Division Do We Need*, Voyennaya Mysl', November-December 1991.

[4] Special Issue of Voyennaya Mysl', July 1992, summarised by P H Vigor & M J Orr in *"Future Russian Security Policies - A Military-Scientific Conference"*, Camberley, SSRC Paper C84.

[5] For examples, see Lt Gen Mazurkevich, addressing a working group of the Russian Federal Assembly & NATO Parliamentary Assembly, as quoted by AVN, 22 November 2001; Col Gen V Zherebtsov, *If You Wish to Be Handsome, Serve Russia*, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 7 October 1995, p8; Army General A Kvashnin said Russia “has the least number of soldiers manning each kilometre of border – 16 instead of no less than 50 in other countries”, CDI Russia Weekly, 1 February 2002.

[6] I Rodionov, *Does The CIS Need Military Science?*, Krasnaya Zvezda, 28 January 1992, p1.

[7] A Dokuchayev, *Russia’s Armed Forces: Stages of Their Formation*, Krasnaya Zvezda, 23 June 1992, p2.

[8] O Vladykin, *Russia’s Mobile Forces*, Krasnaya Zvezda, 18 December 1992, p2.

[9] M J Orr, *Manpower Problems of the Russian Armed Forces*, CSRC Paper D62, February 2002, pp1-3.

[10] V Semenov, The Ground Forces Change Shape, Krasnaya Zvezda, 28 April 1993, p1; V Semenov, The Ground Forces: The Main Directions Of Their Organization and

Development, Armeyskiy Sbornik March 1995 p9; V Semenov, The Ground Forces & Reform, Krasnaya Zvezda, 31 October 1996, p1.

[11] The Siberian and Transbaikal Military Districts were combined in 1999 and Volga and Urals Military Districts were amalgamated in 2001. The military district/strategic direction combinations were: Leningrad/Northwestern; Moscow/Western; North Caucasus/Southwestern; Volga-Urals/Central Asian; Siberian/Siberian; Far Eastern/Far Eastern. See *Prospects for Military Development*, Krasnaya Zvezda, 5 August 1998, p1; Yu Baluyevskiy, *A New Role For The Military District*, Voyennaya Mysl', May-June 1999, p2.

[12] Interfax, Moscow, 3 March 1999.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Yu Bukreyev, *Mother-Infantry Is Still "Raising Dust"*, Armeyskiy Sbornik, May 2000, p33. See also Yu Bukreyev, *Russia Needs Powerful Ground Forces*, Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye, 3 November 2000.

[15] See for example the following articles, all by Kormiltsev: *Mother-Infantry Still Serves Russia*, Armeyskiy Sbornik, August 2001; *The Ground Forces Were & Will Be The Foundation of Combat Power*, Na Strazhe Rodiny, 21 February 2002, p2; *Combat Capability – The Demand Of The Times*, Armeyskiy Sbornik, April 2002, p3.

[16] Contents of the Draft Combat Regulations of the Ground Forces, Voyennaya Mysl', January 2002, p53.

[17] D Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS, London; Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000; M J Orr, *14th Army & the Crisis in Moldova*, Jane's Intelligence Review, June 1992, p247); M J Orr, *The Civil War in Tajikistan*, Jane's Intelligence Review, April 1993, p181; M J Orr, *Peacekeeping - A New Task for Russian Military Doctrine*, Jane's Intelligence Review, July 1994.

[18] Minister of Defence Ivanov gave the official figures for 2002 as 531 men having died on duty as a result of accidents and crimes and 20,000 having been wounded. This figure apparently does not include suicides. Ivanov said, "The accident rate is not falling." Interfax, Moscow, 26 November 2002.

[19] S Shevaldin, *Strange Barracks Cruelty*, Gazeta, 18 October 2002; for details of the Volgograd incident see M J Orr, *Putin's Generals Have Lost Control*, Wall Street Journal Europe, 4-6 October 2002; ITAR-TASS, Moscow, 23 October 2002.

[20] V Rubtsov & V Ampelonskiy, *A Soldier's Death at a Dacha*, Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 8 July 2002, p2.

[21] S Abashkin, *Detochkin With Shoulder Straps*, Versty, 23 May 2002, p1.

[22] V Vershinin, *Fuel is Stolen Straight Off An Exercise*, Vek, 6 November 2002; RIA News Agency, Moscow, 26 April 2002; Interfax-AVN, Moscow, 30 May 2002.

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E-mail: csrc@defenceacademy.mod.uk
http://www.csrc.ac.uk

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