The all-volunteer force in the Russian mirror
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Chapter 1.  The Gorbachev Era: Losing the Initiative

1.  1985-1987: The Introduction of Perestroika

The Policy of Perestroika and its Military Consequences

At the time of Konstantin Chernenko’s death on March 10th 1985, the Soviet Union found itself in a grave condition. The limits of the Soviet-style command economy and extensive growth had been reached. Meanwhile the Soviet Armed Forces were using an inappropriate amount of state resources in what was effectively a militarized society. 144 The abuses and malfunctions of the system became so apparent that the situation of complete stagnation [zastoi] within Soviet society was a publicly acknowledged fact. 145 Mikhail Gorbachev, appointed as the new General Secretary of Communist Party, understood that this situation could not last if the Soviet Union wanted to maintain its superpower status. During this period, the Soviet Union was coping with the challenges of the so-called ‘Third Wave’ revolution which was characterized by an extremely turbulent internal and external environment, the need for extensive knowledge and a technologically intense environment. 146

Gorbachev introduced his idea of reform [perestroika] not only in order to be able to compete with the United States and the West in the bi-polar world, but first and foremost to survive as a state in the 21st Century. In April 1985 he announced his main, though still vaguely formulated, ideas about perestroika during his speech to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) which primarily focused on the improvement of the Soviet economy. As he noted in his memoirs, Gorbachev claims that the two outstanding principles of his new policy were: “the unflagging forward motion of progress, the identification and resolution of

144 See Yurii Yaremenko, Strukturnye izmenneniya v sotsialisticheskoi ekonomike, Moskva: Mysl’, 1981; Roy Medvedev, Post-Soviet Russia, A Journey Through the Yeltsin Era, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 51-85. Gorbachev has noted on this issue: “We were, of course, aware of how heavily our exorbitant military expenditure weighed on the economy, but I did not realize the true scale of the militarization of the country until I became General Secretary. Finally, although the leaders of the military-industrial complex opposed it, we published those data. It turned out that military expenditure was not 16 per cent of the states budget, as we had been told, but rather 40 per cent; and its production was not 6 per cent but 20 per cent of the gross national product. Of 25 billion rubles in total expenditure on science, 20 billion went to the military for technical research and development”. Mikhail Gorbachev, Memoirs, London: Doubleday, 1996, p.215. For a more historical account on militarism in the Soviet Union see Mark von Hagen, Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship, The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 6-7.

145 The period of Zastoi was devastating for Soviet-Russian economy, technological development and society. The way the Soviet economy was organized did not allow for change from an extensive to an intensive growth model. Innovation had existed only in principle so that technologically the USSR was far behind the West. Socially the SU lived in a state of lethargy. Soviet citizens could only survive on the system of ‘blat’, an informal system in which networks were constructed among which ‘trade’ in scarce services and products were carried out. This system of social survival, however, bred corruption, which was rampant. As zastoi was typical for the Brezhnev period, it still throws its shadow over contemporary Russia. For example, blat’ is still an important strategy of soldiers to avoid military service and, more generally, it is an essential social custom for survival for the Russian citizen. See for example: Markku Lokila, Post-Soviet Russia: A Society of Networks, in: Markku Kangaspuro, Russia: More Different Than Most, Helsinki: Kikimora publications, 1999; and especially the Russian specialist on this subject: A. Ledeneva, Russia’s economy of favours. Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

new problems”; and “the perfecting of a society based on the concept of developed socialism”.147 As an apparently convinced Leninist and believer in the communist system, Gorbachev estimated that the improvement of the economy would result in the correction of the entire ‘superstructure’ of Soviet society. His goal was to bring the communist system to a point of perfection, based on the ideals of Marxist-Leninist materialism.

Gorbachev’s idea of perestroika and its emphasis on the Soviet economy inevitably affected the Soviet Armed Forces and the military industrial complex. Since the Soviet Union was more or less a military organization itself, it was clear that every reform effort that was made to reform Soviet society would also effect its military institution. The cult of ‘full mobilization’ had, indeed, militarized the whole of Soviet society and its economy.148 Therefore, from the beginning of the perestroika movement, the military organization was included in Gorbachev’s reform enterprise. Gorbachev simply could not ignore the imperium in imperio that the military institution presented thus he used two traditional Soviet methods to make the military decision making elites support his program. First, in a state that relied heavily on propaganda, Gorbachev believed in the power of the word and he used propaganda to enforce a program of ideological indoctrination. Second, for those who stubbornly resisted change, he used a method of personnel and administrative purges. In brief, he tried to convince, coerce, manipulate and build coalitions among political and military elites.

Gorbachev Makes Perestroika Clear to the Military. Soon after April 1985, Soviet military leaders received various messages that their institution would not escape Gorbachev’s reform endeavors. Indirectly, the General Secretary made it clear that the arms race was overburdening the Soviet economy and subsequently in April 1985, Gorbachev announced the suspension of the deployment of SS-20 missiles in Europe. Six months later, the Soviet Union proposed that half of all Soviet and American nuclear weapons should be destroyed. These were strong signs to the Soviet Generals that the period of quasi-unlimited and unquestioned defense budgets was over.

In the course of the following campaign during which he promoted the April plenum resolutions all over the Soviet Union, Gorbachev met several senior officers at the so-called ‘Minsk Meeting’ in July 1985. During this national meeting he bluntly stated that military spending had to be contained.149 This statement was the first direct and clear message to Soviet military leaders that they should start to downsize its organization. During the XXVIIth CPSU Party Congress in February-March 1986, Gorbachev again made it clear that military spending needed to be controlled more stringently. Gorbachev announced that he intended to reformulate military doctrine and to introduce the idea of ‘reasonable sufficiency’; and that he wanted to refocus with a renewed vigor on the human aspects of perestroika.150 Soviet military leaders were once again put on notice about the consequences of perestroika for their organization.

In order to propagate perestroika effectively in the military, Gorbachev replaced Aleksey Epishev with army General Aleksey Lizichev as chief of the Main Political Directorate (MPA) or Glavnoe Politicheskoе Upravlenie (GlavPU) in July 1985.151 This replacement was a remarkable

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151 The Main Political Directorate was an organization that was part of the Ministry of Defense, which carried the legal authority of a department of the CPSU Central Committee. It was simultaneously a department within the Party’s Secretariat’s Central Apparatus and an administrative division within the Defense Ministry. Ellen Jones stated: “The MPA’s basic charter is “part political work” but this term carries a far broader meaning than party oversight and control...the MPA is the main organization concerned with personal issues in the military. It is responsible for directing political socialization, maintaining high morale and discipline, administering cultural and recreational programs, managing the military’s party and Komsomol organizations”. Ellen Jones, Red Army and Society, a Sociology of the
move because Epishev had led the MPA since 1962 and in addition it revealed Gorbachev’s tactics towards obstinate officials. Gorbachev apparently wanted to use Lizichev and the traditional Party channel in the army to give his propaganda machine a new impetus. In his writing and political agitation work, Lizichev translated the features of the inherently (economic) program of perestroika to the military organization. The main points of this program were as follows: there was the need to create an efficient army; to fight inefficiencies and laziness among soldiers; to stress personal responsibility among individuals; to reject prevailing negative conditions such as alcoholism, dedovshchina, racial tensions (seen in friction between the different nationalities); and finally to address shortcomings in the education levels of military personnel.\(^\text{152}\)

From March 1986 onwards, the problems of perestroika were discussed in a special section of Krasnaia Zvezda, the official daily newspaper of the Ministry of Defense. Letters to the Editor were also published in this newspaper, marking the moment when the military elite began to discuss the impact of perestroika on its own organization. The MPA also organized high level meetings with officials of the Ministry of Defense in which it tried to endorse Gorbachev’s call for the acceleration of the country’s socio-economic development. The Secretary General clearly hoped to change military attitudes by putting forward convincing arguments in the Defense Council.

Besides this propaganda effort, the Secretary General also tried to build coalitions in order to implement this policy. He appointed his allies to institutions which played a role in the decision-making process in military affairs and dismissed ‘hard-liners’ who opposed his policy.\(^\text{153}\) Although this trend was not very clear at that time, Grigory Romanov, a political rival of Gorbachev and a well-known ally of the military, was expelled from the Politburo and this was considered a crucial political move. Gorbachev also revived the Defense Council [Sovet oborony] which had been in a deep political crisis since the end of the Brezhnev era.\(^\text{154}\) Until Gorbachev’s appointment, it had only met infrequently, its meetings were formal, and its function was merely to rubber stamp decisions made elsewhere. Gorbachev tried to stimulate discussions in the Defense Council from the beginning of his period in office. Thus, he altered and enlarged civilian representation on the

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\(^\text{153}\) Generally, the institutions which played a major role in the decision-making process in the organizational development of the armed forces (institutions for industrial defense development are excluded) in the pre-1989 era were: the Politburo (especially the subgroup on national defense), the Central Committee (especially its Secretariat because of its day-by-day supervisory responsibilities and the MPA, as well as occasional ad hoc committees) the Defense Council, the General staff and the Collegium of the Ministry of Defense. Although organizational development decisions were formulated and implemented within a dual party-government system, the Party controlled the military organization. In order to control the military, the Party used the following strategy: (1) it gave formal instruction and directives to the government (Ministry of Defense), (2) it issued joint party-government resolutions and (3) it appointed individuals in key functions. The military were thus integrated into the political structure, but there was a systematic attempt to exclude the professional military from the highest organs. See for instance: Howard Frost, ‘Soviet Party-Military Relations in Strategic Decision making’, in: kenneth M Currie and Gregory Varhall (Editors), The Soviet Union: What Lies Ahead? Military-Political Affairs in the 1980’s, Studies in Communist Affairs, Vol. 6, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1985, pp.58-74.

Defense Council. His objective was to inject his ideas into the Council in the hope of obtaining support for the military establishment and to enforce change in its mentality. Archie Brown noted this tactic in his writing about the working practices of the Politburo, which is considered to be the nucleus of military policy making:

“It is noteworthy that during the first five years of his leadership Gorbachev kept in the politburo people of strong personalities and of very different views. This was partly, no doubt, because he felt constrained to do so, but, still more, because he chose to have a broad representation of opinion and counted on his skills of persuasion to carry both wings of the party with him in the process of fundamental, yet evolutionary, change.”

After two years of discussing and propagating reform, albeit in the vague terms of the period, the results were disappointing. It prompted Herspring to make the following remark:

“By the beginning of 1987, it was clear that if the military-like most of the rest of Soviet society-was not openly resisting perestroika, neither was it rushing to embrace the approach”

Gorbachev showed some irritation at the slow progress of perestroika’s introduction into Soviet society during the January 1987 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee and in his speech he called for truly revolutionary, comprehensive transformations in society. During this plenum Gorbachev highlighted the existence of a ‘crisis phenomenon’ in the Soviet system; he proposed multiple candidacy elections; he spoke out against additional military spending; he urged the expansion of the idea of Glasnost; and he advocated a faster political personnel turnover, a policy which was a reaction against the ‘principle of cadre stability' which was a remnant of Brezhnev's policy.

This speech sent a shock wave through the military establishment. General Yu. Maksimov, Deputy Minister of Defense, understood the message and stated that the January 1987 plenum decisions were ‘all embracing’ while admitting the many shortcomings in the Soviet defense organization. He also pointed at the personal responsibility of military professionals and he stressed the firmness with which he would endorse perestroika including punishments for those who could not maintain discipline in the army.

In the same newspaper there appeared an even more remarkable article by Colonel V. Pokholenchuk who went as far as saying that without general purges in the military high command, the necessary change of mentality would never take place. He also asked for a better approach to ministerial planning and a new military strategic plan. Similar articles followed indicating that perestroika was the key issue in restructuring the armed forces. Apparently, perestroika received a new impulse within the military establishment during 1987, which seemed to have understood the Kremlin’s message. But Maksimov’s Krasnaia Zvezda article can also be seen as an example of self

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criticism (‘samokritika’) of the military, a traditional, though not necessarily convincing way of approving the ideology of reform ‘from above’.

Gorbachev was also eager to make breakthroughs in the international arena. Nuclear disarmament and conventional force reductions were a main concern. In November 1987 he signed the INF-agreement in Geneva committing the USSR and the US, to the total elimination of intermediate-range nuclear missiles, thus the military establishment gradually lost its monopoly over defense policy making and weapon programs. Simultaneously, Gorbachev encouraged political and civilian criticism of military institutions and its traditional policies. He was enthusiastically supported in this endeavor by two key allies, Aleksandr Yakovlev and Eduard Shevardnadze. Yakovlev, the ‘father of glasnost’, was appointed head of the Central Committee Propaganda Department by Gorbachev, which was the center from which perestroika was promoted. He was elected as a full member of the Central Committee in February 1986 and of the Politburo a year later. Shevardnadze, also a full member of the politburo, became the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in June 1985, replacing the long serving Andrei Gromyko, who went on to become the ‘honorable’ Soviet President. Their appointments signaled the endorsement of ‘the new thinking’ and broke the analytical monopoly of the genstab on strategic and defense issues. Shevardnadze criticized the Soviet military leaders and the role of the General Staff in the Defense Council in particular. He started a campaign against the military establishment threatening their near-monopoly on foreign policy issues, and forcing his department into Gorbachev’s inner circle of decision makers. The appointment of Shevardnadze to the Minister of Foreign Affairs was crucial in the development of the post-1987 period. Gorbachev was, indeed, faced with a dilemma. On one hand, Gorbachev and his reform team understood that the Soviet Armed Forces could not be a neutral observer of the perestroika experiment, and that the military’s active involvement was actually necessary. On the other hand, Gorbachev could not endlessly wait for the military leaders’ formal approval of the reforms he thought were necessary for Soviet society. Hence, Gorbachev on the one hand appeared to deliberately risk alienating the military establishment from his government and on the other hand welcoming his two liberal allies to actively participate in the discussion on military affairs.

It was clear at that moment that the discussion of military reform was not harmonious with events at the international level. There was not only a ‘mental’ discord between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but Gorbachev's policy priority and his supporters were located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the significant organizational resistance of military elites who were against perestroika was located in the Ministry of Defense. This situation not only exposed bureaucratic rivalry and clientism, but also caused particular organizational outcomes for the Soviet military which had far-reaching practical consequences. The discussion of perestroika among Soviet Military elites remained at the problem identification stage. Sokolov only reluctantly admitted that there were problems in the army and he only paid lip service to Gorbachev's perestroika endeavors. There was no debate in the Soviet Army about systemic reform. Consequently, in the military establishment the radical idea of the All-Volunteer Force was not mentioned, let alone considered as an option at this time. The polemic about reform was, therefore, still at a preliminary stage and the military establishment had to be convinced of the necessity of reform 'from above'. Gorbachev's policy at the international level, however, fundamentally influenced the organization of the Soviet military system and forced it to think about organizational change. Gorbachev's neglect of the practical implications of his foreign policy for the Soviet military would, especially after 1988, cause major problems for it. In fact, these problems ultimately caused the Soviet/Russian military crisis of the 1990’s.

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Incidents that led to action. In the perestroika years, the military’s reservations about reform were overtaken by political events. The socio-political system was in deep trouble, the economic situation deteriorated further and the Soviet Union experienced the Chernobyl disaster. But it was the Mathias Rust affair that prompted the impetus for reform for military institutions. The military’s inefficiency was shown when Rust, a German student, landed a small Cessna 172 airplane at the gates of the Kremlin. Moreover, he had flown 700 kilometers in Soviet airspace on Border Guard Day itself, which was regarded as a painful and humiliating experience both for the political and military leadership. Although the incident itself was not that spectacular, nor an unchallenged proof of military incompetence, Gorbachev grasped the opportunity to justify his assertion that there was a need for major change in the military forces. Rust’s dangerous but childish adventure gave Gorbachev an excuse to pass over and fire senior military officers who had opposed and obstructed military reform. Moreover, according to Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev’s chief foreign policy aide, the Rust incident planted for the first time the idea of the professional army as a reform option at the highest level of political power. Chernyaev’s devastating memo on Soviet military affairs speaks for itself:

“It would be ridiculous on my part to suggest even the broad outline of such a reform. But it’s not difficult to recognize the vital necessity of giving up a multi-million man army and universal conscription. And, by the way, to avoid drafting “future Newtons”. We need a professional army. We need quality, not quantity…”

In May 1987, the Minister of Defense himself was victimized as well. Sokolov was replaced by General Dmitriy Yazov whose experience lay primarily in the field of personnel management and administration and not in military operations or other more prestigious areas. Even though he could not be called a ‘radical reformer’, he had shown a positive attitude towards Gorbachev and his reform program. The dismissal of Sokolov would also be the start of a series of personnel purges in which younger officers with a less parochial orientation were favored. There was also a slight preference shown for officers from the Far Eastern Military District who would then become the new military elite. Herspring has summarized Gorbachev’s personnel policy as follows:

“Those military officers who think that the talk about creating a Soviet style meritocracy in the military is empty rhetoric need only look at the changes within the high command itself since Gorbachev came to power…Changes in lower-level commands have been even more extensive. Furthermore, while other factors besides age may have influenced these changes, it is clear that seniority no longer ensures an officer’s longevity. Indeed,…, more extensive changes in favor of younger officers are in order. And, while younger officers may have looked on the ouster of Marshal Sokolov and Gen. Koldunov in the aftermath of the 1987

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162 Apparently Gorbachev was supported or even stimulated to oust senior military actors by other politicians who saw the military as a burden for reform. Michael Desch wrote: “It was Yeltsin who, as head of the Moscow branch of the Communist Party, took the lead in June 1987 in castigating the Soviet military for negligence and incompetence in connection with the Mathias Rust Affair”. Michael C. Desch, Civilian Control of the Military: the Changing Security Environment, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999, p. 62.


Matthias Rust affair as an action aimed only at the highest levels of the military, it is now becoming clear that no-one is immune.”\textsuperscript{166}

The 1985-87 Period Placed in the Context of the Decision Making Process

The period 1985-1987 was the period in which Gorbachev initially tried to introduce reform into Soviet society. He was convinced, together with his advisory team that the USSR could not see out the 20th Century in its then current condition.\textsuperscript{167} The liberal elite felt the need for change and was committed to enforcing it. The program it proposed, however, was a poorly developed and vague hotchpotch of ideas. The reform plan was still deeply embedded in the ideology of the rigid communist system of that moment: and it narrowly focused on the economy. The program was also termed a program of ‘\textit{uskorenie}’ [acceleration], which indicated that Gorbachev wanted to stay within the limits of the system at this stage of events. Gorbachev’s idea of reform was therefore not yet a program of radical change but one of incremental change. He could be called a reformist rather than a radical at this stage of events. Cohen defined reformism as:

“the outlook, and those policies, which seek through measured change to improve the existing order without fundamentally transforming existing social, political, and economic foundations or going beyond prevailing ideological values. Reformism finds both its discontent and its program, and seeks its political legitimacy and success, within the parameters of the existing order. This distinguishes it from radicalism. The essential reformist argument is that the potential of the existing system and the promise of the established ideology—have been realized, and that they can and must be fulfilled. The reformist premise is that change is progress.”\textsuperscript{168}

The reform ideas were made public at several official meetings of the Communist Party elite. In the Communist tradition Gorbachev’s thoughts on change were formulated in a hybrid ideological language. This did not mean that there was a plan of action at the political level. This situation molded the way reform was treated by military elites. The General Staff and the Soviet military-industrial complex were aware of the need to do something, especially in the technological field. The need for change was felt by the quality of the arms race with the US and in the American plan to develop SDI. But reform of the military system was not even an issue. Only reluctantly, and under the pressure of events, were most military leaders prepared to recognize organizational problems. However, while the military high command was cautious \textit{vis-à-vis} perestroika, the mid-level cadre showed signs of openness. This uneven response to Gorbachev’s call for reform indicates the first signs of the officer corps’ lack of cohesion and the gradual disintegration of the military organization. The 1985-1987 period can thus be seen as a period of preparation for the fermentation of reform ideas and organizational developments. The appointment of Yazov might be

\textsuperscript{167} Gorbachev had indeed a small group of trustees on which he relied. Although this informal group had no decision-making power, it was a sounding-board for the Secretary General. Although there were members of the Politburo in this team, it may not confused with the inner-cabinet of the Politburo which was the real center of decision-making. Important members were Gorbachev’s advisors: Alexander Yakovlev, Vadim Medvedev (both politburo members), Anatoly Chernyaev, Georgy Shakhnazarov, Ivan Frolov, Valery Boldin and Yevgeny Primakov. See Archie Brown, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 1997, p. 202.
seen as a firm signal for a new era, as, from that moment on, reform of the military organization was formalized and hence entered the stage in which it was most lively and passionately discussed.

1.2. 1988-1991: Radical Change Discussed

The Political and Institutional Contexts that Foster Radical Change

In the period 1988-1991, the nature of the Soviet Union as a state and political institution profoundly changed. There were not only important changes in the way the political decision-making was organized, the relations of the Soviet Union with the external world and the multi-ethnic nature of the USSR was also in flux. Logically, a prominent institution such as the military could not avoid the outcomes of these changes. The way that the military was affected by the political, international and ethnic setting, reconstructs the context in which the military reform discussion occurred.

Institutional and Political Reform in the USSR. Confronted with ‘the management nomenclatura’s’ resistance to perestroika, Gorbachev tried to invite the masses to participate in the perestroika experiment. Through the mass media, he solicited the people to end their apathetic attitudes towards the state. In turn he had to tolerate pluralistic and contesting views and criticism of state institutions. Gorbachev’s call for more glasnost’ provoked a stormy reaction from the intellectual, urban and the pro-western minded people who were ready to explore the limits and possibilities of glasnost. By the same token there was a major difference between the criticism of the intelligentsia vis-à-vis the military during the high days of perestroika and public opinion of the military institution itself. The criticism the military endured through the liberal press, especially Ogonek, Komsomolskaia Pravda and Literaturnaia Gazeta, was overwhelming. Public opinion in general, however, continued to express ‘high trust’ in the military institution throughout this time. Among the public, the military establishment still received the highest esteem of any state institution. As could be expected, opponents of reform articulated their criticisms more vociferously then those who were unequivocally positive. The notorious letter of Nina Andreieva, a neo-Stalinist teacher from Leningrad, published in Sovetskaia Rossiia, openly savaged the reformers. It was also clear that the opposition forces to perestroika were soon to organize themselves through glasnost. Soon public opinion was polarized into two extreme wings: ‘the radical destructive wing’ and the ‘revanchist group’ or the radical reformers on the one side and the ultra-conservative forces on the other.

The communist nomenclature, led by Yegor Ligachev and Nikolay Ryzhkov, had an important hand in this conservative bolstering of power. The mythic Soviet State monolith was publicly dissolved through the process of glasnost. Although the reformists gradually augmented the pressure on the state institutions, Gorbachev realized that there was stiff resistance from the

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170 Public opinion surveys of the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), showed that until the very end of the existence of the Soviet Union, one third to one half of the entire Soviet population—not just Russians—said they fully trusted the army in 1989 and 1990. (December 1989: 44%, July 1990: 35%, July 91: 59%) A survey effected in July-august 1990 by Vox Populi concluded that 61% of the respondents said they trusted the army either completely (30%) or ‘on the whole’ (32%). See: Matthew Wyman, Public Opinion in Post-communist Russia, London: Macmillan Press, 1997, pp. 66-71.
nomenclature. It was during the XIXth All-Union Party Conference, in late June 1988, that Gorbachev endorsed fundamental reform which went beyond the limits of the traditional Soviet system. He proposed; a presidential system for the Soviet Union, a new parliament which was to be called the Congress of People’s Deputies, an increase in the power of local Soviets at the expense of the Communist Party, and the removal of the Party from state economic management. The monopoly of the Communist Party was attacked and the first, albeit embryonic steps, towards more individual initiative in the Soviet economy was proposed. The importance of the XIX Party Congress is underlined by Gorbachev himself:

“Historians, who like everything to be in neat order, have been arguing whether perestroika and reforms began in March 1985 or at some later date. Well, in the first three years we made serious efforts to bring the country out of stagnation and to achieve renewal in all aspects of life. We made our first attempts at radical reform of the economy. However the real turning point, when perestroika became irreversible, was the XIX All-Union Party Conference. This decisive step was prompted by the obvious failure of economic reform to get going and the radicalization of public opinion.”

In March 1989, the first free elections were held in the Soviet Union to elect the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies. These elections were a success for the reformers, while many Party candidates lost the election. In May, the first Congress of People’s Deputies was opened in which Gorbachev was elected chairman. The permanent variant of the Congress of People’s Deputies, the Supreme Soviet, was elected the day after the opening of the Congress. Both forums would become important places for political discussion and renewal. The Inter-Regional Group – a coalition of all reform minded members of the Congress of People’s Deputies - especially tried to promote and endorse reform through this institution. Together with the establishment of this democratic opposition, it was clear that the Congress was spontaneously structuring itself along the lines of the polarized polity. Indeed, the democratic faction met with some fierce resistance from the conservative forces in the Parliament. The factions were not stable thus, being a member of a faction was not a formal given and most of the time not ideologically inspired. Consequently, voting in the parliament and indeed parliamentary work was very often unpredictable and even chaotic in nature. This would become a permanent characteristic of Soviet-Russian parliamentary life. The establishment of a ‘real’ parliament had for the military decision making procedure a formal consequence. A ‘new’ Supreme Soviet Committee for Defense and State Security was established within the new parliament. This committee was supposed to question the military impact on defense issues and its privileged position in the party elite, but it soon became clear that it was too weak to fulfill this role. Most of its members were representatives of the military-industrial complex and they did not question their colleagues. Moreover, the lack of parliamentary culture meant that the members of the Committee were insecure and as a consequence ineffective in dealing with military issues.


174 What is remarkable in these elections was that active ‘soldiers’ could run for a seat in this legislative body. 82 out of 2,250 members of the Congress of People’s Deputies were military men. These military deputies, however, did not represent a cohesive group. 12 out of 82 could be named as reformist. It was this minority that could count on the sympathy of the democratic forces in the Congress and the western press, which would contribute to the professionalization debate of the Soviet armed forces. It must be clear from the very beginning that the military democratic representation (and their contributions to the debate) represented only a minority. For an analysis of this group of military representatives see: Timothy L. Thomas, ‘The Reformist Military Deputies, Yeltsin’s in Fatigues?’, *Military Review*, Vol. LXX, Nr. 12, December 1990, pp. 41-48 and John W. Lepingwell, ‘Military Deputies in the USSR Congress’, *Report on the USSR, Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, Vol. 2, Nr. 20, 18 May 1990, p. 20.
In 1990 there were even more revolutionary events that marked the political life in the Soviet Union. In March, the Congress of People’s Deputies amended Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, ending the monopoly of power of the Communist Party. Moreover, later in the month, Gorbachev was elected as the president of the Soviet Union. The most crucial outcome of these two decisions for the Armed Forces was that the dual party-government structure had been dissolved. The institutional links between the party and the executive branch - at least in theory - were cut.\footnote{An indicator for this may be the resignation of Aleksei Lizichev as chief of the MPA, once welcomed in Gorbachev’s reform team to introduce reform in the armed forces. Officially he resigned for health reasons, but it was clear that when Gorbachev’s policy ‘shifted to the left’, Lizichev increasingly came to support the conservatives. He was an opponent of radical military reform, and the MPA itself emerged as a hard-line bloc against Gorbachev’s reform effort.}

Despite the restructuring of the political institutions during this period, Gorbachev held the supreme power of the state in his hands. His role as a leader combined the functions of: Chairman of the legislative body, Head of State as well as General Secretary of the Communist Party. This combination of functions and the monopolization of supreme power in the hands of one man was, seen by the radical democrats as a contradiction with the ideas of glasnost and perestroika.\footnote{For example, Yury Afanasiev, a prominent member of the democratic group (DemRossiya movement) and rector of the Moscow Institute of History and Archives, criticized Gorbachev for his culmination of functions. Gorbachev, Op. Cit., pp. 290-292 and p. 320.}

Crucially, Gorbachev’s election as president divided both the intelligentsia and the more democratic members of the Congress of People’s Deputies into opposing factions. He became politically isolated as he gradually lost support from both the liberals, and the traditional supporters of his policy. In short, Glasnost made him a powerless president.

As chief executive, Gorbachev also created a Presidential Council. The nature of the Council was never clear. Some thought it had executive powers, others thought it was simply an advisory body. Moreover, this body was not very effective because its composition was diverse and it had no supporting structures capable of carrying the decisions into effect\footnote{The members were: from the legislative branch: Anatoly Lukianov (Supreme Soviet), Yevgeny Primakov (Chairman of the Soviet of the Union); from the executive branch: Ryzhkov (chairman of the Council of Ministers), Shevardnadze (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Bakatin (Minister of the Interior), Yazov (Minister of Defense), Kryuchkov (KGB chief) and Masliukov (Chairman of the State Planning Commission). From the Party: Alexandr Yakovlev, Vadim Medvedev and Valery Boldin. Gorbachev selected also two writers: Valentin Raspustin and Changiz Aitmatov and the economist Stanislav Shatalin and Veniamin Yarin. (Alexander Rahr, ‘From Politburo to Presidential Council’, RFE/RL Report on the USSR, Vol. 2, Nr. 22, 1 June 1990, pp. 1-5.)}. It was Gorbachev himself who appointed the members of this group and he followed his tactic of keeping a disparate group behind him so he - at least in his mind - would be able to unite a broad front of society behind his reform program. In a public statement the Presidential Council took over the function of the Defense Council. But as a result of the vociferous protests of Chief of the General Staff General Mikhail Moiseev, the Defense Council was reinstated one month later in April 1990, albeit under presidential authority and thus with decreased autonomy/authority.\footnote{Theodore Karasik, ‘The Defense Council & Soviet Presidency’, Perspective (Institute for the Study of conflict, Ideology and Policy), Vol. 1, Nr. 2, December 1990; and William E. Odom, ‘The Soviet Military in Transition’, Problems of Communism, May –June 1990, pp. 66-67.}

In November 1990, Gorbachev announced the abolition of the Presidential Council and its replacement by the Security Council. In this Security Council most of the members of the Presidential Council had a seat, with the exception of some intellectuals.\footnote{The Security Council consisted, by the time of its creation on 16 November 1990, of: Bakatin, Bessmertnykh, Kryuchkov, Pavlov, Pugo, Primakov, Yazov and Yanayev. These members represented the ‘power ministries’, which are the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Security, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.}

What was the result of this institutional reshuffling for the military? The General Staff lost its influence in the decision-making procedure in military affairs. Although the Defense Council officially survived until March 1992, its precise role was unknown. The center of decision-making was replaced by the Security Council, which had a more pluralistic composition and a less...
prominent military voice. In brief, the military institution was excluded from the inner-circle of decision-making bodies in the Soviet Union. Moreover, it was constantly criticized by a vocal liberal minority who were representatives of the legislative bodies.

The End of the Cold and Afghan Wars. When perestroika was the key idea for internal reform, ‘New Thinking’ was Gorbachev’s notion concerning his international agenda. The most spectacular decision in this field was made public on December 7th 1988. During a speech at the United Nations, he announced a unilateral reduction of Soviet military personnel by 500,000 within two years. He would also ordered the withdrawal of six tank divisions from Eastern Europe. This announcement was unusual for at least two reasons. Firstly, Gorbachev’s announcement was a construction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Shevardnadze, and the civilian security experts – the so-called institutchiki - who led a campaign against the military leadership and its policy. This action coincided with Gorbachev’s campaign to gradually neutralize communist and military hard-liners. The replacement of the Chief of the General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeev by General Mikhail Moiseev the day after Gorbachev’s UN speech showed that there was friction over the spectacular announcements. The military elite were thus not involved in Gorbachev’s disarmament policy and they lost their monopoly over military policy. Secondly, the fact that the military were confronted with a fait accompli meant that they had no choice but to face far reaching and unresolved practical questions about conventional force withdrawal, radical reorganization and large force reductions.

During his UN speech, Gorbachev also announced that the Soviet Union renounced the use of force to handle conflict. This prepared the way for the ending of the Cold War. In July 1988 he had already said that the Warsaw Pact countries had the right to follow their own path towards socialist objectives. With these decisions, Gorbachev buried the Brezhnev Doctrine and started a process that ended when the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989. The end of the Cold War was not only an important step in the relaxation of tension in international affairs but the decision to withdraw the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in the spring of 1989 was also remarkable, with far reaching effects on the Soviet home front. The withdrawal was completed when General Boris V. Gromov, the commander of the 40th Army in Afghanistan, crossed the Termez River as the last Soviet soldier to leave Afghanistan.

180 Akhromeev would stay the military advisor to Gorbachev until 1991.
181 The frustration of the military on this subject can be read in three books of Viktor Baranets. The books of this colonel of the General Staff can be seen as an expression, or even an outcry, of the general feeling of frustration in the Soviet-Russian military. See: Viktor Baranets, Poteriannaia armiia, zapiski polkovnika Genshtaba, Moskva: Kollektsiia “sovershennno sekretno”, 1988; Viktor Baranets, El’tsin i ego generaly, zapiski polkovnika Genshtaba, Moskva: Kollektsiia “sovershennno sekreto”, 1998; and Viktor Baranets, Genshtab bez tain (Kniga pervaia i vtoraia), Moskva: Politburo, 1999.
182 About the decision making for withdrawing from Afghanistan see: for instance: Sarah E. Mendelson, Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, Mark Galeotti, Afghanistan, The Soviet Union’s Last War, London: Frank Cass, 1995, and the round table discussion organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International peace in Moscow on 15 February 1999: Malashchenko Alekseia (Redaktor), Afghanistan: itogi beskonechnoi vojni, Materiały ‘kruglogo stola’ posviashchennogo 10-letiyu vyyoda vojsk iz afghanistana, Moskva: karney endowment, 1999. In the spring of 1999, the democratic forces of Russia took the opportunity to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Soviet decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. See for example a special edition of Karta, a Russian independent historical and human rights defending journal issued by Memorial. Karta, Afganskii al’bom, Nr. 24-25, Moskva: Memorial, 1999. Although the democratic forces in 1999 did not, by this time, have the same status and influence as ten years earlier, the impact of the decision to end the Afghan War on society and the democratic forces cannot be underestimated.
183 See also the remarks of Dmitri Trenin, for the impact of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan on the break-up of the USSR Dmitri Trenin, The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization, Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International peace, 2001, p. 97
No explanation is needed to conclude that the military institution was severely affected by these events. Not only the end of the Afghan War, but also the end of the Cold War took away the rationale for Soviet militarization of the state and the nature of the military organization which had lasted for over 40 years. These dramatic changes set the context in which the nature of this organization could be questioned. The fact that these crucial events were decided upon without consulting the military elite themselves, added to the military’s traumatic experience.

Ethnic Disorder and the Collapse of the USSR. Perestroika and glasnost had demolished all the creations of the Stalinist order: the political hegemony of the Communist Party, the establishment of an industrial society based on a command economy, and the creation of a relatively ‘peaceful’ multi-ethnic state. This may not be a surprise since these creations were based on the authoritarian and totalitarian control of the citizens of the State. Once this control was relaxed, any belief that the different ethnic groups would not use glasnost to demonstrate their discontent with Stalin’s social constructs could only be an illusion.

Ethnic tensions surfaced early in Gorbachev’s presidency. In December 1986 the first nationalist troubles arose in Kazakhstan, and in mid-1987 the Crimean Tartars organized themselves into a strong movement and demanded the restoration of their rights and return to the Crimea. Many other repressed peoples – such as the Volga Germans, the Kabardins and the Ingushetians - soon demanded the same rights. Unrest also rose in the Baltic States. These republics protested against the policy of ‘Russification’ and the idea of separatism found fertile ground in these republics. The events in Nagorno-Karabakh, which culminated in an open war between Azeris and Armenians, illustrated that the ethnic upheavals could end in violence and complete disorder.

The Soviet Army intervened several times in nationalist disputes. It did so on several notable occasions, for example in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Latvia and Lithuania. The Army, however, was not able to restore the Soviet All-Union order and it was not keen on doing this job. In every clash where the Army was involved, its appearance was ambivalent and the realization grew stronger that its status was deteriorating. However, the Pandora’s Box of nationalist feelings was opened and could not be closed again anymore.

During this period of unrest, Gorbachev tried to redefine the relations between the Soviet republics in a new Union Treaty. This attempt was countered by a coup attempt in August 1991 in which the most conservative elements of the Government helped by a faction from the security forces tried to stop Gorbachev. When their coup seemed to be ill prepared and was countered by democratic forces led by Boris Yeltsin, the collapse of the Soviet Union could not be stopped. In the months after the coup, the Republics declared themselves independent. It was the Belovezh Forest agreement on 8th December 1991, between the Slavic republics that finally sealed the fate of the USSR. The presidents of respectively Russia, Belarus and Ukraine- Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich- declared the USSR dissolved and founded instead a ‘Commonwealth of Independent States’. This secret agreement was officially signed in Alma Ata by a total of eleven Soviet republics several months later in December 1991. That same month, Gorbachev resigned and on the 31st December the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

The ethnic troubles that the Soviet state endured harmed not only the status and prestige of the Soviet military organization, it also affected its composition. The conscription system was characterized by the multi-ethnic state and resulted in a multi-cultural army. It was indeed through the boycotting of the conscription system that the peripheral republics could show their discontent. This personnel aspect of conscription would subsequently trouble the military establishment to a great extent.

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184 The army intervened more precisely on 9th April 1989 in Tbilisi (Georgia); on 4th June 1989 in the Ferghana Valley (Uzbekistan); on 19-20th January 1990 in Baku (Azerbaijan); and in January 1991 in Riga and Vilnius (Latvia and Lithuania).
The policy of glasnost had already begun to have an effect on the military organization and ideas about military reform before the formal decision making process on military reform started. In parallel with the public resentment of many aspects of Soviet life in general there was discontent about the way that the military itself functioned. The fact that conscription was the major link between society and the military forces made it only logical that exactly this practice came under severe public attack.

The beginning of the public discussion about military affairs in general, and conscription in particular, began in the fall of 1988. During this period, the mass media paid attention to the problems of conscription and the life of soldiers in the Soviet Forces. There were, for instance, follow-up articles and reports in the popular press, there were round table discussions, fictional stories in the Soviet ‘thick’ journals, and even television discussions took place, which called for a public debate about military institutions. The most significant arguments against the military establishment were: that there was a continued cultivation of a militarized society, despite the fact that the external threat to Soviet security was declining; that the military organization was too closed and too privileged; that the war in Afghanistan had been a national travesty; that there was a questionable level of professional competence and a low level of education among the military leadership; that dedovshchina, the cruel practice of informal discipline common among conscript soldiers continued to take place; that the recruitment of educated and skilled young people into the military, was taking place which was seen as a societal waste; and finally that the republics’ protest against the call up of their inhabitants into the Soviet military needed to be recognized. This critique resulted in an immense decline in the military’s prestige in Soviet society in general, but most of all it was the conscription system that stood under immense fire. This protest took place on several levels. Firstly there were organized actions by so-called neformal’nyi groupings; secondly, there was informal protests by young men who boycotted the draft by ignoring the call-up; and finally, there were protests by members of parliament.

The protest against the draft was initially led by Moscow State University’s administration who criticized the government for the fact that talented students and valuable know-how were

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185 It is necessary to return to the discrepancy between the criticisms leveled at the military organization, which was concentrated on some specific practices of the Army, filtered by a specific stratum of Soviet society and loudly expressed in the liberal press, and the general view of public opinion expressed on the subject of the military institution. The ‘loss of prestige’ is only a (relative) perception often used by the military to find excuses for the dysfunctions in the military organization. Moreover, the opinions expressed in the liberal-democratic camp, are not necessarily supported by the public in general. The Army remains a strong national symbol, certainly in comparison with the West. Public opinion, the voice of anti-militarist voices in Soviet-Russian society and actual military reality form a complex relationship and must therefore be treated with caution.


In the spring of 1989, an informal group of ‘Soldiers’ Mothers’ was founded and they actively protested against the practice of conscription, and the abuse of soldiers in the Armed Forces. Their protest was remarkably successful and in March 1989 the Defense Council adopted the decision to stop the conscription of students. In the summer of 1989, the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff fought a rear guard fight against this decision. However, 176,000 soldiers who were serving in the army were released from their duties. This success inspired the Soldiers’ Mothers to continue to expand their actions against all abuses that were related with conscription, for instance: the unhealthy living conditions in the barracks; the peace-time deaths and the use of soldiers as cheap labor. Finally, they became inspired advocates of the professional army in the Soviet Union. The protest against the draft clearly inspired citizens to organize effective political action as Buckley pointed out that: “Of all the women’s group to have formed since Glasnost, the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers has made, perhaps, the largest impact on Russian society and politics.”

Besides this societal protest, the practice of conscription was also eroding from the inside. From the spring draft of 1989 onwards, a significant fall in the draft’s enforcement was noted. Young men from the Baltic, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Ukraine Republics, especially began to abscond. Even youths from Russia itself showed up less and less in the ‘Voenkomaty’, the offices to which the 18-year-olds had to report after being called up. Serebriannikov and Deriugin, two former political officers and later leading spokesmen on social problems in the Armed Forces, noted that whereas in 1978 it was reported that some 78% of young men declared they were pleased to serve in the military, in 1990 this figure was only 12%. This prompted the military elite to say that they were confronted with a boycott of the conscript system: whereas in 1986, only 1044 people did not show up in the ‘voenkomaty’ in 1991 this number increased to 17,000.

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188 It is not a coincidence that the sociological Department of Moscow State University made a very profound study of the phenomenon of dedovshchina, the system of systemic abuse of soldiers. See: S.A. Belanovskii (Editor), Dedovshchina v armii (Sbornik sotsiologicheskikh dokumentov), Moskva: Institut Narodnokhziaistvennogo prognozirovania, 1991.

189 Mark Galeotti already saw from the beginning of the Afghan war some self help groups who would later evolve to the influential group of the Soldiers Mothers. He identified the feminist dissident group ‘Mariia’ and ‘Nadezha’ (Hope) as specific Afghan related action groups who later would be overtaken by broader based movements. Whereas in the beginning these groups were protesting against the Afghan war and sought support for help for the mothers and widows of Afghan veterans, they later tried to defend the whole stratum of conscripts. Mark Galeotti, Op. Cit., 1995, pp. 96-97 and p.140. There is an abundant literature on the Soldiers Mothers Organization: See for instance: Valentina Melnikova and Anna Lebedev, Les Petits Soldats, le Combat des Mères russes, Paris: Bayard, 2001; Eva-Maria Hinteruber, Die Soldatenmutter Sankt Petersburg, Zwischen Neotraditionalismus und neuen Widerständigkeit, Münster: LIT Verlag, 1999; Julie Elkner, Militarism versus Maternalism under Gorbachev: The Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers and the Soviet Military’s legitimacy Crisis, unedited MA thesis, University of Melbourne, March 2000 and Elena Zdravomyslova and Galina Eremitcheva, ‘Transformation in Russia and Soldiers’ Mothers Movement’, unedited paper received from the authors.


191 The data published from public opinion research done in the USSR before 1989 must be treated with caution, since these surveys had a clear function in the propaganda policy of the State. Elisabeth Seica, a French researcher who studied (the functions of) public opinion in the Soviet Union and wrote a Ph.D. dissertation with the title: ‘Les sondages d’opinion publique en Russie de la perestrojka à nos jours (1985-1992): un outil hautement convoité, enjeu d’intérêts multiples’, noted that surveys were used in the USSR as a support for ideological messages. The results of the surveys that were made public showed a big consensus among the population toward the official ideology and were used as a pseudo-scientific proof of the coherence between the politics of the State and the will of the population. See: Elisabeth Seica, ‘Opinion de l’armée & l’armée dans l’opinion, fonctions des sondages militaires’ unedited paper received from the author. The figures about the attitudes toward military service that are mentioned here, and which are often used by the military throughout the 1990’s, are thus probably an overestimation of Soviet opinion in reality.

At the time of the First Congress of Peoples’ Deputies, every individual Minister of the Government had to be confirmed in order to increase the legitimacy of the Soviet government. During this process progressive deputies in the government openly criticized Yazov for his lack of vision and conservatism. It was only with the personal help of Gorbachev that Yazov was finally re-appointed as Minister of Defense. Also during the Second Congress of People’s Deputies, the representatives opened fierce attacks on the military institution itself. Criticism of General Rodionov’s responsibility for the Tbilisi massacre, and Andrei Sakharov’s speech on the conduct of the military in Afghanistan, underlined the anti-militaristic feeling in the democratic camp of the Congress while conversely the conservative members in the Parliament supported the Army and its leadership. In brief, military affairs, the position of the military in Soviet society and the declining faith in conscription was a divisive element in Soviet society on which two opposing camps were formed: conservatives versus progressives. These camps were also noticed in other discussions about Soviet politics and society at that time as Julie Elkner observed:

“These opposing standpoints extended to broader underlying questions concerning the nature of the individual’s duty to the state as to general issues surrounding the ways in which violence functioned in the Soviet system. Indeed, debates in this area had implications for the legitimacy of the Soviet state itself, whose identity was so closely bound up with militarist models and metaphors.”

Under these circumstances, the reform discussion took place as it could not escape the societal polarization which grew between 1990-1991. In fact the reform debate was an expression of the same political-societal processes that dominated Soviet socio-political life. In 1990, two antagonistic military reform plans were presented that split the political landscape. The first of the plans was a progressive one presented by the legislative Supreme Soviet, the second a conservative inspired one presented by the Ministry of Defense in close collaboration with the General Staff.

The Progressive Reform Ideas: the Lopatin Plan. It was out of the Second Congress of People’s Deputies that an initial and progressive reform proposal was openly formulated. A special sub-committee of the Commission on Defense and the Armed Forces of the Supreme Soviet was set up during the Second Congress of People’s Deputies. This Commission was led by Major Vladimir Lopatin and its purpose was to produce a proposal for military reform for consideration at the Third Congress of People’s Deputies. Initially, this commission consisted of seventeen members and


194 Gerard Snel has observed that since 1985 an IMEMO working group under the direction of Yakovlev was working behind the scenes on military reform. In the spring of 1987, Yakovlev handed to Gorbachev a military reform plan with very radical proposals and a second draft at the end of that year. One element in these proposals was a partial shift to a well-trained and well-educated army and a transition to a professional army in six, seven years. See: Gerard Snel, From the Atlantic to the Urals, The Reorientation of Soviet Military strategy, 1981-1990, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996, pp.206-207; Also Gorbachev’s foreign aide Anatoly Chernyaev formulated in 1987 a proposal to replace the multi-million man army and the draft system with a professional cadre army. (Anatoly Chernyaev, Op. Cit., p. 118.) So, although Lopatin’s ideas were certainly not unique, his proposal was the first coherent and officially proposed plan for military reform that stood against the ideas coming from the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff.

195 This initiative came from the Congress of People’s deputies and not from the Supreme Soviet, the permanent representation of the legislative body. In the latter, a committee for Defense and State Security was formed. This Committee consisted of 43 members of which the majority was related with the military-industrial complex. This committee was headed by professor Vladimir Lapygin, who had worked all his life in the Soviet aerospace industry. Although he advocated draft exemption for all college students, he stood for the conservative line in the military debate. The committee was thus no lever for reform in the Soviet armed forces and certainly not an instrument for democratic control over the military. This remark points out that the debate on military reform was steered by informal, more then the institutional channels. See Stephen Tsypkin, ‘The Committee for Defense and State Security of the USSR Supreme Soviet’, RFE/RL: Report on the USSR, Vol. 2, Nr. 19, May 11, 1990, pp. 8-11.
the reform draft they issued in the beginning of January 1990 was signed by twelve members, all military officers, from the ranks of first lieutenant to colonel. It was therefore called ‘the plan of the twelve’ or ‘the Lopatin plan’ according to the name of the chairman of the commission.\textsuperscript{196}

Actually, this radical plan, announced the gradual development of an AVF, which was the basis for the work of a Special Commission ‘On Developing a Concept of Development of the Soviet Armed Forces 1991-1995 up to 2000’. This plan was set up during the CPSU Central Committee Plenum in preparation for the XXVIIIth Congress of the CPSU which was held in June 1990, where finally a sound, radical reform plan was presented and the concept of a phased implementation of military reform was officially stipulated in the Congress’ resolutions.

The Lopatin plan evolved between December 1989 and June 1990, although the main ideas were clear from the very beginning of the plan’s conception in January 1990: (1) The Soviet army should induce a radical reduction in the size of its armed forces. (2) The Soviet Armed Forces should evolve into a professional army over the next 4-5 years. The first recommendation of Lopatin plan was that the most technologically advanced troops (e.g. the Strategic Rocket Troops and the Navy) should recruit on a voluntary basis and in the last phase of the plan the Army (Land Forces) should recruit on a voluntary basis. The Military Forces were advised to professionalize the NCO-Corps and the quality of the formation and education of cadres should also be augmented. If this plan was carried out then, Lopatin argued that this would result in the re-establishment of the status and prestige of the Army in Russian society. It was recommended that reserve forces should also be organized on a territorial basis (territorial-militia basis) and general mobilization and conscription should be limited and used only during times of war.\textsuperscript{198}

After the idea of a professional army was introduced, and certainly after the publication of the Lopatin plan, conservative members of the military establishment reacted fiercely against the abolishment of conscription. They had social, financial, security and sentimental-historical arguments against the abolishment of the draft\textsuperscript{199}. Yazov argued that the defense of the country could not depend on a small group of people who were hired by the state to defend the country. In a critical manner, he called a professional army ‘an army of mercenaries or hirelings’ [naemnaia armiia] The defense of the country was, according to the Minister of Defense, a concern of the whole society and based on the conviction of the people.\textsuperscript{200} Moiseev calculated that a professional army would cost five to eight times more than a conscript army and subsequently he proposed a financial argument against professionalization.\textsuperscript{201} Akhromeev, now in his function of military advisor of Gorbachev, claimed that a professional army would encounter problems with the formation and training of the reserves. Behind this suggestion lay the idea that the international geopolitical situation of the Soviet Union could (still) not allow the introduction of an AVF. Although Akhromeev worked hard to implement the doctrine of ‘reasonable sufficiency’, he used security reasons in his argumentation against the professional army.\textsuperscript{202} Lieutenant-General Serebriannikov, a political officer of the MPA, agreed with the financial, geo-political and moral arguments against a professional army, but added an historical reason. He argued that the


\textsuperscript{197} Proekt razrabotannyi gruppoi narodnych deputatov SSSR, ‘O podgotovke i provedenii voennoi reformy’, Pravitel’stvennyi Vestnik, Nr. 48, 1990, pp. 5-10.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., p. 11.


\textsuperscript{200} D. Yazov, Krasnaia Zvezda, 13 April 1989, p.1-2

\textsuperscript{201} Interview with Moiseev, Sovetsky Patriot, Nr. 1, 1990, pp. 11-14

\textsuperscript{202} Interview with Akhromeev, Krasnaia Zvezda, 6 October 1989, pp. 2-3
experiment of a territorial army in the 1925-39 era had been a great failure and that as a result this aspect of the Lopatin plan was doomed to fail in the 1990s.203

Holoboff observed an open conflict between the advocates and the adversaries of a professional army just before the beginning of the XXVIII Party Congress.204 Forty-seven liberal minded members of the Parliament and civilian experts signed a letter in which they warned against the military leadership that was thwarting all real attempts to reform the military forces. This ‘letter of 47’ argued explicitly for the gradual transition to a professional army and it received a hostile response from Akhromeev and twenty six other marshals and generals; and later by Moiseev and seventy seven USSR and Russian Republic People’s deputies and several academics in Krasnaia Zvezda.205

The conservative military establishment also set up a press campaign in the Voennoo-istoricheskii Zhurnal [Military Historical Journal] in favor of its traditional militarist values. During the summer of 1989, Karem B. Rash, proclaimed that, based on historical grounds, the military forces played a key role in disciplining society and it was the only institution that though its system of conscription could develop patriotic attitudes among the youth of the Soviet Union.206 Rash’s ideas reflected in a semi-scientific, semi-artistic way the kind of ideas that were circulating among the militarist, conservative faction of the military elite.207 His ideology could be regarded as an answer to the ‘irresponsible’ alternative reform plan of the Soviet deputies.

The Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces himself showed at this very moment of his period in office a brief ‘turn to the right’. During a Komsomol Congress, in April 1990, Gorbachev said that a volunteer army was out of the question for the present, because of the large costs it would entail. With this statement, he paid lip service to the main argument of the General Staff. However, Gorbachev’s stance towards the professional army was actually more ambivalent and vague. During the celebration of Victory Day, on 9th May 1990, he firmly stated to a senior military audience that it must prepare for considerably more perestroika in the military forces and during a speech in Odessa in a military academy he vaguely came back to the AVF issue. He stated that the idea of creating a professional army ‘was under his attention’.

It was clear that the leading figures of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff were opposed to the idea of professionalization, but the military elite did not speak with one mind. Colonel General Dmitrii Volkogonov, the military historian and author of revealing biographies of Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky (and who would later become the military advisor to Boris Yeltsin), predicted that the Soviet Army would be two to three times smaller and increasingly more professional by the year 2000. He already saw some signs of this evolution in the most technological sections of the Soviet Armed Forces, for instance, the submarine fleet and the Strategic Rocket Forces. Army General P.G. Lushev, Commander in Chief of the Warsaw Pact States Joint Armed Forces, said that he believed in the system of conscription, but that his conviction was not unshakable. He said that objective conditions prompted the General Staff to increase the proportion of professional military men in the overall strength of the Army and Navy. Lushev did not, therefore, exclude the mixed system of recruitment in which conscripts and professional soldiers were simultaneously recruited. Colonel General Viktor Yermakov, appointed as the new Deputy Minister for Personnel, announced his sympathy for the notion of a professional

206 See the serialized articles of Karim Rash in Voennoo-istoricheskii Zhurnal from February until September 1989 under the title ‘Armiia i Kul’tura’ (Army and Culture). (Voennoo-istoricheskii Zhurnal, Nr. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 1989.)
207 Notorious and ‘wave making’ representatives of this fraction were the so-called ‘black colonels’ Viktor Alksnis and Nikolai Petrushenko. General Albert Makashov was also a prominent member of this fraction.
army immediately after his appointment. The most unexpected voice in favor of the Lopatin plan out of the officer elite came from General Vladimir Lobov. Formerly, this general was fiercely against force reduction and he was seen in the West as a hawk. In 1990, however, he reviewed his conservative ideas. He criticized the Ministry of Defense and said that it was not committed to reform. He was also against the idea that the military establishment should have a monopoly over military affairs. In other words, he approved of the ‘civilian’ effort to present a reform plan for the military, but most importantly, he understood that the system of conscription did not work anymore. He favored a system in which voluntary and compulsory conscription should be combined. In the long run, he was in favor of ‘the principle of universal voluntary enlistment’ or the professional army.

Beside the divided and ambivalent opinions of the military elite, the officer corps in general was divided in their opinions about the progressive plan. In a survey conducted in July 1990 which sampled 1069 officers from all parts of the Soviet Armed Forces, the report stated that 29% of the respondents supported the Lopatin plan, a minority of 18% supported the Yazov plan, while 53% had great difficulty in choosing between the two plans. This indecisiveness among the officer corps was explained in the research report by the fact that the officers saw the reform discussion as a political game in which they had nothing to gain. Moreover, the officers were poorly informed about the results of the discussion and they were convinced that the debate would not change anything in their everyday life. With respect to the AVF proposal, the report stated that the officers thought, “the voluntary principle depends on the battle readiness, the professionalism of the personnel and the technological level of the unit”. Some 35% of the respondents said that a complete transition to the AVF was possible and 45% saw only a partial transition as a realistic option. Nevertheless, 69% of the officers thought that a gradual transition [poetapnyi perekhod] to a professional army in the next four to five years was possible.

In conclusion, the progressive Lopatin plan brought the idea of the AVF onto the political agenda and it could count on the vocal support of the liberal, democratic faction of society as well as on the progressive camp of the military elite. The elite of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, together with the nationalistic and conservative forces of society, however, were opposed to the progressive reform plan and the idea of the AVF. Although there existed a large ‘silent camp’ of free riders concerning the discussion on the AVF, a split among the officer corps was visible and preceded only what Lilia Shevtsova would later call ‘the fragmentation of the armed forces’.

The Conservative Reform Ideas: the Yazov Plan. The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff was put under pressure by the publication of the progressive reform plan of the parliamentary deputies, by reform ideas of Gorbachev’s aides and allies as well as by civilian criticism towards the military forces. Therefore, the military establishment could not afford to postpone the formalization of its own view on military reform. In February 1990 the Central Committee of the CPSU ordered the military leadership to formulate a plan. A ‘Special Commission on Developing a Concept of Development of the Soviet Armed Forces 1991-1995 and to 2000’ was established under the authority of the Minister of Defense. This commission drafted several proposals which were considered by the Defense Council, the Ministry of Defense Collegium and the Committee on

209 S.S. Solov’ev, I.V. Obraztsov, Rossiiskaia Armiia: Ot Afganistana do Chechni, [The Russian Army: From Afghanistan to Chechnya], Moskva: Natsional’niy Institut Imeni Ekateriny Velikoi, 1997, p. 120.
Defense and State Security. In the Fall of 1990, the final draft was submitted to the parliament. Reform became now a real policy issue in the military high command. The special issue of *Voennaia Mysl’* [Military Thought], a professional journal issued by the General Staff, in November 1990 was completely dedicated to the issue of reform and might be seen as a barometer of the thinking of the General Staff.212

Yazov reported in the *Krasnaia Zvezda* the main outlines of the Ministry of Defense version of military reform.213 Compared with the Lopatin plan, Yazov’s plan was mainly focused on the status quo, although it contained some minor concessions toward the possible professionalization of the Armed Forces. It also reflected that the military forces were considering several force structural changes. Holoboff evaluated the plan as being, generally; “conservative in both its vision and content”.214 The main ideas of the Yazov plan were that there should be an optimization of: the organizational staff structure, the composition and size of the Army and the Navy; the assimilation of the principles stemming from the defensive doctrine, strategy, operational art and tactics; the improvement of the system of military cadre training and the Armed Forces manning; the transformation of the system of Party political work in the Army and Navy; the implementation of the effective system of social guarantees for military servicemen; and the democratization of society’s entire military organization.215

Although the military elite of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff were opponents of the idea of establishing a professional army, they modified their opinion slightly during 1990. They experimented on a small scale, for instance with the practice of voluntary recruitment or contract service in the Navy.216 They also said that they did not exclude the idea that the implementation of a mixed system was possible in the ‘foreseeable future’ in the Navy and Strategic Rocket Forces.217 This can be seen as a confirmation that their policies were rushed forward by societal discussion and that the practice of conscription was a rapidly growing problem.

Lopatin reacted against the Ministry of Defense plan by saying that the High Command did not want effective and radical change.218 He stated that the publication of the plan was only a political maneuver to slow down the process of military reform. Lopatin stated that the High Command did not want to abandon the following principles which included: the monopoly of the Communist Party over the relationship between the army and society; the immobilization of the conservative leaders of the Party; and finally, the High Command’s monopoly over military affairs. In other words, Lopatin criticized the immobilizing conservatism of the Soviet military leaders, which he thought Communist ideology was responsible for.

In the same interview, Lopatin pointed out that there were rising crime rates in the armed forces, conscripts died in peacetime and there was massive desertion by recruits and even junior officers wished to leave the armed forces. Lopatin explained that this was taking place because the military High Command could not get a grip on the events that occurred in Soviet society and they could not keep pace with the speed at which Soviet society - precipitated by glasnost and

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217 ‘Kontseptiia voennoi reformy, Proekt Ministerstva oborony SSSR’, *Pravitels’stvennyi Vestnik*, Nr 48, 1990, pp. 6-7
In an attempt to regain control of the situation of proposed reform in the military forces, it is perhaps the reason why Yazov decided to support the August Coup in 1991. The failed coup actually meant the end of Yazov’s career and, in complete contradiction of his original intention, it accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the August Coup brought Boris Yeltsin onto the forefront of the political scene. He would determine the fate of military affairs in the 1990s. Consequently, a new era with new protagonists, new rules and new logic began.

Saving the Union: Shaposhnikov’s Ideas About Reform. The period September-December 1991 represents an interim phase in the process of transformation of the USSR into Russia and its successor states. It was a period wherein the Union dissolved and the republics came to seek their independence. Consequently, during the four last months of its existence, the Soviet Union had an ambivalent status in which the composite republics tried to increase their profile at the expense of the Union, which added another element to the polarization of society.

The relations between the Center and the periphery contained a strong military element. The new republics wanted to organize their defense systems on a national basis. In the case of the Russian Federation, the struggle between the Union and the Russian Federation was in fact a fight between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Gorbachev wanted to save the Union; on the other hand Yeltsin’s position was more ambivalent. His main purpose was to obtain absolute power and in the months preceding December he apparently had not yet decided whether to choose to support the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation. In any event, he had two military ‘clients’ who he could use for both possibilities. He appointed Evgeny Shaposhnikov, a young Air Force Marshal as Minister of Defense, known as an advocate of the All Union idea. He also recruited General Grachev to his team, who Yeltsin could use in case he had to play the Russian card. In other words, Yeltsin’s choice between the Union and Russia was a pragmatically oriented choice towards the seizure of absolute power. The characteristics of the political practice in the Yeltsin era were already perceivable in September 1991 and will be explained in the next chapter.

In September 1991, Gorbachev created an inter-republican committee to work out a new national defense structure. Yeltsin, with a remarkable political feeling, gradually realized that the Union option would affect his power position and he started to use Grachev as the whistleblower of the national Russian armed forces. In December, the real intentions of Yeltsin became clear when he opted for Russian independence. The politicians, in their inter-personal rivalry for absolute power, again gave ambivalent signs about their real intentions. This ambivalence and lack of consensus would have important military consequences. For the time being, Shaposhnikov, as a convinced ‘Unionist’, tried to endorse a plan that could revive the Soviet Union’s military forces, while Yeltsin, behind the scenes, was preparing his own national army by establishing important contacts with military officers in key positions.

Shaposhnikov presented his reform intentions at the end of September 1991. He promised to reduce the Armed Forces to 3 million people, to institute a pay increase of 30-40% to all members of the Armed Forces, and he stated his intention to establish a committee, independent of the troop commanders and deputy ministers of the Ministry of Defense, to ensure that the legal and

220 The fact that the disintegration of the USSR created much rancor may be illustrated by the fact that during the impeachment procedure, introduced by the Communist-Nationalist led Duma in 1998, used exactly the argument of the illegality of the Belovezh agreement in an attempt to purge Yeltsin. See Federal’noe Sobranie Rossiiskoi Federatsii Gosudarstvennaya Duma, Sbornik dokumentov I Materialov spetsial’noi komissii Gosudarstvennoi Dumy federal’nogo Sobranii Rossiiskoi Federatsii po otsenke sobliudeniia protsedurnych pravil I fakticheskoi obosnovannosti obvineniia, vyvinutogo protiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi federatsii, I ich rassmotreniiia Gosudarstvennii Dumoi 13-15 Maia 1999 goda Moskva: Isdanie Gosudarstvennii Duma, 1999, pp. 43-44.
social protection of soldiers and their families was carried out. He vaguely stated that: “The Soviet military will be smaller, more professional, better fed and housed, with fewer, but better weapons.” In this sentence there was only a small suggestion of progress toward a professional army that would put quality above quantity. In reference to the ongoing debate about recruitment policy he noted that:

“The soldiers’ service must also be improved. Firstly, there will be a change of the term of service from two to one and a half years. There will also be a change to a mixed principle of recruitment. In the first six months the (conscript) soldier will receive his basic training and his military specialty. After this he will have a choice. Either he will continue his military service for one year or he will sign a contract in which he will engage for three or five years for which he will receive a defined loan, partly paid in his hands and partly on an account. Food and clothing will be free. After three or five years he would have a small amount of money and may leave the military. Ultimately he could continue his military service for which he would now receive a higher loan and a flat.”

Shaposhnikov clearly continued the line of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff of the pre-1991 era to introduce a mixed system of recruitment. An AVF was not one of his options, His ideas, however, were not unrealistic. He tried to create incentives to attract people for military jobs and he admitted that there were problems among the soldiers’ ranks. Consequently, he pointed at the common responsibility of every commander to fight the problem of dedovshchina and he said “When dedovshchina takes place in the barracks, it is the commander who is guilty [vinovat] and at the same time it is the responsibility of the individual [lichnost’].”

In November, the last Soviet reform plan was published in Krasnaia zvezda. The most important question of this plan was not the issue of professionalization, but the question of who should command the troops -- the center of the Union or the republics. Vladimir Lobov, who had been appointed chief of staff on August 23rd, said that the High Command opted for a central command of the Armed Forces and thus for the unity of the armed forces for strategic and nuclear affairs. The republics, however, were given the possibility to command the troops in their republics in a relatively autonomous way. A few days later, on September 1st, the people of Ukraine voted for total independence, an act which spelled the end of the USSR and the maintenance of the Soviet Armed Forces. A military reform plan that was only a few days old was again outmoded and overtaken by events.

Radical and Conservative Reform Ideas Explained in the Decision-Making Process

The Creation of a Highly Uncertain Environment. The process under review occurred in an extremely unstable period of radical change. In fact it is a difficult task to determine which process influenced what event. Did the context of this turbulent period allow the formulation of the radical reform plan or was the reform plan a contributor to the ongoing turbulence? Probably both are true: it is clear for example that the logic of the reform debate significantly contributed to the political atmosphere of that moment. In fact this remark is an application of Merton’s article which

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222 Ibid., p. 3.
223 Ibid., p. 3.
224 Ibid., p. 3.
summarizes the reasons for the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action, where he says:

“Public predictions of future social developments are frequently not sustained precisely because the prediction has become a new element in the concrete situation, thus tending to change the initial course of developments.”

This citation can easily be applied to the study of military reform in the USSR during the last years of its existence. Plans for military organizational change are always controversial, since the plans themselves become a new element in the discussion, which tends to change the course of events. There is no such a thing as a social and/or political vacuum in which reform plans can be developed and discussed. The idea of a rational process, in the sense of the rational comprehensive model, is an illusion, whatever the military staff techniques may presume or the academic observer expects.

Glasnost allowed the public to participate directly and indirectly in the military reform debate. Indirectly, informal groups with the liberal press on their side emerged as lobbies to put the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff under pressure. The Congress of People’s Deputies, a consequence of Gorbachev’s political institutional reform, emerged as a legislative institution that would bring out a concrete reform plan, independent from the Military High Command. This plan had a direct impact on the military reform discussion. In other words, glasnost multiplied the number of participants in the reform debate. The fact that so many people had a voice in the discussion affected the decision-making process. Indeed, the critique on the military forces that took place from 1987-88 onwards meant that a multitude of issues were raised which increased the complexity of the issues and the ‘bounded rationality’ of decision making. The manner and the speed with which the military debate evolved in this period made the rationalization and the management of it into a reform program almost impossible. The military elite lost their grip on events and proved to be unable to rationalize the evolution. The changes that the military forces had to cope with were also extensive and may not be minimized. Firstly, they lost their monopoly on military and strategic facets of international affairs; secondly, they lost the ideological framework and structure that they had worked in for seven decades; thirdly, their societal legitimacy had been weakened; and ultimately, they lost the state which they served. Institutional uncertainty - partly provoked by the military themselves, partly beyond their control - was in other words complete.

The process in the period 1988-1991 was also interrupted on several occasions. The discussion of military reform experienced a profound and radical new option as a result of the presentation of the Lopatin plan. This evoked an internal interruption because the Ministry of Defense was now forced to react and to edit its own reform plan. Finally the process was twice externally interrupted, once in the beginning and once at the end of the period under review. Indeed external interventions, such as the dismissal of key persons in the organization, including the luminaries Sokolov and Akhromeev, and the August coup itself, gave the reform discussion a completely new dimension. The main focus shifted from cosmetic reform to profound organizational reform, and from a discussion about the choice between a mass-conscript army and the professional-AVF army model to a discussion about the relationship between the center and the republics.

The logic of the three different interruptions illustrates in another way the instability of the reform process: it reflects the way the rational-decision-making process was disturbed and the comprehensive rationality in the decision-making process which was quite impossible to achieve. Soviet military reform was never a well defined subject that could be rationally sub-divided into several categories. Reform is rather a problem that is built around several key issues and key problems of which the relative importance alters over time. As has been shown, in the period 1988-

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1991 the problems, the needs and suggested solutions were incrementally brought into the discussion. The solutions - edited in reform plans - can only be understood in the political system and context in which they appeared and may not be seen as independent from each other.

**Reactions to the Uncertain Environment.** For Gorbachev, the environment that he created became his worst enemy. The instability he unintentionally fabricated was so overwhelming that he was gradually forced to dissolve the system that he led. He overestimated his ability to establish coalitions among the political and military elites that existed in the Soviet Union. In fact, Gorbachev was much more a ‘reformer’ than a ‘radical’ politician. Gorbachev never accepted all the consequences of his choices: he was too wise to face the potential horrific societal consequences of his decisions and too smart to risk his own position of power. This is perhaps the reason why he was always ambivalent about military reform and military affairs were never one of his policy priorities. In fact military affairs was only a side issue in his reform policy. Archie Brown has described four fields in which the General Secretary tried to enforce fundamental change: the economic field, the internal political field, foreign policy, and the national question. All four reform attempts were logically interrelated and produced side-effects. The military question only came to the forefront for Gorbachev when it affected his policy in the four cited fields. And, indeed, all four elements touched the military organization, which may not be a surprise given the militarized nature of Soviet society.

Reforming the military organization itself was thus never a direct goal of his policy making and military issues were very often presented with a *fait accompli* by the achievements or defeats it experienced in the policy goals Gorbachev had set for himself. Because the military was never a first priority for the president of the Soviet Union, he was only interested in the military in terms of the degrees to which they would neither boycott his policy priorities nor cause popular concern or even unrest concerning the army’s condition and status. Consequently, the military forces were isolated and deliberately excluded from the decision-making forums on military affairs and they could never count on the support of Gorbachev in their organizational management. On the contrary, they often felt betrayed by Gorbachev. This occurred at several defining moments: when Gorbachev denied he was involved in the decision-making on military intervention in the Baltic in January 1991; and on different occasions in the Caucasus during which the military’s status was severely damaged. Gorbachev was thus never an ally for the military in the reform debate. Specifically on the AVF question Gorbachev was vague and ambivalent. His stand on this was lost in generalities without him ever expressing his own personal ideas about the issue. This attitude also reveals that he was not an ally of the liberal military reformers either. In fact Gorbachev stayed out of the reform debate even when the debate dominated political life in 1990. This attitude can also be deduced from his memoirs in which he did not write a word about military reform.

**The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff** reacted in a conservative way to the turbulent political environment that has emerged. The overwhelming problems they faced urged them to seemingly fall back on known and approved past experience. In other words, the answer of the military forces to the problems posed was rather one of strengthening conservatism than of radical change. Their call for more discipline, for more patriotism and their support for the conscript system, in short for traditional military values and practices, can be seen as evidence of this reflex action. They lacked the necessary creativity needed to come up with new ideas in order to cope with uncertainty. Stephen Cohen’s description of conservatism - even though it does not refer

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specifically to military conservatism - is perfectly applicable to how the Russian Ministry of Defense reacted:

“The pivot of conservatism is a deep reverence for the past, a sentimental defense of existing institutions, routines, and orthodoxy which live on from the past, and an abiding fear of change as the harbinger of disorder and of a future that will be worse than the present as well as a sacrilege of the past. Conservatism is often little more than the sum total of inertia, habit, and vested interests. But it can also be a cogent philosophical justification of the status quo as the culmination of everything good in the historical past and thus the only sturdy bridge to the future. Many conservatives can distinguish between stability and immobilism, and they do not flatly reject all change. But the conservative insistence that any change be slow and tightly controlled by established authority, based on law and order, and conform to prevailing orthodoxy is usually prohibitive. In the end, conservatives usually prefer cults of the past and those authorities … which guard order against change, native tradition against alien corruption, the present against the future.” 230

Two elements are necessary to underline the military’s behavior during this period in order to nuance this observation. Firstly, Moiseev and Yazov experimented with contract service in the Navy, but it was a small scale, tightly controlled experiment. During 1991 there were signs that the Ministry of Defense considered the possible implementation of contractees in a slow and tightly controlled manner. Their conservatism may thus not be confused with inaction. Secondly, the military was not a monolithic organization. As demonstrated above, there were voices from the rank and file and even among the highest ranks that openly proclaimed to be in favor of the AVF. In the end, the radical program of Lopatin was in essence also a military plan, written by officers of field grade level.

In conclusion, the following questions can be raised concerning the Soviet military’s role in the reform discussion. (1) The military elite cultivated the closed character of their decision-making practices. The ideas came from the General Staff and the Ministry of Defense, and were - as their conservatism showed - based on past Soviet experience. The victorious experience of the Second World War, in particular, played an important role in their mindset. The information flow was as a result primarily internally based. There was no input of external consultancy or external expertise. The strict hierarchical thinking in Soviet society and especially the Soviet armed forces prohibited the growth of ideas at the grass roots level; (2) The Soviet High Command was not pro-active in searching for organizational problems. It was the informal groups that brought organizational problems to society’s attention and forced the army to react. Publicly, the military elite preferred to deny the societal accusations that were leveled at them, a tactic that proved to be counter-productive; (3) Decisions made in the Russian military forces were basically a fait accompli. The forces had to cope with overwhelming organizational problems for which they were not responsible, they had little or no decision-making responsibility, and they were rarely considered as consultants. In other words, their professional opinion was neglected even if the decisions had severe consequences for them as a group, as for instance the unilateral reduction of troops in Eastern Europe; and (4) Closely related with this last argument is the fact that Russian politics themselves created an extremely unstable environment, in which the military was isolated from. The military received little or no support from politicians, and in some ways they were not treated fairly by civilian authorities. Gorbachev never regarded military organizational reform as an important priority.

The Congress of People’s Deputies played a crucial and specific role in the period 1988-1991. Lilia Shevtsova described the political impact of this institution as follows:

“…Sessions of the Congress of Peoples Deputies were important milestones in the development of Russian political life, as the entire Russian political establishment, including its regional representatives, gathered together. The power struggles that had gone on behind closed doors burst into the open. These periodic explosions of passion and emotions could hardly be expected to resolve problems productively. However, given Russia’s political circumstances and the weakness of institutions, such public reaction at least served to express society’s interests and orientations, refine or change the balance of power, and to force major political actors to look for ways to resolve their conflicts.”

This description of the political significance of this particular Soviet legislative body can also be applied to the contribution that this institution made to the field of military reform. The small group that was appointed to present a reform proposal at the end of 1989 proved to be innovative, in fact it expressed ‘society’s interests and orientations’. Their reform proposal can be praised for the fact that it summarized the military societal debate that burst forward into the public forum during that period.

But where did the idea of the AVF come from? Lopatin himself admitted that this idea came from the contacts that their sub-committee had with their American colleagues. William Odom confirmed that, as soon as the Congress of People’s Deputies was established and operational, there were contacts between the American and Soviet legislative bodies. The US military organization was for Lopatin and his ‘group of seventeen’ the role model for the reorganization of the Soviet army. The introduction of the AVF idea can then also be seen as a good example of organizational imitation. The fact that such a revolutionary idea could take root in this sub-committee, may be explained by the size, composition and open character of the committee. A small group which was homogeneously composed of officers with field grades and which was open for new ideas proved to be a good breeding ground for innovative thinking.

Besides the positive elements of this legislative work, it is also necessary to see the problematic elements of their endeavor. First, their revolutionary ideas, which was an imitation of the Anglo-Saxon military organizational model, was not adapted to the organizational reality of the Soviet army. Was the Soviet army ready for the introduction of this AVF-model? In other words, did the AVF model offer any guarantee for the solution of organizational problems in the Soviet army? In Part III of this study, this question will be discussed in depth.

Lopatin’s idea was the expression of passion and societal outrage. Shevtsova’s remark that the Congress of Peoples Deputies “hardly could be expected to resolve problems productively”, is therefore apt in this matter. It was also clear that the liberal-democratic reform proposal was representative of a political minority, which had received considerable attention in the press. It was the press which reported on military affairs and informal groups active in the field. These two groups were clamorous, but not very influential political actors when it came to the true decision making practices. Politically, Lopatin was isolated and excluded from decision-making forum, just as Yazov had been. It is, indeed, an illusion to think that at that moment Lopatin’s plan received any substantial support from any state institution, or even in the Congress because political life at the time was too polarized.

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This political reality can explain the stalemate in which organizational thinking found itself in the summer of 1991. Lopatin’s plan, just as the Ministry of Defense-plan caused and was an effect of this polarization. It was clear that there was no communication between the legislative bodies and the executive: an effect of institutional weakness. In conclusion, the Lopatin plan was innovative, it incorporated societal criticism and considerations into its recommendations and these ideas would influence Russian organizational thinking even in the new millennium. The ‘group of seventeen’ was thus actively and openly seeking solutions for organizational problems in the Soviet Army. Their solution was based on imitation. However, flat imitation of an Anglo-Saxon organizational model and applying it to the Soviet military case is no guarantee of success. The plan was uncompromising and the authors lacked the necessary political skills to endorse their plan. Thomas remarked on this issue:

“The reformist position is innovative, and action-oriented, but remains consumed by the euphoria of making bold statements not fully representative of responsible foresight for potential future problems or present constraints.”

In this sense they were true revolutionaries, for, as Huntington wrote: “The revolutionaries must be able to dichotomize social forces, the reformer to manipulate them.”

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