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(U) USSR: Military Leaders Vs. Reform Intellectuals

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(U) Key Judgments

Soviet Defense Ministry leaders are uneasy about the USSR's freer atmosphere and public complaints about the military under Gorbachev. They object in particular to realistic media portrayals of brutality encountered by draftees and high-command failings during World War II; they complain about pacifism being spread by informal groups, attacks on officer corps perquisites, and draft deferments wangled by college students.

The military clearly fears a burgeoning effort to reduce its traditional role in public life and, in particular, to cut its budget. Reform-minded intellectuals, on the other hand, see their objective as expanding the parameters of humaneness and truth.

Given that some party bosses share the generals' reservations about perestroika, critics of the military are likely to accomplish little in the way of change in the near term. Their sniping at the military could even fuel anti-Gorbachev sentiment in the upper reaches of the armed forces. But the military-intellectuals' differences on public issues stem largely from changing social attitudes in the USSR and could have long-term importance for the evolution of Soviet society.

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- 2 -

(U) Brutality Issue

Allowing senior servicemen to beat up recruits is a Soviet military tradition. So is the system of keeping order in the ranks by having senior conscripts exploit younger ones, forcing them to perform the seniors' duties, confiscating their uniforms and food, etc. With the age of glasnost, newsmen and literati began to focus on such "nonregulation relations"; articles have been published describing in graphic detail the harshness of the recruits' existence.

The military has admitted the existence of such practices and made assurances that steps are being taken to eradicate them. But some of its spokesmen counter by blaming "barracks hooliganism" on coddled youths and overly permissive parents and school directors.

The assistant chief of Komsomol work in the Navy Political Directorate, for example, described "the seniority system" as an acute problem requiring action not only by commanders and political officers but also by the entire military collective. He appeared particularly concerned that the system was another reason why conscripts try to avoid service in the Navy. At the same time, however, he argued that inadequate preparation of conscripts for naval service results in some conscripts being "immature and philistine." He also suggested that the charges of recruits being bullied were exaggerated, and that Soviet writers and moviemakers do not do enough to encourage youth to want to serve in the Navy.

Defense Minister and Politburo candidate member Gen. Yazov on Moscow TV (January 16) took sharp issue with media treatment of military reality. He went so far as to identify "the problem" as "not with the excessive incidence of irregular treatment in the Army, but in the number of literate people who later write about this."

Last August, Yazov advised military press editors to avoid a disrespectful treatment of military cadres in writing about the armed forces. In his recent TV appearance, he levied a blast at glasnost flagship Ogonyok on those same grounds. Waving an issue of the journal and crying shame on its staff, Yazov fumed about a story concerning an alcoholic private who considered general officers toadies.

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- 3 -

(U) Disputes Over History

Yazov and his aides are no less concerned by the glasnost-driven pressure for more objective treatment of the Soviet-Nazi war. One historian specializing in that conflict, Academician Aleksandr Samsonov, has used glasnost to excoriate Stalin's despotism and his failings as a military commander, blaming him for the Red Army's defeats in 1941. In response, the Defense Ministry journal Voyennyy vestnik last October dredged up Samsonov's writings of 1950 and 1952 extolling Stalin as "brilliant commander and great leader" and assailed him as an ambitious opportunist.

Yazov in his February 22 Armed Forces Day speech did admit that the military had been hurt by crimes of the Stalin era. But on the personal level, he paid tribute to Stalin's performance as State Defense Committee head during the war and stressed the role played by military history in building national pride. First Deputy Defense Minister Lushev on the same occasion warned against negativism in dealing with wartime events, and General Staff chief Akhromeyev lashed out at those who claimed Soviet victory over the Nazis was so costly in blood that it could hardly be considered a victory.

The military daily Red Star on March 29 resumed the attack on historian Samsonov and hit at two anti-Stalin literati, Mikhail Shatrov and Anatoliy Rybakov. Even after Pravda flayed the neo-Stalinists in the party daily Sovetskaya Rossiya on April 5, the military newspaper argued with documentary movie-makers who had implied that Stalin in 1945 was fearful or jealous of his wartime generals (Red Star, April 11). Evidently, military circles are loath to see Stalin the warlord discredited and still respect him as a symbol of authority and discipline, as well as battlefield glory.

(U) Domestic Pacifism

Pacifism, too, has become a bone of contention. Of course the peace movement has been a major vehicle for promoting Soviet foreign policy objectives, particularly in the arms control field. But the spillover into domestic attitudes has aroused considerable concern. In early 1987, a Minsk journal censured Belorussian writer Adamovich for urging educators to imbue future servicemen with "hatred of war and of killers." In order to prevent war, Adamovich reportedly had argued, "a new ethic prohibiting killing" had to be introduced; this ethic would "lead to the prohibition of all wars."

Red Star last December praised Adamovich's critics, agreeing that human behavior was not determined merely by sermons. But Red Star complained that those critics had failed to point

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 4 -

out that the combat capability of the Soviet armed forces was one of the guarantees of peace.

In a still heavier broadside at Soviet pacifists, the military press denounced as "internal enemies" an East-West "Trust" group which allegedly circulated an open letter charging that an ill draft resister had been forcibly recruited into the Army and terribly abused. A military journalist writing on the case claimed the youth was a happy private and indignant over the Trust letter.

Such rumblings of military discontent doubtless reflect attitudes of the top brass. The Defense Ministry's collegium met in January to discuss preservice training and issued a condemnation of the spread of "abstract-pacifist views" in Soviet society.

(U) Social Injustice Denied

The military traditionally has enjoyed a privileged status in Soviet society. Special goods and services have always been available for its higher echelons. Military hospital facilities are vastly superior to anything open to the shpak, a contemptuous Army term for civilians. Gorbachev's call for cutting down on bureaucratic privileges accordingly irks the military just as much as it does other elite groups.

The literary journal Novyy mir in 1986 ran a biting comment on the perquisites of the military which raised hackles at the Defense Ministry. The writer had particularly targeted a vast summer camp on the Black Sea which was run for the children of senior officers; he claimed that a camp employee had gotten into trouble for writing a song noting the absence of workers' children at the campfires. Red Star denounced that kind of reporting as an invention aimed at an ignorant public.

Last December, Red Star also rebuked those guilty of malicious or envious attitudes toward the armed forces. The paper took umbrage over the "blasphemous" remarks of a middle-age woman visiting a grandiose military cemetery in the Caucasus to the effect that "the military always grab the best of everything for themselves." It also reprimanded a writer for drawing a stark contrast between a colonel's wages, chrome leather boots, and cheviot greatcoat and the lot of destitute peasants. Such remarks were said to be creating "an unhealthy atmosphere of hostility" toward the Army.

(U) Draft Deferments

The decision apparently made last year to expand draft deferments for university students (a 1982 act had sharply

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- 5 -

curtailed such deferments) provides evidence of Gorbachev's willingness to put civilian needs ahead of the military. According to a brief announcement published in Literaturnaya gazeta (December 23, 1987), the decision to restore student deferments was made for "a number of the country's most important universities." It was taken despite strongly voiced objections from such high-ranking military spokesmen as Col. Gen. Mahkmud Gareyev, deputy chief of the General Staff, who warned that such a move would violate principles of social justice and could be exploited by "insufficiently mature" young persons seeking to avoid military service at all costs (Literaturnaya gazeta, June 8, 1987). Recently, Gareyev has hit at writers urging a reduction in the length of service for draftees (Oktyabr, No. 2, 1988).

Reformers Undaunted

(C) "The Ministry of Defense cannot be fenced off from glasnost!" That was the reply Ogonyok chief editor Korotich gave to military grousing at a February 1988 meeting of some 400 persons at the House of Composers in Moscow.

(C) Korotich reportedly asserted that Gen. Yazov's blast at Ogonyok would not stop the journal from exposing abusive treatment of ordinary soldiers. Afghan war veterans were a special concern. Korotich added: "Something must be done in particular about those who have been crippled in the war."

(U) And writers continue to debunk the legends about Stalin's military acumen. Georgiy Kunitsyn claims that Stalin was a disaster for the armed forces, his prewar purges responsible for the deaths of more officers than fell during all of Russia's wars, and for the only violent deaths of supergrade (field marshal or marshal) officers. "We won in spite of Stalin and not because of him," Kunitsyn affirmed (Literaturnaya Rossiya, February 26).

(U) Ogonyok's editor apparently has high-level backing on a number of issues. Shortly after Korotich's speech, Pravda ran a letter from a draftee's mother who complained of officers' indifference to the beating of her son. Furthermore, a CPSU decree published February 24 drew attention to cases of "a formal, callous attitude toward former internationalist servicemen who have received wounds and have lost limbs."

(U) On the other hand, party leaders by and large seem to fear a protest movement developing among Afghan veterans under the influence of intellectual radicals. The February 24 decree also attacked "some people with ideologically harmful views and

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- 6 -

excessive personal ambitions" for trying to pit Afghan veterans against regime loyalists.

(U) In the last analysis, the military's trump card against critics is its network of friends within the party apparatus. As did Gen. Yazov, deputy party head Ligachev has berated Ogonyok and stressed the importance of heroism in history. Ligachev has also tended to uphold the elite perquisites.

(U) One tentative sign of party-military accommodation surfaced in Pravda on January 21. Pravda urged "maximum caution" toward "recommendations from those who are now writing with new aplomb the opposite of what they used to write." The reference to anti-Stalin historian Samsonov whom the Defense Ministry had attacked seems clear.

(U) Many civilian party members certainly share the simplistic world view which the avant-garde of Soviet art finds so objectionable in the military. Younger writers and theater directors have been especially critical of the military for framing issues in black and white and for treating individuals in one-dimensional fashion. That natural alliance of party and Army ideologues can be expected to seek to obstruct attempts of Soviet reform intellectuals to "humanize" the armed forces, if not scale down glasnost to a minimum. An explicit account of Kremlin infighting during the Khrushchev era which was published recently presumably was intended as a reminder to all that military leaders occasionally play a key role on the USSR political stage (Literaturnaya gazeta, February 24).

(U) Long-Term Significance

Whatever the immediate outcome of the public controversy between the intellectuals and the military, the real issue for years to come is the vast and costly defense machine's status in Soviet society. The public complaints about the military currently reflect both war weariness brought on by Afghanistan and attitudinal changes in society. Party reformers and ordinary citizens, particularly those of less than age 35, share the view that much of the resources now channeled to the military could better be used for the satisfaction of human needs in the civilian sector. The military, however, only grudgingly acknowledges problems and defects, and probably is still confident it can rely on party conservatives to get what it wants.

The anti-militaristic mood shift "below"--in the population itself--will have real impact on policy only if the structure of political power in the USSR is changed. Apparatus rule by entrenched officials in the party and state bodies has to give way to more democratic influences if radically new policy

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- 7 -

steps are ever to be taken. This seems to be the motive behind Gorbachev's push for "democratization" of Soviet government and society. The ingrained habits of thought which until now have kept reform at bay have to be surmounted over time before real change comes to the USSR.

Prepared by Sidney Ploss
647-9186

Approved by Richard A. Clarke
647-2402

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