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*Russian Conventional Armed Forces: On the Verge of
Collapse?*

Stuart D. Goldman, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division

September 4, 1997

Abstract. Russian government decisions and the budget deficit crisis have hit the Ministry of Defense very hard, cutting defense spending drastically and transforming the Defense Ministry into a residual claimant on scarce resources. Many experts believe that if these budgetary constraints continue for 2-3 more years, they must lead either to more drastic force reductions or to military collapse.

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Russian Conventional Armed Forces: On the Verge of Collapse?

Summary

All quantitative indicators show a sharp, and in most cases an accelerating, decline in the size of the Russian armed forces. Since 1986, Russian military manpower has decreased by over 70 percent; tanks and other armored vehicles by two-thirds; and artillery, combat aircraft, and surface warships by one-third. Weapons procurement has been plummeting for over a decade. In some key categories, such as aircraft, tanks, and surface warships, procurement has virtually stopped. This has led not only to a decline in present inventory, but implies a long-term crisis of bloc obsolescence in the future. Russian Government decisions and the budget deficit crisis have hit the Ministry of Defense very hard, cutting defense spending drastically and transforming the Defense Ministry into a residual claimant on scarce resources. Many experts believe that if these budgetary constraints continue for 2-3 more years, they must lead either to more drastic force reductions or to military collapse.

Military capabilities are also in decline. Reportedly, few, if any, of Russia's army divisions are combat-ready. Field exercises, flight training, and out-of-area naval deployments have been sharply reduced. Morale is low, partly because of non-payment of servicemen's salaries. Draft evasion and desertion are rising. Half the officers say they plan to quit the military in 1998.

Despite these problems, the Russian Army can be formidable vis-à-vis weak neighbors such as the Baltic states. Russian forces are dominant in the Caucasus and Moldova, and are a key factor in Central Asia, but seem less useful vis-à-vis Ukraine. The Russian Army, however, has little capability to threaten Central and Eastern Europe and is no longer dominant in East Asia.

The Yeltsin regime appears to have concluded that to the extent that it faces a security threat, it is more an internal than an external threat. It has taken better care of internal security forces than the army. The armed forces are becoming more politicized. Many U.S. and Russian specialists warn of a military calamity (implosion, mutiny, or coup) if present trends continue.

As concern about the military crisis intensified in 1997, the Yeltsin regime said military reform was a top priority. Plans were announced to further reduce the size of the army, consolidate military services and command structures, pay all military salary arrearages, and move toward an all-volunteer force that is more compact and mobile. There is widespread resistance to the proposed reforms within the military and from opposition political parties, calling into question whether and to what extent the reforms will be implemented.

Estimates are that, at the soonest, it might take Russia ten years to rebuild its conventional military capabilities. Compared to the cold war era, the military threat to the West is greatly reduced, while warning time is greatly increased. There is a danger, however, that Russia might become embroiled in a military conflict on its periphery that is beyond its now much-reduced capabilities, with potentially dire consequences for Russian reform and for international stability.

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Russian Conventional Armed Forces: On the Verge of Collapse?

Introduction

“The current state of the Russian Armed Forces can be described only as an accomplished catastrophe of the armed forces, which would develop into a NATIONAL CATASTROPHE very soon unless society and the state ... prevent this impending threat.” — [Russian] Council on Foreign and Defense Policy¹

“The Russian military is in deep crisis. Russia remains a preeminent nuclear power, but the great instruments of conventional power projection created by the Soviet Union are in ruin.” — Sherman Garnett, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace²

Most people are aware that the Russian Army³ today is neither as powerful nor as threatening as its Soviet predecessor of ten years ago. But relatively few observers realize the full extent of the degradation of Russian military capability, especially in conventional (non-nuclear) forces.

For two generations, NATO lived with “The Threat” — offensively configured, numerically superior, tank-heavy Warsaw Pact armies that seemed poised to sweep westward through Germany.⁴ Now that threat is not merely diminished, it has disappeared. Alexei Arbatov, a leading Russian strategic analyst and Deputy Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Russian State Duma gives this assessment:

As recently as 1988, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies held a quantitative edge over NATO of about 3-1 in the main weapons of conventional ground and air forces. But ... today Russia is quantitatively inferior to NATO by a ratio of from 1-2 to 1-3. With NATO first phase enlargement this will change

¹ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, [Moscow], February 14, 1997.

² Sherman Garnett, “The Revolution in Eurasian Military Affairs,” *The Future of the Russian Military: Managing Geopolitical Change and Institutional Decline*, Heritage Lecture No. 578, The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., December 12, 1996, p. 4.

³ In ordinary usage, Russians often refer to their armed forces simply as the army.

⁴ There was a good deal of debate about whether the Soviet Union actually intended to launch such an attack, and also about the quality of Warsaw Pact vs. NATO forces, but the preponderance of Warsaw Pact forces on the Central European front was deeply disturbing to many in the West, prompting warnings that “quantity has a quality all its own.” Their offensive preparations, exercises, and constant high state of alert on the NATO border were tangible indicators of an aggressive capability.

to a 1-4 imbalance.... Given the ability of NATO and the West to mobilize superior economic and technological resources, the discrepancy is even more alarming from a Russian perspective. Chillingly, in the case of revived hostilities, only nuclear weapons can be relied upon to negate this gaping imbalance.⁵

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of this reversal in what the Soviets used to call the “correlation of forces.” The Russian Army, quantitatively and qualitatively far inferior to its Soviet predecessor, bereft of its Warsaw Pact allies and the resources of the non-Russian Soviet republics that made up half the population of the U.S.S.R., perceives itself to be thoroughly overmatched by the superpower United States, which retains powerful allies in NATO. Russia now sees itself faced with NATO’s old dilemma, and has adopted an old NATO strategy — reliance on nuclear weapons to counterbalance inferiority in conventional forces.⁶

Indeed, in the defense sector Moscow has given the highest priority to maintaining its strategic nuclear forces. It is in that category alone that Russia has maintained rough parity with the United States, although even in that area Russia’s capability has eroded significantly. A recent CRS report examined Russian nuclear forces in detail.⁷ The present study is a complementary piece, focused on conventional forces.

The role and status of the Russian Army has changed dramatically from that of the Soviet era, when the Red Army was kept out of politics but enjoyed a preferential status in resource allocation and in prestige. Now those relations are reversed. The Army has become highly politicized but has a low priority in resource allocation and has lost much of its prestige and pride.

There has been a spate of conferences and reports about the Russian military in the past year. (Many are cited in this study.) A clear consensus has emerged among specialists.⁸ That consensus, surprising to many non-specialists, is that Russian conventional military capabilities have been degraded to such an extent that the armed forces face the possibility of collapse or implosion if present trends continue much longer. Many experts assert that the “Russian military threat” now is more **to**

⁵ Alexei G. Arbatov. *The Russian Military in the 21st Century*. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pa., June 3, 1997, p. 9-10.

⁶ Defense Minister Igor Sergeev said in a speech on August 11, 1997, that, “there is no direct military threat to Russia in the near future up to the year 2005, while the state of strategic nuclear forces, provided their combat readiness is maintained at the level of set demands, will enable the country to counter threats which may arise”. Itar-Tass, August 11, 1997.

⁷ *Russia’s Nuclear Forces: Doctrine and Force Structure Issues*. CRS Report 97-586F, May 23, 1997.

⁸ Many of these experts have had long careers in the military, the intelligence community, think tanks, and academe, studying the Soviet military — and do not have a history of or a predisposition to underestimate the threat.

Russia than **from** Russia.⁹ Interestingly, Russian expert assessments of the Russian military tend to be even more negative than American assessments.¹⁰ These experts warn that the “crisis” in the Russian armed forces could, if unchecked, destabilize Russia politically, undermine economic reform, and jeopardize regional security.

Many observers believe the Yeltsin regime has the means to avert a military collapse or upheaval if it acts promptly and intelligently. Decisive political leadership is needed, since the military can not be expected to fundamentally reform itself. In response to this crisis, the Yeltsin regime proposed military reforms in mid-1997 that emphasize reorganization, consolidation, and further downsizing. These proposals face strong bureaucratic and political opposition. It is not clear whether they will be implemented or, if implemented, effective. It is clear, however, that Russia cannot sustain the huge military-industrial complex inherited from the U.S.S.R. This could be a critical decision point.

Military power was the primary basis of the Soviet Union’s superpower status. The Russian Government and Russian political elites across the spectrum seem not to have fully adjusted to the new reality of Russia’s diminished military capability. Even while acknowledging that the military is in crisis, Russian officials and politicians typically cling to attitudes reminiscent of the Soviet era, to the effect that “Russia was, is, and will be a great power.” Russia certainly was and probably will again be a great power. The problem is in the present. Yet, even the thoughtful Alexei Arbatov, cited above, asserts that although

... Russia is passing through a deep and protracted crisis, the end of which is far from sight.... At the same time, Russia remains a great power. Its immense natural and human resources, huge and established industrial base, its military assets, and the historical legacy of great power status attained during the Soviet era — all assure its status at a much higher level than its present economic position would warrant.

One of the problems with such attitudes is that they perpetuate unrealistic views of the proper roles and missions of the Russian armed forces that exceed actual military capabilities. A vivid example of such miscalculation was Moscow’s use of military force in Chechnya.¹¹ Russian officers learned a harsh lesson from this experience and strongly oppose using the army against separatists in the Russian

⁹ This idea is developed more fully on p. 31-34, below.

¹⁰ Many of these highly pessimistic Russian assessments appeared in the winter and spring of 1996-1997, during the final phase of negotiations over NATO enlargement. This was not a time when Moscow’s interests would seem to have been well served by exaggerating Russia’s military weakness. One Russian tactic during the NATO talks was to float warnings of dire military consequences in the event of NATO enlargement. Reports of Russian military weakness tended to undermine that tactic.

¹¹ Former Defense Minister Pavel Grachev reportedly told President Yeltsin in December 1994 that a single regiment of Russian paratroopers could stamp out the Chechen separatist movement in 2 hours. Yeltsin ordered in the army, apparently confident that organized resistance would be quickly crushed. After 21 months of bloody fighting, the Russian Army was actually defeated by Chechen rebel forces and forced to leave Chechnya.

Federation and other domestic political opposition.¹² But the military leadership is believed to have opposed using the armed forces in Chechnya and was overruled by the Kremlin.¹³

Political leaders imbued with the instinctive belief that Russia is a great power, may be inclined toward imperial overreach, a tendency that could entangle Russia in conflicts beyond its current capabilities, with potentially dire consequences. The most immediate threat is of conflict on Russia's periphery, what Moscow calls its "near abroad," i.e., the states of the former Soviet Union. Conflict there could pose dangers both to Russia and its neighbors.

Russian military capabilities, force deployments and military policies, the prospects for Russian political stability and continued reform, and Russia's relations with other Soviet successor states are issues that have important policy implications for the United States. These developments could significantly affect congressional attitudes toward and action on such issues as U.S. defense programs, arms control treaties, NATO enlargement, and foreign aid.

Quantitative Indicators

*"Reform in the armed forces has turned into a struggle for their survival, a struggle against disintegration. The whole horror is in the fact that, as Russian defence minister, I am becoming a spectator of the destructive processes in the army and can nothing about it."*¹⁴ — Gen. Igor Rodionov, Minister of Defense, February 6, 1997.

*"What kind of Defense Minister am I? I am the Minister of Defense of a disintegrating army and a dying fleet."*¹⁵ — Gen. Igor Rodionov, Minister of Defense, February 25, 1997.

"Stop whining." — President Boris Yeltsin to Defense Minister Rodionov, February 26, 1997.

All quantitative indicators show a sharp, and in most cases an accelerating, decline in the size and capabilities of the Russian armed forces. This is true of forces in being, of weapons production, and of defense spending.

¹² Deborah Yarsike Ball, "How Reliable Are Russia's Officers?" *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 1996, p. 205-207.

¹³ The evidence, particularly on the role of Defense Minister Grachev, is ambiguous.

¹⁴ Reuters, February 6, 1997.

¹⁵ *Izvestia*, February 25, 1997.

Table 1. Russian and U.S. Military Manpower and Equipment, 1986/1996^a

	1986	1996	Percentage Change
Active Manpower			
USSR/Russia	4,300,000	1,270,000 ^b	-70
USA	2,143,955	1,483,800	-34
Divisions			
USSR/Russia ^c	216	61	-72
USA	32	22	-31
Tanks			
USSR/Russia	53,200	17,650	-67
USA	15,012	10,900	-27
AFV/APC			
USSR/Russia	83,000	28,580	-66
USA	26,640	32,635	+18
Artillery/MRLs			
USSR/Russia	29,259	19,153	-35
USA	18,016	9,605	-47
Combat Aircraft			
USSR/Russia	7,365	5,160	-30
USA	7,225	4,466	-38
Major Surface Warships			
USSR/Russia	269	166	-38
USA	222	144	-35
Attack Submarines			
USSR/Russia	360	87	-76
USA	97	78	-20

- a. The figures in Table 1 are taken from *The Military Balance, 1986-1987*, and *The Military Balance, 1996-1997*, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London. These figures for 1986 generally track closely with the possibly more accurate figures contained in CRS Reports 91-636RCO, *Soviet Armed Forces Statistical Trends, 1985-1990*, and 92-657S, *U.S. Armed Forces Statistical Trends, 1985-1991*. But as there is no comparable CRS report for 1996, the IISS figures have the advantage of consistent counting rules for both years, providing more reliability in charting trends over time.
- b. The actual number of Russian active duty military personnel is uncertain and disputed by Russian officials and western analysts. Estimates range from 1.2 to as high as 1.8 million. The official authorized strength is 1.7 million, although Russian officials often say 1.8 million. Most analysts place actual troop strength at 1.2-1.5 million. The figure 1,270,000 from *The Military Balance* is near the low end of the range. But the practice of padding unit rosters with “ghost” contract soldiers is believed to be widespread, as a way to get larger payroll disbursements. Authoritative data on military manpower published in *Izvestia* on July 18, 1997 indicates a total of 1.32 million. The Ministry of Defense is currently conducting a unit-by-unit census in order to determine actual troop strength. A further complication is that Russia has another 1 million armed men in uniform in some 15-23 paramilitary agencies. About 40 percent-50 percent of Russia’s draftees go to these other agencies. Among the largest of these are the Interior Ministry troops, Federal Border Guard Service, Federal Security Service, Ministry of Emergency Situations, and Federal Road Construction Department. But since only the regular armed forces are equipped, trained, and dedicated to the warfighting mission, most analyses do not include paramilitary personnel in military manpower.
- c. Many Soviet/Russian divisions were/are manned at 20 percent-50 percent of nominal strength.

Manpower and Major Weapons Systems

Table 1 illustrates this downward trend by comparing the Russian armed forces in 1996 with the Soviet armed forces of 1986 in a number of key categories: total active duty military manpower; ground force divisions; tanks; armored fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers (AFV/APC); artillery and multiple rocket launchers (MRL); fixed wing combat aircraft; major surface warships;¹⁶ and submarines.¹⁷ For further comparison, Table 1 also gives figures for the U.S. armed forces in the same categories for the same years.

Russian active duty military manpower has decreased by over 70 percent¹⁸ and most of its Army divisions are hollow. The Russian and U.S. Armed Forces now have about the same number of troops. Whereas the United States has 22 army and marine divisions (active duty plus national guard), Russia counts 61 active duty and reserve divisions, plus scores of so-called independent brigades of unknown strength. Even allowing for the fact that a full-strength Russian division has about one-third fewer men than its U.S. counterpart, these numbers confirm reports that most Russian divisions are severely undermanned. Many are believed to exist primarily on paper.¹⁹

The sharp decrease in Russian armored vehicles undercuts its traditional capability for offensive operations in Europe. The Russian Army has only one-third the number of tanks and AFV/APCs as the Soviet Army had in 1986. For decades, heavy armored divisions were considered the sine quo non for offensive operations in Central Europe. It was the preponderance of forward-deployed Soviet/Warsaw Pact tank armies, with echelon after echelon of armored divisions in reserve, that seemed to pose the gravest threat to NATO. Today, the United States actually has more AFV/APCs than Russia (compared to a 3:1 Soviet advantage in 1986), and NATO enjoys clear superiority in the total number of armored vehicles.

Russia has about two-thirds the number of combat aircraft and artillery pieces as the Soviet Union had in 1986. U.S. inventories of these weapons have declined by about the same amount.

Similar proportional cuts were made in surface warships, although the numbers in Table 1 for this category can be misleading. The Soviet surface fleet was no match

¹⁶ Frigates and larger.

¹⁷ Does not include ballistic missile-launching submarines (SSBN), which are considered strategic rather than conventional weapons.

¹⁸ This is partly because Russia has about half the population of the former Soviet Union and a somewhat smaller share of the draft-age youth.

¹⁹ The new Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Anatoly Kvashnin, confirmed this in his first published interview in July 1997. In order to protect the billets of senior officers, he said, "understaffed divisions that had barely enough people to staff a regiment or even a battalion were preserved. With few remaining privates, such a battalion was not battle-worthy, yet it had completely staffed structures of command and rear services.... [T]he Army had turned into an Army of command and supply trains. Look at the map. Each flag means a unit. There are dozens of them. How many are battle-worthy? Few." Itogi, no.30-31, July 29, 1997, p. 18-19.

for the U.S. fleet in 1986 and its Russian successor is even more overmatched today. In 1986 and 1996, the U.S. Navy was outnumbered, but enjoyed substantial qualitative superiority. The aggregate tonnage of U.S. major warships exceeded the Soviet/Russian tonnage in 1986 and 1996. The Russian Navy has nothing comparable in firepower to a U.S. carrier battle group.²⁰

In contrast to its surface fleet (and to most other elements of its armed forces), Russia's submarine force appears to have been accorded a relatively high priority. This is thought to be due to the growing importance of Russia's SSBNs to its overall strategic nuclear forces. Although the rate of submarine production has been cut back significantly, the reduction was not as deep as for surface ships or most other defense items. Production of nuclear and diesel submarines continues, and according to U.S. Naval Intelligence, the new nuclear-powered boats rival the best U.S. submarines in overall capability. The size of the Russian submarine force has been greatly reduced, but the eliminated boats were older, obsolescent craft. The new force, though 75 percent smaller than the Soviet force of 1986, is proportionately more modern. Unlike most other areas of U.S. defense planning, which no longer focus on Russian developments, U.S. submarine acquisition and anti-submarine warfare programs are still driven by Russian activities.²¹

Declining Rates of Weapons Procurement

Soviet/Russian weapons procurement has been plummeting for over a decade.²² Table 2 and the accompanying graphs show that in some key categories, weapons procurement has almost literally dropped off the charts. Russian weapons production has also plummeted, and of that limited production, a substantial portion is for export.

Particularly dramatic is the drop in procurement of tanks and aircraft, weapons that are indispensable for offensive operations. Tank procurement has gone from several thousand to several dozen per year.²³ Russia procured no combat aircraft in

²⁰ Russia has only two large-deck aircraft carriers — the 58,500-ton Kuznetsov, which can embark an air wing of 24 fixed-wing aircraft and 17 helicopters (perhaps more in wartime), and the 40,400-ton Gorshkov, which can embark an air wing of 12 VSTOL (vertical/short takeoff or landing) aircraft (none, though, have been operated since 1992) plus 14 helicopters. The United States has 12 large-deck aircraft carriers, most of the 95,000-ton Nimitz class. U.S. carriers embark air wings of about 70 fixed-wing aircraft plus 6 helicopters. U.S. carrier battle groups typically include several other major surface warships and attack submarines armed with hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles.

²¹ U.S. Department of the Navy, Office of Naval Intelligence, *Worldwide Submarine Challenges 1997*, Washington, D.C., February 1997, p. 10-17; and CRS Issue Brief 91098, *U.S. Attack Submarine Programs: Issues for Congress*, (updated regularly).

²² A one year upward spike in 1989 was reversed in 1990.

²³ An official at Transmash, one of Russia's two operating tank plants (and the only T-80 factory), said that the government had ordered no tanks from his plant in 1997 and that any production would be for export. *Interfax*, April 1, 1997.

1996 and none are scheduled for procurement in 1997.²⁴ Construction of new major surface warships has been “practically frozen” since the early 1990s.²⁵

This collapse of weapons procurement speaks to the sharp decline in current weapons inventories. Perhaps more significant is the prospect of a future crisis of massive bloc obsolescence. Most of Russia’s weapons inventory, built mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, is reaching the end of its designed service life in this decade and the next. The gap in recent procurement means that the inventory will decrease even more sharply in coming years. The longer the procurement gap continues, the greater will be the future shortfall. Because of Moscow’s continuing budget and revenue crises, there is no end in sight for the negative trend in weapons procurement. According to a senior U.S. Army expert on the Russian military, “the best estimate is that if present trends continue, only 5 percent to 7 percent of the force will be modernized [have modern weapons] by 2005.”²⁶ Russian military specialists gloomily warn that, “Gradually we will slide toward the category of armies of third world countries.”²⁷ Even if the economy and weapons procurement begin to pick up by the end of this decade, there will be a significant period of acute bloc obsolescence. Hardest hit will be weapons systems that require a very long lead time for production and deployment, such as warships. Naval analysts say that Russia could virtually lose its “blue water” surface fleet early in the next century if procurement is not revived soon.²⁸

²⁴ Vitaly Shlykov, *The Political Economy of Russian Defense*, paper presented at a conference at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, March 1997, p. 2.

²⁵ “Naval Shipbuilding in Russia,” *Naval Forces*, no. 1, 1996, p. 10.

²⁶ Jacob W. Kipp, (Office of Foreign Military Studies, U.S. Army), “Military Pluralism and the Crisis of Russian Military Professionalism: Reflections of a Military Historian,” *The Future of the Russian Military*, Heritage Foundation, p. 13.

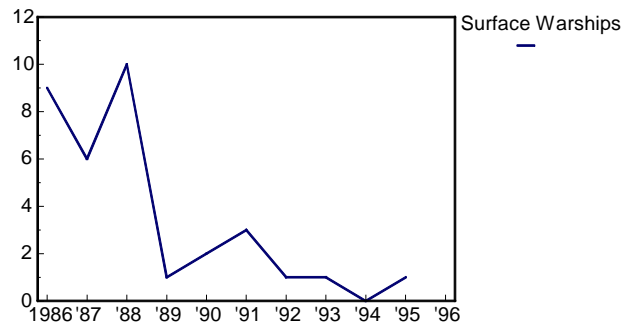
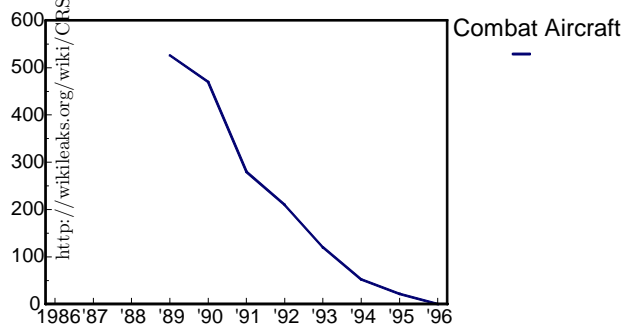
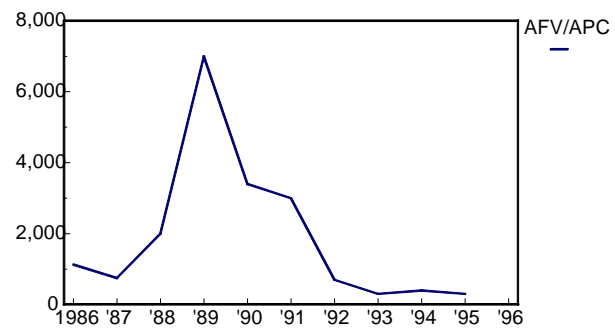
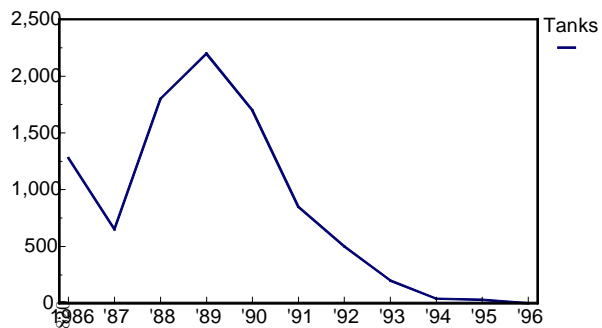
²⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Central Eurasia Daily Report* [hereafter cited as FBIS], September 18, 1995, p. 19.

²⁸ Since the early 1990s, Russia has not started construction of any new major surface warships. Given current funding levels, just the completion of ships previously laid down would take over ten years. “Naval Shipbuilding in Russia,” p. 10. Many of those hulls may never be completed. For example, of the five destroyers under construction at the Baltiisk shipyard, only one is expected to be completed. The remainder reportedly are to be cut up for scrap. Dale Herspring, “The Future of the Russian Military,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, March/April 1997, p. 52.

Table 2. Procurement of Major Weapons Systems, 1986-1996

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Tanks	1,280	650	1,800	2,200	1,700	850	500	200	40	0-30	?
AFV/APC	1,125	750	2,000	7,000	3,400	3,000	700	300	400	300	?
Combat Aircraft				526	470	280	210	120	52	22	0
Major Surface Combatants	9	6	10	1	2	3	1	1	0	1	1
Submarines	7	6	4	8	12	6	6	4	4	3	?

Weapon Systems Procurement



Defense Spending

Clifford Gatty of the Brookings Institution has written that,

For nearly sixty years, the Soviet Union had the most militarized large economy the world has ever seen. By all quantitative measures — the volume of arms produced and the physical and human dimensions of the industrial apparatus used to produce them — the Soviet military-industrial establishment was unmatched. But militarization was more than merely a question of size.... It was a process that affected the very nature of the system in both its political and economic dimensions.²⁹

Contemporary Russia, with a population and GDP smaller than that of Brazil, cannot sustain the military-industrial complex that the militarized U.S.S.R. created. The Yeltsin regime took what may have been a decisive step toward demilitarizing the economy when, in 1992, the government, led by Acting Premier Yegor Gaidar, cut spending on military hardware by 80 percent. That cut was never restored. The military-industrial complex has been struggling to adjust to that unprecedented cutback ever since.³⁰

The sharp reduction in defense spending is driven in part by the conviction that this step is absolutely necessary for Russia's transition to a market economy. Two other important factors are believed to figure prominently in this decision. One is the Kremlin's assessment that whatever security threat it faces is primarily internal rather than external, which would argue against a large expensive army.³¹ Another is alleged to be "unimaginable incompetence" on the part of the government, the parliament, and the Ministry of Defense (MOD).³²

Assessing defense spending in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia has been and remains a slippery and uncertain business. In the Soviet period the main obstacles were official secrecy and the peculiarities of a nonmoney economy. There is much less secrecy now, but the economy is in transition and, from an accounting perspective, in chaos. It is difficult to quantify Russian defense spending accurately on a year-to-year basis when the ruble's exchange rate was crashing during the hyperinflation of the early 1990s while ruble purchasing power parity has been fluctuating at a very different rate. Assessments of Russian defense spending tend to be impressionistic. But nearly all published assessments give the impression of

²⁹ Clifford G. Gatty, *The Price of the Past: Russia's Struggle with the Legacy of a Militarized Economy*, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 1.

³⁰ Russian Federation Government presentation to the EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) meeting, London, April 1997, Overview, p. 1.

³¹ Borisenko, "Gendarmerie or Army." The priority of internal over external threats is explicit in the official "National Security Concept" approved by Yeltsin in May 1997. (See p. 38-39, below.)

³² Shlykov, *Political Economy of Russian Defense*, p. 17, ff.

extreme budgetary constraint which, if continued for 2-3 more years, will lead either to more large-scale force reductions or to military collapse.³³

One of the most respected Russian authorities on Russian defense economics, Vitaly Shlykov,³⁴ offers the following calculations of recent Russian defense spending:

- The MOD budget in U.S. dollars at then-year exchange rates was, in 1993 \$7.4 billion; 1994 \$18 billion; 1995 \$12.8 billion; and 1996 \$15.1 billion.
- The ruble's (especially the "military ruble's") purchasing power parity against the dollar was much greater than the simple exchange rate would suggest. That purchasing power advantage, however, has decreased as market relations advanced through the Russian economy.
- Recalculating the MOD budget based on purchasing power parity, in 1993 it was \$28.7 billion; 1994 \$40.2 billion; 1995 \$21.1 billion; and 1996 \$18.2 billion.³⁵

In this view, the Russian defense budget, already seriously underfunded, was effectively cut in half from 1994 to 1995. Many Russian and western analysts share this view. Historically, such drastic cuts in defense spending occur rarely, and then usually at the end of a war. But in December 1994, the Russian Government **began** a war — albeit an internal one — in Chechnya. Yet the government did not allocate additional funds in the 1995 or 1996 budget for operations in Chechnya. The MOD had to absorb the costs of Chechnya in a defense budget that had just been cut in half.³⁶

The MOD, slow to adjust to the give-and-take of new political processes, has been maladroit in presenting its case. Defense Minister Gen. Pavel Grachev (1992-1996) disliked making detailed budget requests. In 1994, for example, the proposed defense budget he sent to the Duma was 2 pages long. Grachev also refused to answer the Duma Defense Committee's questions on the budget.³⁷

³³ Prospects and scenarios of military collapse are discussed below, p. 31-33.

³⁴ Dr. Shlykov, a Ph.D. in economics, served for 30 years in the Soviet Army General Staff mainly as a research analyst in defense economics. From 1990 to 1992, he was Deputy Chairman of the Russian State Committee on Defense with the rank of Deputy Minister. He was responsible for defense industry and its associated budget. He is now a member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a Russian non-governmental research organization.

³⁵ Shlykov, *Political Economy of Russian Defense*, p. 19-22.

³⁶ The war in Chechnya consumed about 10% of the Ministry of Defense budget in 1995. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ Based on interviews with Russian parliamentary staff.

The MOD's fiscal situation in 1997 appears to be no better than in the past few years and could end up worse. The MOD's initial 1997 budget request was for 260 trillion rubles. This was summarily rejected by Premier Chernomyrdin's government. The MOD then scaled back its request to 160 trillion rubles, which is the figure the government submitted to parliament in its 1997 budget request. Parliament cut the defense budget to 90 trillion rubles. Last-minute negotiations yielded a "compromise" figure of 104 trillion rubles.³⁸ (The Russian ruble has held steady at about 5,800 to the dollar for several years.) The MOD warned that this sum was barely adequate for nine months and jeopardized the very existence of the armed forces.³⁹ But the military is unlikely to get even that much. First, the Finance Ministry routinely withholds some of the funds authorized in the defense budget. In 1996, the MOD received about 60 percent of its authorized budget; in the first quarter of 1997, it got 53 percent of the amount authorized for that period.⁴⁰ Then, a major shortfall in tax collection in 1997 forced the government to propose a 20 percent budget sequestration, including a 20.3 percent cut in defense spending, which would reduce the 104 trillion ruble defense budget to 83 trillion rubles.⁴¹ If the government keeps its promise to maintain "social services" for the military (salaries, food, housing, etc.) and operations costs remain level, then such items as training, weapons procurement, research and development, capital construction, and maintenance must be cut more deeply.⁴²

One unusual MOD response to the budget crisis was to seek supplementary nongovernmental funding. On February 27, 1997, Defense Minister Rodionov called a group of top Russian bankers and businessmen to the Ministry and asked them to create a privately financed "defense fund." He also suggested that the MOD seek voluntary contributions from the public and from ethnic Russians living abroad.⁴³

³⁸ Presentation by Vitaly Shlykov at a conference on "Russia's Future as a World Power," U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, April 23, 1997.

³⁹ "On the Financial Plight of the Russian Army," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, [Moscow] April 24, 1997.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Shlykov, "The Political Economy of Russian Defense," p. 17. This situation is not unique to the Ministry of Defense. It is part of the pattern of government nonpayment of salaries, pensions, and debts to enterprises. It is part of the government's monetarist approach to curbing inflation. The MOD, however, has fared relatively worse than other agencies in this regard.

⁴¹ "Cutting Russian Defense Budget," AP, May 6, 1997.

⁴² This appears to be the case. In January-February 1997, for example, the MOD reported that the Finance Ministry had disbursed 72% of the funds budgeted for that period for salaries; but only 34% of the funds for food; 23.9% of the funds for capital construction; 1.8% of the funds for weapons procurement; 0.9% of the funds for R & D; and none of the funds for repairs, transportation, communications, housing, uniforms, or medical care. FBIS Special Memo, "Russian Army Pay," April 4, 1997, p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Defense Industries

From the above, it is clear that Russian defense industries are in distress. Government contracts to defense enterprises have fallen sharply and in many cases have stopped altogether. In June 1997, the Russian Government revised its economic forecast for the year from zero to two percent growth to zero to minus two percent contraction, mainly because of a 25 percent decline in military industrial production in the first quarter of 1997. First Deputy Premier Anatoly Chubais told the Presidential Council in June 1997 that, “the state of financing of defence orders is most catastrophic, with things on the brink of an explosion.”⁴⁴ This reflects not only the ebbing of government contracts, but the government’s persistent failure to pay defense enterprises (and others) for past orders. In 1996, the government reportedly paid for slightly more than half its military orders. In July 1997, it was estimated that the government owed 42 trillion rubles (over 40 percent of the total 1997 defense budget, before sequestration) to military suppliers.⁴⁵

In many enterprises, workers have not been paid for months. Salary arrearages of 6-8 months are not uncommon. Some of the most skilled and ambitious workers, especially among the younger generation, are leaving defense industries for the private sector. Others find ways to supplement their income in the “grey economy.” But many defense enterprises are clustered in provincial cities where there are insufficient alternative employment opportunities, and Russian labor, for a variety of reasons, is notoriously immobile. Economic conditions far worse than those of the Great Depression of the 1930s in the United States are giving rise to desperation, strikes, and protest demonstrations. Hunger strikes are becoming commonplace. More unusual — and for Moscow, more alarming — manifestations are emerging. For example, in June 1997, workers at a major nuclear submarine repair yard near Vladivostok who had not been paid for 9 months blocked the tracks of the Trans-Siberian Railway in protest. Other workers disconnected the power to a recently-overhauled nuclear submarine to prevent the Navy from taking it from the shipyard until the repairs were paid for.⁴⁶ Local power companies began shutting off electric power to military facilities — including the Headquarters of the Northern Fleet and a Strategic Rocket Forces missile complex — for nonpayment of electric bills. This prompted the Northern Fleet Commander to send sailors with machine guns to persuade the power company director to turn on the electricity and prompted Premier

⁴⁴ Interfax, June 3, 1997; “July will see six-fold increase in defence order financing, says First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais,” RIA Novosti, [Russian news service] June 5, 1997. Chubais, who is also Minister of Finance, promised a six-fold increase for July compared to June 1997. But in June, the government, at Chubais’ direction, made practically no payments to defense enterprises because of its severe revenue shortfall.

⁴⁵ “Russia: Sky Cloudy For Defense Industry,” RFE/RL, April 14, 1997; Interfax, July 10, 1997.

⁴⁶ “Military Debts: More Government Promises and More Protest Actions,” Jamestown Monitor, July 1, 1997.

Chernomyrdin to issue a decree prohibiting utilities from cutting power to military facilities regardless of unpaid bills.⁴⁷

The Militarized Economy. It is not surprising that little work is done in many large, overstaffed, typically still state-owned defense enterprises, with few if any defense contracts and little if any money to pay salaries. What **is** surprising is that few if any defense enterprises have gone out of business. Defense industry expert Shlykov identifies this as a major, though little-understood, failure of Russian economic reform: the failure to demilitarize the economy. For although defense spending and defense production have plummeted, the “structural militarization” of the economy — thousands of defense plants, design bureaux, and research institutes, with millions of employees — remains a huge presence, albeit, in many respects, a dead weight.⁴⁸

The unwieldy defense industrial sector received confusing and contradictory signals from the Yeltsin regime. In 1991-1992, the government, under acting Premier Yegor Gaidar, encouraged privatization and conversion of defense industries to non-military production, though not much actual defense conversion occurred. From 1993-1996, Gaidar’s successors adopted more statist attitudes toward defense industries, lost interest in defense conversion, and prohibited privatization of major defense enterprises. The State Committee for Defense Industries, a key promoter of the defense sector’s interests, was elevated to a government ministry in May 1996, under the tutelage of First Deputy Premier Oleg Soskovets, a champion of heavy industry and state subsidies. Then in March 1997, following Yeltsin’s reelection and recovery from heart surgery, western-oriented “reformers” regained the ascendancy, led by First Deputy Premier Chubais, a monetarist and champion of banking interests. Soskovets was dismissed. The Ministry for Defense Industries was abolished and its duties transferred to the Economics Ministry, controlled by Chubais.

Meanwhile, some significant changes occurred in the defense industries. When the Soviet Union dissolved, Russia inherited 70 percent of Soviet defense industries with 5.5 million employees. Since then, over 2.5 million workers, nearly half, are believed to have left the defense industries. The State Committee for Defense Industries promoted a consolidation of defense enterprises, from over 1,800 in 1992 to fewer than 500 in 1997 — but no defense plants were closed in this reorganization.⁴⁹

A prominent example of consolidation was the 1995 merger of the Mikoyan design bureau (responsible for the long line of MiG fighter planes) with MAPO, the Moscow Aviation Production Association, and its Moscow-region factories. In 1997, MAPO-MiG acquired the Progress Aviation Company, which makes the new Ka-50 and Ka-52 attack helicopters as well as Mil helicopters and Antonov aircraft. MAPO-MiG and other government-approved defense conglomerates were granted the right to export arms independently of the government’s arms export agency.

⁴⁷ “The Future of the Russian Military,” p. 51.

⁴⁸ Shlykov, “The Political Economy of Russian Defense,” p. 3-10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

MAPO-MiG has had some success selling fighters abroad. But the sale of dozens of planes abroad can not make up for the hundreds of MiGs the Soviet Air Force used to buy each year. In June 1997, it was reported that MAPO-MiG had not paid its workers for 3 months and was unable to pay its suppliers, contractors, taxes or electric bills.⁵⁰

The plight of MAPO-MiG, one of Russia's flagship defense enterprises, is illustrative of the underlying problem of the defense industrial sector. Although Russian arms exports have increased in the past two years, after falling sharply in 1992-1995, that cannot make up for the drastic reduction in government contracts. The defense industries have been kept afloat by direct government subsidies and by bank loans largely engineered by the government. Many Russian banks, including large commercial banks, are now in trouble, partly because of bad loans to defense industries. The new government, dominated by Chubais, is more responsive to banking interests than to the "metal eaters" of heavy industry. It may be willing to see large numbers of non-productive defense enterprises close their doors. This could have a beneficial effect in reducing the "structural militarization" of the economy. It would also greatly reduce the size of Russia's defense industrial base — and would cause large socio-economic dislocations.

It is problematic, however, to make such a prediction. The Yeltsin regime has often changed policies unpredictably and could do so again. Moreover, leaving the defense industrial sector at the mercy of the market would be a profound break not only with Soviet policy but with centuries of Russian tradition. Communists, nationalists, and other statists would be strongly opposed. On the other hand, many in Russia and the West argue that neither the Russian government nor the private sector can continue to sustain the large and unproductive defense industrial sector at anything near its present size. From this perspective, some substantial demilitarization of the economy may be not only desirable but inevitable. The end result may be a hybrid system with aspects of private enterprise and state support.

Although the future of Russia's defense industry is difficult to predict, current trends and government intent seem clear. The MOD's top priority is to provide salaries, food, and housing for its forces. In the proposed 1997 budget sequestration, those items are "safeguarded." The rest of the defense budget is to be cut by 37 percent (from 52 to 32 trillion rubles).⁵¹ Even before the need for sequestration became apparent, First Deputy Defense Minister Andrei Kokoshin announced that until the year 2005, the MOD will have only enough money to fund the development of prototypes of new weapons and perhaps to modernize some of its present equipment. Gen. Anatoly Sitnov, the General Staff's Chief of Armaments, added that selected defense plants will receive "minimal state orders" for new weapons in the interim to keep production lines intact so that they will be able to meet the

⁵⁰ Itar-Tass, June 29, 1997; "Ailing MiG Uses Sex to Sell Planes," Sunday Times [London], June 1, 1997.

⁵¹ Kommersant [Moscow], May 6, 1997.

military's needs after 2005. Sequestration will squeeze the defense industries even more tightly.⁵²

Research and Development. Russia's military research and development (R&D) establishment faces similar difficulties because of reduced defense spending. As with defense industry, few R&D institutes or labs have closed. But many scientists who are nominally employed there receive no salaries and are forced to work elsewhere, often in non-scientific jobs in the service sector. Many institutes exist at the subsistence level but do little productive work.⁵³ A recent RAND study concludes that Russian military R&D is being starved, and that many institutes and labs that cannot maintain their equipment or pay salaries are approaching a "point of no return."

Everywhere one hears talk of the aging and decay of the material base. Russia is already experiencing a serious degradation of basic experimental scientific capability.... This loss is having a negative impact on basic, theoretical, applied, and defense science. [Unless] the government acts ... the continuing shrinkage of the Russian S&T [science and technology] base will accelerate. That segment which survives will, to a great extent, owe its well-being to an international S&T community with which it is increasingly integrated, making Russia's military far more dependent than it would like upon foreign S&T resources for the modernization of its weaponry.⁵⁴

The situation in military R&D is not uniformly bleak. Some "islands of excellence" receive priority funding. Examples include the Tokomak nuclear fusion project, the new Topol-M ICBM, the space program, submarines, tactical aviation, and electronic and information warfare. Also, despite official denials, it is believed that research on biological weapons is continuing.⁵⁵ Even with priority funding, however, the MOD has stated that the Topol-M is at least three years behind schedule. And as numerous failures and setbacks in the Russian space program — long a "favored child" in the high tech community — show, even islands of excellence are in danger of being submerged by the rising tide of decay.

⁵² "Kokoshin: Military Will Have to Wait for New Weapons," Jamestown Monitor, February 2, 1997. Kokoshin, a civilian who has been the number two man in the MOD for years, has responsibility for defense industry.

⁵³ Some western analysts give a very different impression, reporting robust Russian military R&D. See, for example, Richard Pipes, "Russian Generals Plan for the Future," IntellectualCapital.com, July 3, 1997, carried on Johnson's Russian List, an internet website for Russian affairs, hereafter cited as JRL. Such judgements appear to be based more on the rhetoric of Russian politicians (who speak of the need to maintain Russia's preeminence in the field) than on actual conditions in the R&D establishments.

⁵⁴ Sharon L. Leiter, *Prospects for Russian Military Research and Development*, p. 22-23. Paper presented at the U.S. Army War College conference on Russia's Future as a World Power, Carlisle, PA, April 24, 1997. This paper builds on her 1996 RAND monograph of the same title.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Qualitative Indicators

The decay is awful...The army has stopped military training, the fleet does not go to sea, aviation does not fly. Machinery is not repaired and is not being bought. There is one reason — no money. Igor Rodionov, May 1997, after being fired by Yeltsin as Minister of Defense

... [W]hen weapons are old, reconnaissance potential is near zero, and battle management systems are absent, no amount of numerical strength can cover these gaps. new Defense Minister, Gen. Igor Sergeev, justifying manpower cuts, July 1997

Qualitative factors such as readiness, training, morale, and performance in action also indicate serious degradation of Russian conventional military capabilities.

Readiness

Russian military readiness is at the lowest level since the 1930s. Among the armed services, the strategic nuclear forces have generally maintained a reasonable level of readiness, although even their readiness has reportedly declined somewhat.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, readiness has fallen sharply. In 1995, the German Foreign Ministry estimated that fewer than half of Russia's ground force divisions were "operational." U.S. and Russian military specialists today put the number of combat-ready divisions at 0-8.⁵⁷ A Yeltsin aide complained in 1995 that only 20 percent of Russia's tanks were operational.⁵⁸ Russia has only enough combat airlift capability to support one paratroop regiment.⁵⁹ In the winter of 1994-1995, the Russian General Staff was hard-pressed to find combat-ready forces for the invasion of Chechnya and actually had to send in naval infantry units from as far away as Vladivostok. From beginning to end, operations in Chechnya revealed very low levels of combat-readiness.⁶⁰ Readiness has deteriorated since then.

⁵⁶ See Russia's Nuclear Forces: Doctrine and Force Structure Issues. CRS Report 97-586F, May 23, 1997.

⁵⁷ Sherman Garnett, "A Wedged Bear in Great Tightness": Understanding the Constraints on Russian Power, Center for Global Security and Cooperation, Science Applications International Corporation, Washington, DC, 1996, p. 7-8. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Roman Popkovich, Deputy Chief of the Our Home Is Russia parliamentary faction, commenting on military manpower issues in June 1997, said, "Let us admit: there are virtually no fully manned units in the Ground Forces and the troops of the military districts, and consequently, no combat-effective formations." FBIS, June 17, 1997.

⁵⁸ FBIS, September 8, 1995, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Most of the Soviet Union's Il-76 military transports (comparable to the U.S. C-141) were stationed outside of Russia. Ukraine inherited about half the inventory. Ukraine also got the only regiment of Il-76 airborne tankers. Jamestown Monitor, May 9, 1997.

⁶⁰ Mikhail Pogorelyi, Wars in Chechnya and Afghanistan: A Comparative Analysis of their Impact on the Soviet and Russian Military, paper presented at the U.S. Army War College conference on Russia's Future as a World Power, Carlisle, PA, April 23, 1997.

Naval readiness has also deteriorated dramatically, especially among surface units, where the main effort appears aimed at keeping some of the newer high-value vessels operational while most of the rest rust at dockside.⁶¹ Fewer than half of Russian combat aircraft are operational because of lack of funds for repairs and shortages of spare parts. The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force said in April 1997 that his service could not conduct large-scale combat operations in more than one theater at a time.⁶² Russia's ability to replace reconnaissance satellites as they wear out has become so degraded that in 1996-1997 there was a gap of almost ten months in which it had no regular military reconnaissance satellites in orbit.⁶³

The budget crunch has caused the Russian Army to consume some of its war reserve stockpiles. By 1996, the military had reportedly used up 90 percent of its emergency food rations to feed its troops.⁶⁴ The chairman of the Duma Subcommittee for the Military-Industrial Complex revealed that the government is selling off a large part of its stockpile of strategic rare metals.⁶⁵

A peculiar development affecting readiness is the disabling of segments of Russia's military communications network by "prospectors" tearing up underground communications lines to get valuable nonferrous metals. For example, the Pacific Fleet reported that from February to June 1997 it had lost 5 kilometers of cable, resulting in 18 communications disruptions, including with some submarines on combat alert.⁶⁶

⁶¹ There are serious readiness problems even with some of the navy's most important surface ships. The aircraft carrier Kuznetsov "escaped" from the Ukrainian shipyard where it was being built before all systems were installed, it has only been deployed once, is troubled by gang violence in its crew, and is viewed by some naval analysts as a white elephant. The newest nuclear-powered Kirov-class cruiser, Peter the Great, has not been able to complete sea trials because of lack of funds. "Preparedness of Russian Army Said One-Sixth of Soviet Level," Interfax, January 31, 1997; and discussion with senior DIA official, August 1997.

⁶² Herspring, "The Future of the Russian Military," p. 52; Interfax, April 7, 1997.

⁶³ The reconnaissance satellite system is greatly stressed because of lack of funds. The satellites are very costly. Even strategic ballistic missile warning capability is affected. Seven of Russia's nine LDS-2 launch-detection satellites are operating beyond their designed service life, and there are gaps in coverage. Discussion with senior DIA official, August 1997.

⁶⁴ Herspring, "The Future of the Russian Military," p. 51.

⁶⁵ Stepan Sulakshin reported that reserves of germanium, indium, iridium, zirconium, cesium, lithium, and tungsten were being sold. "Russia Selling its Strategic Minerals Stockpile," Komsomolskaya Pravda, February 13, 1997.

⁶⁶ Igor Dvinskiy, "Silence Reigned on 'Unsinkable Battleship.' Scrap Metal Dealers Destroy Russkiy Island's Unique Communications System Developed Over Decades," Segodnya, July 29, 1997, p. 5, cited in FBIS, July 29, 1997.

Training

The MOD, as an economy measure, has been forced to greatly reduce training. Funds for training made up one percent of the formal 1997 defense budget. There have been no division-level ground force exercises since 1992. In 1994, 70 percent of all military exercises and maneuvers were canceled for lack of fuel; 60 percent of those that took place were command post exercises without forces in the field. Military pilots are reportedly averaging 20-30 hours of flying time per year. In naval aviation, it is down to 13 hours per year. By U.S. standards, this is hardly enough to maintain basic flying proficiency, let alone combat effectiveness.⁶⁷ (U.S. fighter pilots average 250 hours per year; transport pilots fly more than that.) The Navy's ship-days-at-sea is also much lower, although not uniformly. The Northern Fleet, Russia's strategically most important, is more active than the others.⁶⁸ The Baltic and Black Sea Fleets are the least active. The level of Pacific Fleet activity lies between these. Russia no longer maintains a Mediterranean Squadron. Russian submarine patrol activity, however, which was sharply curtailed in the early 1990s, has reportedly increased somewhat in the past few years.⁶⁹

Morale

Nearly all sources agree that Russian military morale has sunk to a low level.⁷⁰ One major reason is the government's persistent failure to pay salaries on time. The problem of military salaries being months in arrears has been going on for years, as have government leaders' promise to pay up.⁷¹ In July 1997, the Chief of the MOD Budget and Finance Department announced that the government owed 8.1 trillion rubles in back wages to servicemen and MOD civilian employees. In June, Yeltsin pledged to pay all servicemen's pay arrearages by September 1. On that date, the

⁶⁷ Herspring, "The Future of the Russian Military," p. 53. On July 22, 1997, Gen. Petr Deynekin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force, said that the Air Force, "is going through a crisis not just because of a shortage of funds but because of an acute deficiency of aircraft fuel.... [A] pilot must undergo constant training. Training for him means flying. We have no such resources." FBIS, July 23, 1997.

⁶⁸ Most of the Northern Fleet's at-sea training, however, is accomplished in short duration operations of two days or less, mainly because of fuel shortages.

⁶⁹ Russia is believed to have completely eliminated long-range submarine patrol activity in the early 1990s. In the past few years, Russia has resumed sending submarines to distant waters, including off the U.S. East and West coasts. U.S. Department of the Navy, "Worldwide Submarine Challenges 1997."

⁷⁰ Some analysts conclude that morale is not uniformly bad, noting that it is better in the Strategic Rocket Forces and Airborne units and worst in the Ground Forces.

⁷¹ Some analysts claim that the MOD intentionally aggravated this problem in 1996, diverting funds from salaries to procurement and R & D in order to create an atmosphere of crisis in the army that would force the Kremlin to increase overall defense spending. Pavel Felgengauer, Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure, paper presented at a conference on Russian Defense Policy Toward the Year 2000, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, March 25-26, 1997, p. 20-22.

government announced it had done so — at least temporarily.⁷² According to *Izvestia*, the amount of money Russia allocates per serviceman (for salary and other benefits, equipment, training, etc.) is less than $\frac{1}{13}$ the comparable U.S. figure and one-third that of China. The Russian government's recently announced (July 1997) plans anticipate doubling these expenditures by the year 2001 and "finally reaching the Chinese Army figures by 2005."⁷³

The combination of non-payment and low salaries have driven many military men into poverty. Military regulations forbid servicemen to hold other jobs, but many are forced to do so to support their families.⁷⁴ A recent poll indicates that more than half the officer corps is forced to earn money on the side to support their families. Most commanders recognize the objective necessity for this and look the other way.⁷⁵ Scenes of colonels driving taxicabs, officers and soldiers working as private security guards, and conscripts begging on the streets have become commonplace. On the other hand, such "moonlighting" may be helping to prevent more serious unrest in the military by at least providing a means for servicemen to feed themselves and their families.

Military authorities have acknowledged that malnutrition is a major problem.⁷⁶ In February 1997, the MOD reported "systematic malnutrition" in the Transbikal and Leningrad Military Districts. The Deputy Chief of the MOD Food Directorate said that lack of food was preventing navy ships from going to sea and prompting the Far East Military District to consider evacuating some island bases. Four sailors actually starved to death on a remote island base in the Pacific.⁷⁷

⁷² Defense Minister Sergeev announced on September 1, 1997 that almost all the arrearages had been paid and that the Finance Ministry had delivered the last of the funds needed to make good on all back pay within 3-4 days. Cynics say that if the government makes good on this pledge, it can do so only by robbing Peter to pay Paul, and that arrearages will begin to build up again after the immediate crisis has passed and the government reprograms funding streams that were temporarily diverted to pay salary arrearages.

⁷³ Viktor Litovkin, "There is Hope that Russia Will Have a Modern Army," cited in FBIS, July 29, 1997.

⁷⁴ This also effects readiness, as "moonlighting" is often done during regular duty hours.

⁷⁵ "Russian Officers Face Personal and Political Insecurities," U.S.I.A. Opinion Analysis, Washington, D.C., July 14, 1997, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Defense Minister Rodionov, in a radio interview on May 8, 1997, said that in 1996, "[O]ut of over 6 billion rubles approved for food supplies, the Army received only 3.4 billion.... [T]his year too, there has been no change for the better.... The situation is made worse by the fact that a considerable number of conscripts drafted into the Armed Forces are undernourished. We give these soldiers extra food rations and they are excused from strenuous exercise."

⁷⁷ FBIS, Special Memo, "Russian Army Pay," p. 8-9; Herspring, "The Future of the Russian Military," p. 54.

Hunger strikes and demonstrations by servicemen and their families are increasing. At a number of air bases, pilots' wives and children have blocked runways to protest non-payment of salaries. Some other manifestations of low morale are more disturbing. There were 526 military suicides in 1996, a 35 percent increase over 1995 and more than double the 1991 rate. According to the MOD's chief psychiatrist, 90 percent of the 1996 military suicides were "absolutely normal people driven into a corner by despair."⁷⁸ "Hazing," the often brutal beating of young conscripts by older soldiers, has plagued the army for years. But the incidence of soldiers turning their weapons against comrades and superiors, sometimes provoked by hazing, is on the increase. In 1995, 11 servicemen were killed and 9 wounded by comrades. In 1996, 20 were killed and one wounded. In the first five months of 1997, 40 servicemen were killed and 11 wounded.⁷⁹ The liberal Moscow daily, *Segodnya*, reported in June 1997 that more than ten Russian servicemen die every day from suicide, accidents, murder, abuse, illness, and malnutrition. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, an independent anti-military group, says the situation is far worse, claiming that nearly 10,000 soldiers and officers died in 1996 from non-combat related causes.⁸⁰ The number of non-hostile fatalities in the U.S. Armed Forces in FY1996 was 963.

Other indicators of declining morale are the high rate of draft evasion and desertion. In 1996, the MOD reports that 62,000 young men illegally evaded the draft. The regular armed forces fell 16 percent short of their conscription goal, primarily because 79 percent of the draft-eligible cohort obtained deferments from military service. One-third of these were for poor health (up from 5 percent in 1985 and 20 percent in 1991). A new health deferment category added in recent years, "body mass deficiency" (i.e., physical emaciation), accounted for 15 percent of the health deferments in 1996. The MOD reports that the quality of those inducted into the armed forces is also falling. In the autumn 1996 call-up, one-third of inductees had not completed high school, 12 percent were heavy drinkers, and 5 percent had criminal records.⁸¹

The morale of the officer corps may pose more serious problems for the Russian armed forces than that of its conscripts. The biggest problem is officer retention; the main factor is pay. Junior and mid-level officers are leaving in droves. Many of these are among the "best and brightest," the future hope of the Russian Army. According to Gen. Grigory Kasperovich, head of the MOD personnel department, 22 percent of all officer billets are vacant. All officers on active duty in 1993 signed 5-

⁷⁸ Jamestown Monitor, June 11, 1997.

⁷⁹ FBIS, June 12, 1997.

⁸⁰ Fred Weir [Moscow], in the *Hindustan Times*, [JRL], June 21, 1997. The apparent discrepancy in these figures may be because *Segodnya* took data only from the regular armed forces while the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers counted losses in all of Russia's military and paramilitary agencies. Alternatively, the Mothers' Committee figures may be inflated.

⁸¹ Jamestown Monitor, February 19, 1997; Anatoliy Yurkin, "Armed Forces Currently Staffed at 85 Percent," ITAR-TASS, April 29, 1997; "Seventy-Nine Percent of Conscripts Granted Deferment," *Argumenty i Fakty* [JRL], No. 20, May 1997.

year service contracts that expire in 1998. Over 50 percent of them, says Kasperovich, have informed their superiors that they “are determined” to quit the service in 1998. Kasperovich bluntly warned that unless the government does something, the armed forces are in danger of losing nearly half their officers next year. The Russian Army has an officer-conscript ratio of about 1:1. (It is 1:5.3 in the United States.) Moreover, the Russian Army, like its Soviet predecessor, is notoriously deficient in experienced non-commissioned officers. Hence, while the Russian Army is officer-heavy, it is also extraordinarily dependent on officers. Rapid replenishment of the officer corps is hampered by the fact that applications to military academies have fallen substantially, 40 percent of cadets quit before finishing military school, and 50 percent of those who graduate from officer schools leave military service for the private sector as soon as their initial commitment is completed.⁸²

Recent Performance

An important qualitative indicator of military capability is performance of actual military missions. In this, the Russian Army’s recent record in combat and various peacemaking/peacekeeping operations is mixed, though more negative than positive overall.

The Army’s biggest military undertaking since the dissolution of the Soviet Union was in Chechnya. There, it failed badly. Yeltsin, as supreme commander, bears a good deal of responsibility for the failure. Also, it is uncertain whether the government gave the military clear, achievable objectives. But the Chechen campaign revealed serious weaknesses in the armed forces.⁸³ Several factors stand out that are relevant here.

- The failure was general and occurred at many levels: national command authority, General Staff, field commanders, tactical commanders, small unit leaders, and individual fighting men;
- Many observers believed that despite the army’s quantitative and qualitative decline, it could/would pull itself together and fight effectively to preserve the territorial integrity and cohesion of the state. This did not happen in Chechnya. The humiliating defeat the Army and Interior Ministry troops suffered in August 1996 was due in substantial part to the fact that demoralized soldiers refused to

⁸² Interfax, March 14, 1997; Interfax, March 28, 1997; Herspring, “The Future of the Russian Military,” p. 53.

⁸³ Some argue that the failure (and responsibility) of the Interior Ministry troops, especially in the fall of Grozny in August 1996, was even greater than the that of the regular army. There were more Interior Ministry than Army troops in Chechnya, and the Interior Ministry exercised overall command.

fight despite their numerical superiority and vastly greater firepower.⁸⁴

Russian forces have been active in so-called “peacekeeping” operations in Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan and, from Moscow’s perspective, performed quite well in Moldova and Georgia. The Russian 14th Army (successor to the Soviet 14th Army, long stationed in Moldova) intervened decisively in a civil war in Moldova in 1992-1993, supporting the pro-Russian breakaway “Transdniester Republic” in heavy fighting and securing its de facto independence.

Russian forces actively supported Abkhazia’s separatist struggle against the Georgian Government headed by Eduard Shevardnadze. They then helped Shevardnadze defeat a rebellion led by former Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Moscow used this leverage to compel Georgia to join the CIS and grant Russia military bases.

Russia intervened militarily in a civil war in Tajikistan in 1992 and has been bogged down in mostly low-intensity combat since then. Russia’s 18,000 troops (Army and border troops) have preserved a pro-Moscow regime in Dushanbe, but rebel forces control nearly half the country and use bases in neighboring Afghanistan. Some observers, however, argue that Russian involvement in Tajikistan is a stabilizing influence, preventing the breakup of Tajikistan and the spread of violence and radical Islam to neighboring countries.

Russian Army performance in Bosnia is viewed by many as quite successful. A Russian brigade was part of the NATO-led international Implementation Force (IFOR) since its inception in 1995 and remains as part of the Stabilization Force (SFOR). The Russian brigade, commanded by a Russian general, has been subordinated to the U.S. commander since the beginning. U.S. and Russian forces regularly work together down to the small-unit level. Their cooperation has been praised as one of the unheralded triumphs of U.S.-Russian cooperation in the post-Soviet period. U.S. officers in IFOR/SFOR commend the military professionalism of their Russian colleagues, although there have been press reports of Russian forces illegally selling fuel and equipment and being involved in other forms of corruption.⁸⁵

Reliability, Politicization, and Civil-Military Relations

“The chief national threat for the country is not the expansion of NATO to the east, but its own unreformed, hungry and disgruntled army.” — Yegor Gaidar, (former Acting Premier), May 1997

⁸⁴ Pogorelyi, Wars in Chechnya and Afghanistan.

⁸⁵ See CRS Issue Brief 93056, Bosnia: U.S. Military Operations, updated regularly.

The role and status of the Russian armed forces in society and the relationship between military and political authority have undergone major changes in recent years.⁸⁶

Old Traditions

Part of the legacy of the Stalinist terror was the utter and complete subordination of the military to civilian (i.e., Communist Party) control. After Stalin, physical terror against the military ended, but the tradition of military subordination, enforced by Party watchdogs in the form of political officers, continued. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the political effectiveness of Soviet political leadership slackened under Brezhnev and his successors, the military became an important interest group in Soviet bureaucratic politics, but the principle of strict military subordination to the Party was maintained until the last phase of the Gorbachev period.

At the same time, however, the Soviet armed forces enjoyed what was in many respects a privileged place in Soviet society. The most important aspect of this was the extraordinary militarization of the Soviet economy, noted above. The civilian sector became what economists call a “residual claimant,” i.e., its needs were met from what was left over after military requirements had been satisfied. In addition, Soviet propaganda glorified the armed forces as an institution and the military as a profession. Many young men may have dreaded conscription, but being a military officer gave one a substantial level of respect and prestige in Soviet society. Officers could and did feel proud of their calling. Ordinary citizens understood, with pride, that the rest of the world respected and feared the Soviet Army. For many Soviet citizens, the U.S.S.R.’s proudest achievement was a military one, the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Declining Status

The war in Afghanistan (1979-1988) had a corrosive effect on the Soviet Army, similar in some respects to the U.S. experience in Vietnam. The downgrading of the Soviet armed forces began in 1985 with Mikhail Gorbachev’s rise to power and accelerated in the late 1980s. Gorbachev came to believe that in order to revitalize the Soviet economy, it was essential to shift substantial resources from defense to the civilian sector, at least temporarily. Also, in order to get large-scale western investments, credits, and technology transfers, he believed it necessary to remove the specter of a looming Soviet military threat. These policies led to large cuts in Soviet defense spending, to arms control agreements which further reduced the Soviet armed forces, and ultimately to the peaceful withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe. Afghanistan, *glasnost*, and Gorbachev’s new priorities also inevitably led to a lessening of the respect and prestige of the armed forces. This was intensified by the role of Defense Minister Yazov and elements of the Army in the abortive anti-Gorbachev coup of August 1991, which not only ended in humiliating failure, but triggered the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

⁸⁶ See CRS Report 94-631 F, Russia’s Civil-Military Relations: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests, July 28, 1994.

The fact that Yeltsin's triumph over Gorbachev was almost blocked by a military coup was not lost on the new master of the Kremlin. Many believe that Yeltsin's distrust of the military was deepened in October 1993, when, according to Yeltsin's memoirs, the Army hesitated to support him at the decisive moment in his confrontation with the Supreme Soviet.⁸⁷ In addition, the end of the cold war brought a profound change in the international environment for Russia, reducing the likelihood of war and the need for a huge army. And defense spending was dramatically constrained by Russian economic reforms and budget crises.

Many Russian and western analysts have concluded that these factors convinced Yeltsin and the people around him that, to the extent that they face a security threat, it is more an internal than an external threat. Hence, internal security forces have been strengthened and new ones created while the regular armed forces grow weaker. The defense economist, Shlykov, among others, has commented on the internal security forces increasing share of the national security budget.⁸⁸ According to Aleksandr Belkin, a senior Russian defense consultant, Yeltsin built up "other forces — interior forces, border guards, security forces, and emergency forces ... his praetorian guard to contain the military or — in case of mutiny — to suppress it."⁸⁹ In the words of another Russian critic, this is "evidence of Russia's transformation into a police state in which every second bayonet at the least is turned inside the country."⁹⁰

The Russian Government's willingness to allow the army to atrophy to such an extent has led some Russian and western analysts to conclude that the Yeltsin regime is intentionally weakening the regular armed forces. According to a senior CIA analyst, "For Yeltsin the army has three main tasks, to defend him, to shoot his opponents, and to vote for him. It did each of those things once, and he's not sure it would do any of them again." This same analyst calls Yeltsin's treatment of the army, "malign neglect."⁹¹ The Russian defense expert, Belkin, put it this way:

"The primary political objective [of Yeltsin's military reorganization] was to deliberately weaken and incapacitate the military as a potential instrument of any political rivals of the President. That objective has been accomplished completely."⁹²

The idea that the Yeltsin regime has deliberately weakened the army is a minority view; most interpretations focus on the effects of economic crisis and

⁸⁷ Boris Yeltsin, *Zapiski Prezidenta* [Presidential Memoirs], Izdatel'stvo Ogonek, Moscow, 1994, p. 114.

⁸⁸ Shlykov, *The Political Economy of Russian Defense*, p. 25-26.

⁸⁹ Aleksandr Belkin, *The System of Defense Decision Making in Russia*, paper presented at the U.S. Army War College conference on Russia's Future as a World Power, Carlisle, PA, April 24, 1997, p. 21-22. Belkin is the Deputy Executive Director of the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy.

⁹⁰ Borisenko, "Gendarmerie or Army," p. 3. See also, Kipp, "Military Pluralism."

⁹¹ Discussion with Central Intelligence Agency analyst, March 1997.

⁹² Belkin, *The System of Defense Decision Making in Russia*, p. 25.

political and bureaucratic incompetence. That the thesis of “malign neglect” has been put forward by responsible analysts, however, is in itself a commentary on the state of the Russian armed forces.

Most observers do agree that in recent years the Russian Army has become much more politicized, and that this is a big change. Yeltsin’s hands-off leadership style contributed to this; he lacks the temperament or discipline to supervise Russia’s governance on a day-to-day basis. Some believe Yeltsin prefers to set up competing power centers that counterbalance one another, allowing him to stand above the fray as supreme arbiter. A less generous view is that Yeltsin’s disengagement fosters the formation of competing power centers and “clans” and that he only steps in and makes decisions when a situation has reached critical mass or gone out of control. In any case, the MOD inevitably became a player in this game, scrambling to secure a share of the state’s diminished resources. Yeltsin’s use of the army in October 1993 to crush his political opposition, shelling the parliament building with tank fire, and the army’s (reluctant) decision to engage in this way, made the army a direct participant in Russia’s political struggle. At that time, many observers believed this would make Yeltsin more dependent on the army, increasing its influence. But the opposite was the case, as Yeltsin turned more toward internal security forces.

The army’s inability to prevent Yeltsin from using the armed forces in Chechnya was an indication of its political weakness.⁹³ The Chechen campaign, in turn, further politicized and weakened the army. The Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Russian Ground Forces refused to lead his troops into battle in Chechnya on the grounds — correct as it turned out — that they were not properly trained. The commander of the main assault force halted his three divisions temporarily, declaring publicly that it was inappropriate “to use tanks on the people.” Other senior active duty officers publicly criticized the decision to invade Chechnya. Some of these officers were reprimanded or transferred, but few were seriously disciplined.⁹⁴ Officers were drawn more and more into politics. The MOD sometimes fostered this, as with Defense Minister Grachev’s attempt to get active duty officers to run in the 1995 Duma election.⁹⁵

There has been an unusual amount of personnel turnover and reorganization recently in the MOD, the armed forces senior command, and the national security apparatus. Yeltsin has gone through three Defense Ministers and three Security Council heads since June 1996 when, in the heat of the presidential election campaign, he dismissed his long-serving and loyal but increasingly unpopular Defense Minister, Gen. Pavel Grachev. Grachev was replaced by Gen. Igor Rodionov, the choice of Yeltsin’s electoral ally-of-convenience, Gen. Aleksandr Lebed. Lebed was appointed head of the Security Council. To counterbalance Lebed, Yeltsin created a competing organization, the Defense Council, headed by a

⁹³ A more positive interpretation would be to see this as evidence of civilian control of the military. In either case, the result in Chechnya was the same.

⁹⁴ Herspring, “The Future of the Russian Military,” p. 50; Deborah Yarsike Ball, “How Reliable Are Russia’s Officers?”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 1996, p. 207.

⁹⁵ Only 3 of 123 military candidates were elected. Herspring, “The Future of Russia’s Military,” p. 50.

loyal aparatchik, Yuriy Baturin, and gave it some of the powers formerly exercised by the Security Council. Lebed lasted four months as head of the Security Council, replaced in October 1996 by Ivan Rybkin. But the Defense Council remains. Rodionov and Baturin feuded continually about the defense budget and military reform. Yeltsin fired and humiliated Rodionov on May 22, 1997 during a televised Defense Council meeting, blaming him for lack of progress on military reform. At the same session, Yeltsin also fired the Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Viktor Samsanov and publicly ridiculed the military top brass.⁹⁶ Gen. Rodionov's successor is Gen. Igor Sergeev, previously Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces. The new General Staff Chief is Gen. Anatoly Kvashnin. In June 1997, Yeltsin announced the creation of two new commissions. One, headed nominally by Chernomyrdin, is tasked with developing a near- and mid-term military reform program. The other, chaired by Chubais, is to draft proposals to stabilize the army's financial situation.⁹⁷ On August 28, 1997, Yeltsin named First Deputy Defense Minister Kokoshin to head a newly created State Military Inspectorate in the Office of the President. Its stated role is to oversee implementation of recently decreed military reforms. At the same time, Yeltsin named Kokoshin to replace Baturin as head of the Defense Council.⁹⁸ Kokoshin will give up the MOD post he held since 1992. Baturin, a Yeltsin loyalist, remains a presidential advisor and is expected to be "recycled" in another position.

This personnel and organizational turbulence seems a part of the general disarray in the defense sector.

Since 1992, each new change in the Security Council or presidential bodies in the security sphere has engendered a new wave of Western warnings at the creation of new and super-concentrated centers of power over the army, police, and security policy. It is apparent, however, that this regular cycle of decrees, reforms, and new structures is instead a sure sign of the government's continued incoherence.⁹⁹

Attitudes of Officers

In the past, western assessments of the political attitudes of Soviet or Russian officers tended to be based on broad assumptions and bits of anecdotal evidence. The prevailing wisdom was that the officer corps was conservative, anti-democratic, anti-western, and not squeamish about using force, including military force if necessary, to maintain order and protect national interests throughout the Soviet

⁹⁶ Yeltsin said generals were building dachas all over the country and stalling military reform to protect their personal careers, adding that, "the soldiers are getting thin and the generals are getting fat."

⁹⁷ Interfax, June 6.

⁹⁸ RIA Novosti and Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 29, 1997. One prominent Russian analyst observed that, "The whole problem is whether Kokoshin will get powerful levers to deal with the ministers or whether he will remain merely Yeltsin's ears and eyes among them. If Kokoshin gets these powers then Thursday's changes will mean a breakthrough and a powerful boost for reform, if not, it will be another sad example of Kremlin musical chairs." Reuters, August 29, 1997.

⁹⁹ Garnett, "A Wedged Bear in Great Tightness," p. 4.

empire. There certainly are Russian officers — some prominent ones — who fit this description. But the weight of evidence suggests that no stereotype is representative of the Russian officer corps today. Some of the most authoritative evidence we have is from a survey of 600 Russian field-grade (major-colonel) officers conducted in mid-1995, known as the Ball survey.¹⁰⁰ The findings are significant and in some cases surprising.

Ball characterized her findings with a quotation from the political scientist, Irving Louis Horowitz: “The great myth of the intellectual class is that those who wear a uniform and carry a gun are undemocratic....” To the contrary, Ball reports that the majority of Russian officers “is committed to the basic tenets of democracy,” “does not support the creation of an authoritarian form of government,” and “does not support the forcible restoration of the Soviet Union.”¹⁰¹ More specifically:

- In response to a question about use of the Russian armed forces, 68 percent disapproved and 28 percent approved of using the army to fight against separatism in regions of Russia; 52 percent approved and 45 percent disapproved of using the army to protect parliament; and 50 percent approved and 47 percent disapproved using the army to protect the President;
- When asked, “Would you follow orders to put down a separatist rebellion?” — 15 percent said they “definitely would not” and 25 percent said they “probably would not” follow such orders; 34 percent said they “probably would” and only 17 percent said they “definitely would” follow such orders; 4 percent refused to answer and 6 percent were undecided;
- Contrary to claims that the military wants to reconstitute the Soviet empire, over 80 percent of officers agreed that “establishing good relations with the countries of the Near Abroad” is an important foreign policy goal; 75 percent do not agree that Russia must dominate the former Soviet republics in order to be internationally respected as a great power; 66 percent disagreed with the idea that the former Soviet borders were the borders of “our country;” and a minority (42.5 percent) agreed that the dissolution of the Soviet

¹⁰⁰ The project director was Deborah Yarsike Ball, an analyst at the Center for Security and Technology Studies of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). The survey was funded by LLNL. The 600-officer sample was proportionally representative of the Russian regular armed forces in terms of service, branch, and geographic distribution. The survey was conducted by the Russian firm, Russian Public Opinion and Market Research (ROMIR), which is sometimes used by the U.S. Information Agency. The face-to-face interviews lasted about one hour each. Interviewers were all Russian citizens. Neither the interviewers nor the interviewees knew that the survey was being conducted for a U.S. Government client. Survey methodology is described in detail in, Deborah Yarsike Ball, “The Political Views of Russian Field Grade Officers,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 1996:12,2, p. 161-163.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Union should have been prevented by any means including the use of force.

Ball's bottom-line conclusions are:

- Although a majority of Russian officers lament the passing of the Soviet Union, most also “accept the current borders as *faits accomplis*, and prefer that Russia move on by making the best of the new geopolitical reality instead of advocating costly revanchist aggression;”
- The officer corps sees its main mission as protecting Russia against external attack. The Kremlin must rely on its internal security forces should it decide to use force against regional separatism or political opposition;
- “If the central government continues to insist that the military becomes embroiled in internal domestic disputes, then the Russian military may go the way of the Soviet Union — complete disintegration.”¹⁰²

A May 1997 survey of Russian officers conducted by the U.S. Information Agency found that, “... three-fourth of the officers (78 percent) affirm that the armed forces should *not* become involved in domestic politics.”¹⁰³

Predictions of Calamity for the Russian Military

One striking aspect of recent studies of the Russian armed forces is the increasing frequency of apocalyptic predictions. For example, at a conference on the future of the Russian military at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (Monterey, California, March 1997), Russian and American specialists were asked to rate “the probability of a coup, chaos, or disintegration of the Russian military within the next 12 to 18 months.” Russian participants (including Alexei Arbatov and Vitaly Shlykov) put the probability at 60 percent-100 percent. U.S. participants (including George Kolt, CIA National Intelligence Officer for Russia), were less pessimistic, putting the probability at 30 percent-40 percent. One participant noted that, “The fact that all of us are in basic agreement that the Russian military is going down the tubes is pretty significant.”¹⁰⁴ Many other U.S. and Russian specialists on the Russian military have warned of the increasing possibility of some sort of calamity. Arbatov wrote recently that,

... nowadays even the highest military leaders speak more and more rarely about the Armed Forces' inability to protect the country against external threat, but

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 163-169; Ball, “How Reliable Are Russia's Officers?” p. 207.

¹⁰³ “Russian Officers Face Personal and Political Insecurities,” p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Reported in “Washington Whispers,” U.S. News and World Report, April 14, 1997, p. 23-24.

warn chiefly about the danger of a social explosion in the Army and its getting out of the state leadership's control.¹⁰⁵

Even if one were to believe that the Russians' predictions at Monterey exaggerate the probability, the increasing frequency of such warnings suggests: a) that many specialists believe the Russian military is under extreme stress, and; b) the possibility of calamitous developments cannot be ruled out. "Chaos" and "calamity" are not particularly useful terms in trying to foresee possible future scenarios for the Russian army. Below is a discussion of some of the more frequently mentioned possible calamities.

Coup. For years there has been speculation about and rumor of a possible military coup. It is heightened by awareness of the growing anger and frustration felt by many officers over legitimate grievances.¹⁰⁶ If the probability of a coup depended primarily on serious grievances, the risk would be high. But there are mitigating factors. The officer corps is badly split on political issues. The High Command, well aware of the disastrous effects of the failed August 1991 coup, is likely to be leery of any such activity, is believed to have little enthusiasm for taking responsibility for the ailing economy, and fears the outbreak of a civil war. Some observers believe that if there is any danger of an armed coup, it is more likely to come from the internal security forces than the military, although the former are better provided for materially and have fewer grievances.

Mutiny.¹⁰⁷ The combination of nonpayment of military salaries and alienation of the military from the government could lead to officer-led mutinies, especially in the face of a highly unpopular order. This situation almost arose when several senior army commanders refused to obey orders during the initial assault on Chechnya. The Ball survey cited above and some recent events suggest the growing possibility of officers refusing to obey orders.¹⁰⁸ On June 24, 1997, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Lev Rokhlin, Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, caused a sensation with an open letter to Yeltsin and all servicemen, which some view as suborning mutiny. Rokhlin accused Yeltsin and his associates of betraying the army in Chechnya and wrecking

¹⁰⁵ Alexei Arbatov, "Military Reform: Doctrine, Troops," *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnyye Otnosheniya* [Moscow], No. 4, 1997, cited in FBIS, July 17, 1997.

¹⁰⁶ "A howl of despair from Russia's dying army" is how the Moscow tabloid monthly, *Sovershenno Sekretno*, described its excerpts from the diary of Col. Viktor Baranets. Baranets, the former head of the MOD Press Service, said the army was seething with resentment and hatred of the government and Yeltsin personally. His diary includes his musings on the possibility of assassinating Yeltsin. Baranets was fired in December 1997 when authorities learned of his plans to publish his diary. FBIS Special Memo, "Russian Army Pay," April 4, 1997, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ A thoughtful article on the danger of mutiny appeared in *Segodnya* [Moscow], June 28, 1997, p. 1,3, and can be found translated in FBIS, June 30, 1997.

¹⁰⁸ In March 1997, an airborne brigade based in Stavropol briefly defied orders to participate in scheduled exercises, complaining that they had not been paid for several months. The High Command's insistence, backed up by military counterintelligence officers and FSB troops, persuaded the paratroopers to return to duty. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 25, 1997, cited in FBIS Special Memo, "Russian Army Pay," April 4, 1997, p. 5.

the armed forces at the behest of “western special services” and the IMF. He urged servicemen to resist government plans to further downsize the army, exhorting them to hold conferences in each unit, formulate demands, and send them to the president.

You must organize, elect leaders to the posts of chairmen of officers’ assemblies, and demand the fulfillment of your legal rights. Do not hope that someone will do this for you. The guarantee of success lies in our unity in resisting the destruction of the Army. Otherwise the Army will perish.¹⁰⁹

Another variant of the mutiny scenario is the possibility of individuals or small groups of servicemen turning their weapons against the government in kamikaze-like acts of desperation or revenge. The threat of mutiny may have been reduced by the government’s recent fulfillment of its pledge to pay military salary arrearages by September 1, 1997.

Implosion. Some Russian and western specialists have begun using the term “implosion” in discussions of possible military collapse. Implicit in the notion of implosion are such phenomena as rapid, uncontrolled, large-scale depletion of the ranks through officers’ resignations, desertion, and draft evasion.¹¹⁰ Another scenario is fragmentation to the point of warlordism. This notion derives from the centripetal political forces already at work in the Russian Federation. As central authorities fail to pay, feed, and house the army, some regional leaders are stepping into this void, and in the process, securing the allegiance of military units in their territory. Economic exigency has caused the MOD to encourage military units to seek economic support from the governments of the regions in which they are stationed.¹¹¹ In the event of a political confrontation between regional and central authorities, this could have serious consequences. Some experts warn of the danger a rising level of lawlessness within the armed forces, with the breakdown of discipline ejecting more and more armed men and weapons into the society at large. Some analysts assert that the implosion is already occurring, that we are witnessing the “quiet disintegration of the Russian Army, which was built from the remnants of the dismantled Soviet Army.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ For the full text of Rokhlin’s 6-page letter, see FBIS, June 27, 1997. Rokhlin, one of the few commanders in Chechnya to escape with reputation intact, remains a member of the government’s Our Home is Russia parliamentary faction after this inflammatory letter. Nevertheless, he formed a “military support organization” in July 1997 dominated by hardline extremists. See Jamestown Monitor, July 11, 1997.

¹¹⁰ Draft evasion and officer retention have been discussed above. Large-scale desertion is also increasing. On July 18, 1997, ten sailors deserted from a Northern Fleet submarine about to sail on an operational patrol. The remaining crew reportedly refused to sail without them. The MOD reported that a group of 40 soldiers in the Ground Forces had gone AWOL on July 22, while another group of 47 had been detained and sent back to their units the previous week. Over 230 Ground Force troops deserted their units in the third week of July, 1997. Jamestown Monitor, July 24, 1997.

¹¹¹ FBIS Special Memo, “Russian Army Pay,” p. 9-10.

¹¹² Discussion with senior DIA official, August 1997.

Central authorities are aware of the warnings of coup, mutiny, and implosion. Some believe this growing awareness is part of the reason why Yeltsin has (belatedly) taken a prominent role on the military reform issue and elevated it to a high priority.¹¹³ In addition, in June 1997, it was announced that military police, an institution unprecedented in Russian history, are to be introduced into the Russian armed forces. On July 19, 1997, the head of the military counter-intelligence in Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) reported that his organization has the armed forces "under continuous and unremitting" observation. The FSB has "clear-cut orders," he said, to prevent penetration of the armed forces by extremist political groups and to "neutralize" attempts to get the army involved in any sort of "political confrontation."¹¹⁴ On a different tack, in August 1997 the MOD opened a 24-hour telephone hotline on which counselors try to calm angry servicemen.¹¹⁵

Most observers believe that central authorities have access to enough carrots and sticks to keep the army under control. The question is whether the government will use these tools effectively to forestall a calamitous development. Skeptics point to Yeltsin's persistent failure to stay focused on an issue and to follow through. Others note that this is such a core issue for regime security that Yeltsin and his inner circle — people who understand power — are sure to take the steps necessary to maintain control.

What Can Russia's Armed Forces Do?

The preceding sections have examined weaknesses and problems of the Russian military. Those armed forces, however, are still quite large and in some respects formidable, especially when compared to some of Russia's militarily weak neighbors. This section assesses Russian military capability, particularly vis-à-vis countries and regions on its periphery — possible venues for Russian military involvement.

Nuclear Capabilities

As noted above, Russia remains a nuclear superpower. There has been some erosion of readiness and capability in the nuclear forces (beyond those dictated by arms control agreements), compared to U.S. nuclear forces, but Russia is maintaining rough parity with the United States. Because of the degradation of Russian conventional forces, Moscow consciously is more reliant than ever on nuclear forces both for strategic deterrence and to "back up" its conventional forces. In the present post-cold war environment, however, nuclear weapons have less geostrategic and political significance than previously, and little practical military utility in most conflict scenarios.

¹¹³ Military reform proposals are discussed on p. 40-43, below.

¹¹⁴ Jamestown Monitor, July 22, 1997.

¹¹⁵ FBIS, August 11, 1997.

Conventional Military Capabilities Vis-à-Vis Neighbors

This section considers Russian capabilities vis-à-vis various neighbors in a military and geopolitical context.

Baltic States.¹¹⁶ The armed forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are so small, weak, and geographically exposed that the Russian Army, even in its present condition, is generally viewed as capable of rolling over the Baltic States at will. Russia would, of course, pay a heavy price in international political and economic terms for such an act, and the costs to Russia of military occupation and suppression of Baltic nationalism would also be high. The likelihood of a Russian attack is considered very low, despite threatening Russian rhetoric sometimes directed at Estonia and Latvia. But from a military perspective, the Baltic States live under the shadow of overwhelming Russian might.

Caucasus and Moldova.¹¹⁷ Russian conventional military force appears to be dominant in the Caucasus and Moldova, providing the basis for substantial Russian influence over recalcitrant “host” governments. In the post-Soviet period, the Russian Army has been more active in these regions than in any others. The mountainous terrain and rugged peoples of the Caucasus, however, could pose serious challenges to the Russian Army in guerilla warfare and low-intensity combat, as was shown in Chechnya.

Russian military intervention in Georgia’s internal conflicts in 1992-1993 was decisive, forcing Georgia to join the CIS and grant Russia military bases. Russia has some 15,000-20,000 troops in Georgia, a force more powerful than the Georgian Army. Russian border troops control Georgia’s land and sea frontiers. Russia has used the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh to extend its military influence. The Armenian Government, reliant on Russian arms transfers, has granted Russia military bases and sees Moscow as an ally and protector. Azerbaijan resents Russia’s role, but is militarily too weak to effectively oppose it. Russian forces, ostensibly in a peacekeeping role, secure the de facto independence of the Transdniester regime in Moldova. Moscow ignores Moldova’s repeated requests to withdraw its forces from Moldovan territory.¹¹⁸

Geographically, Russia is adjacent to Georgia and Azerbaijan and has an ally in nearby Armenia. But Moldova, southwest of Ukraine, is relatively far from Russia. Russia’s military position in Moldova could become complicated if Ukraine actively opposed it.

¹¹⁶ See CRS Report 96-584 F, *The Baltic States: U.S. Policy Concerns*, Jan. 22, 1997.

¹¹⁷ See CRS Issue Brief IB95024, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, regularly updated.

¹¹⁸ A Russo-Moldovan agreement on withdrawal of Russian forces was signed by the two presidents in 1994, but Moscow has refused to implement it.

Central Asia.¹¹⁹ Russia is a key player in Central Asia militarily, but not with the same level of unquestioned dominance as in the Caucasus and Moldova. This is partly because the Central Asian states are a good deal larger and more populous than those of the Caucasus and Moldova. Also, Kazakhstan, the size of Western Europe, separates Russia from the rest of Central Asia. Kazakhstan is very important to Russia militarily, although Russia has only a small military presence there. The northern half of Kazakhstan, adjacent to Russia, is populated predominantly by Russians and viewed by many Russians as part of their traditional homeland. Stability — which many view as fragile — between the slavic north and Islamic south of Kazakhstan is maintained by President Nursultan Nazarbaev. The Yeltsin regime has dealt cautiously with Kazakhstan, but Moscow could easily destabilize its southern neighbor by stirring up ethnic conflict. Kazakhstan's armed forces are very weak, but large-scale ethnic conflict there could be a quagmire for the Russian Army. Russia has already had an unpleasant taste of this in Tajikistan, the smallest and most distant (from Russia) of the Central Asian states. Russia has some 18,000 army and border troops in Tajikistan, embroiled in a clan-based civil war. They are suffering significant casualties and have been unable to impose their will, although they have preserved a fragile pro-Moscow regime. Russia is also a player, though not a dominant one, in the multi-faceted civil war in Afghanistan. The instability of Central Asia provides Russia with many opportunities to exert influence. The Soviet Union's bitter experience in Afghanistan (1979-1988), however, is a reminder of the potential costs of military intervention.

Ukraine.¹²⁰ Ukraine is a huge factor in assessing Russian military capabilities. If Kyiv maintains its current policies of guarding its independence against Russian encroachments and its cooperation with NATO, Ukraine stands as a major barrier against future Russian military pressure westward. If Ukraine were reunited with Russia, its population (50 million), large military infrastructure and industrial base, and geographic position, would greatly expand Russian military potential. Although the Russian Army is far larger and stronger than Ukraine's 400,000-man armed forces, serious observers doubt there is any threat of direct Russian aggression against Ukraine now or in the near future.¹²¹ Even Russian political and economic pressure against Ukraine has been counterproductive from Moscow's perspective, pushing Kyiv toward closer cooperation with NATO.¹²² That was a major factor in Yeltsin's May 1997 decision to accede to key Ukrainian terms on division and basing

¹¹⁹ See CRS Issue Brief IB93108, Central Asia's New States: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests, updated regularly.

¹²⁰ See CRS Report 96-245 F, Ukraine: Current Issues and U.S. Policy, Updated January 16, 1997.

¹²¹ Ukraine has 50 times the population of Chechnya.

¹²² On July 21, 1997, while Ukraine simultaneously was conducting two separate joint military exercises with the United States and hosting a visit from the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish armed forces, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, citing the NATO-Ukraine partnership agreement, said that Ukraine's neutrality differed from that of Switzerland. "Perhaps Switzerland does not have any worries, but we must closely watch developments in Russia." Jamestown Monitor, July 25, 1997.

of the Black Sea Fleet. Russia's residual military presence in Ukraine is almost entirely in the Black Sea Fleet.

Central Europe and the Balkans. The status of Ukraine underlines the reversal of Russian military capabilities vis-à-vis Central Europe and the Balkans. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union had de facto military possession of that region, which was a potential springboard into western Europe. Today, there is no credible Russian military threat to that region. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this shift in the correlation of forces. The likelihood of Russian union with Belarus and Polish accession to NATO, however, could soon bring NATO literally to Russia's door, which could increase tension there.

China and East Asia. Russia still has large forces in its Far Eastern Military District and Pacific Fleet. But the size, power, capabilities, and strategic importance of those forces are being rapidly reduced.¹²³ Furthermore, the powers that Russia faces in Northeast Asia — China, Japan, and the United States — exceed Russia's current military capabilities in the region. Many analysts believe that Russia is becoming more of an object than an actor in East Asia. Some observers warn of the threat of a Russo-Chinese strategic alliance against the West. Others, however, including many Russian military analysts, see China more as a threat than an opportunity to Russia in the long run. At present, Beijing has no interest in such an alliance.¹²⁴

Unconventional Military Capabilities

Despite — or perhaps because of — the decline in Russia's conventional military capabilities, what might be called its “unconventional” military capabilities should not be overlooked. The most obvious example would be a policy of military destabilization of countries on its periphery, presumably to weaken them and bring them under Russian control. This could be done in many ways: by the insertion of relatively small Russian military forces, covertly, overtly, or in the form of peacekeepers; by instigating conflicts among neighbors; and by arms transfers. All these approaches could support a “divide and rule” strategy. Russia appears to have pursued this strategy in Moldova, Georgia, and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The military weakness and/or instability of many of the states on Russia's periphery may make this appear to be an attractive and relatively low-cost strategy for Moscow. It is not without risk, however, as the miscalculations that led to the debacle in Chechnya attest.¹²⁵

¹²³ In July 1997, MOD officials reported that the Pacific Fleet is to be reduced by 50 percent. Admiral Felix Gromov, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, announced that all but two main naval bases in the Pacific (Petropavlovsk on Kamchatka and Primorye na Amure) would be closed and that “ships that do not meet existing requirements will be decommissioned.” *Jamestown Monitor*, July 23, 1997; *Interfax*, July 23, 1997.

¹²⁴ See CRS Report 97-185 F, *Russian-Chinese Cooperation: Prospects and Implications*, January 27, 1997.

¹²⁵ The Yeltsin regime helped set up and arm an anti-Dudaev faction in northern Chechnya in 1994. Moscow then sent small units of its regular armed forces to back the
(continued...)

A different form of unconventional military capability, and one that receives little attention except from technical experts, is information warfare (IW). IW could take the form of attacks against a target country's military command, control, and communications nodes and links, and its computer-controlled civilian communications, transportation, energy and banking networks. The "attack" need not be by bullet or bomb, but may instead be electronic, by computer. IW is an activity that Russia, with its large cadre of skilled computer specialists, might seek to exploit during a military confrontation. This is an area in which the United States is believed to be quite vulnerable. First Deputy Defense Minister Kokoshin stated in July 1996 that, "The emergence of information warfare assets and means of impacting on the information space of another state necessitates the development of ... information warfare ... as part and parcel of the military art."¹²⁶

Russia's Intentions

There is near consensus in Russia on national security interests, but not on national security strategy, military strategy, or military doctrine. There is sharp debate over military reform and a major disconnect between national security ends and means.

Near Consensus on National Interests

There is broad, though not complete, agreement among Russian political elites on Russia's national security interests. These begin with the assertion that despite its present difficulties, Russia is a great power. Many Russians acknowledge that this is a step down from the global superpower status of the former Soviet Union and they eschew major interests in Africa and Latin America. Nevertheless, there is widespread support for a broad range of interests. Foremost among these is that Russia should be the dominant force among the Soviet successor states and promote their reintegration under Russian leadership. In addition, most believe that Russia has vital interests and should exercise strong influence in: Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and East Asia. These interests, it is widely believed, require that Russia maintain nuclear parity with the United States and world-class conventional military forces.

No Consensus on Strategy or Doctrine

There is no consensus in Russia on national security strategy or military strategy. These are the key master plans for translating interests into policies. Normally, national security strategy comes from the top political leadership. Military strategy, which derives from national security strategy, would be worked out in consultation between military and political leaders. In Russia, whose Constitution

¹²⁵(...continued)

anti-Dudaev faction. When these "covert" actions were defeated and exposed by the Dudaev regime in late-1994, Yeltsin escalated to full-scale invasion.

¹²⁶ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 24, 1997.

(designed by and for Yeltsin) vests predominant power in the hands of the president, a national security strategy can only come from the executive branch, with presidential leadership. President Yeltsin (at least before mid-1997) did not provide that leadership. To the contrary, he and his government gave the military a good deal of autonomy in decision-making in military affairs — while cutting the defense budget drastically.¹²⁷

Soviet authorities traditionally stressed the importance of military doctrine and theory and Soviet military leaders relied heavily on such authoritative documents for guidance. In the 1990s, lacking strong or clear political guidance, the Russian MOD tried to retain as much of the Soviet force structure as possible on its reduced budget. This attempt to muddle through amounted to a policy of “more of the same, only less so.” Yeltsin and the government proclaimed “military reform” to be a high priority as early as 1993, but this was little more than rhetoric. Yeltsin periodically claimed progress in military reform or that major reforms were imminent, but nothing happened. Defense Minister Grachev played along with this pretense, but was not the primary culprit.¹²⁸ Western and Russian military experts agree that absent firm political guidance, the Russian military cannot reasonably be expected to “reform” itself (especially in the midst of a severe budget crisis). Nor does it have the authority to formulate a national security strategy. There are some indications that Yeltsin has belatedly moved to fill this gap in mid-1997.

A 23-page military doctrine, drafted primarily by the Russian General Staff, was approved and promulgated by Yeltsin on November 2, 1993.¹²⁹ Western commentary focused on the doctrine’s official abandonment of Moscow’s long-standing declaratory policy of non-first-use of nuclear weapons. Perhaps more significant was the doctrine’s change of emphasis on missions of the armed forces. The threat of large-scale foreign military aggression against Russia was rated as low. The threat of ethnic or nationalist conflicts on the periphery was up-graded. The Russian Army was specifically tasked to help defend ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in other Soviet successor states and, if necessary, to combat internal security threats within Russia. The doctrine said very little about the structure of the armed forces, other

¹²⁷ Arbatov, *The Russian Military in the 21st Century*, p. 6.

¹²⁸ “Without clear-cut guidelines, not knowing what kind of enemy to counter, with President Yeltsin as Commander-in-Chief who is unwilling or incapable of extending political leadership to the armed forces, and with totally insufficient budget funding, the Russian armed forces under Grachev had no chance to ‘reform’ in any meaningful way. But for four years, Grachev constantly pronounced, against all odds, that military reform was on track.” Felgengauer, *Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ The former legislature, the Supreme Soviet, had delayed approving the draft military doctrine (as required by law) for more than a year. Yeltsin’s promulgation of the doctrine in November, during the interregnum following his forcible dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, but before the new Federal Assembly was elected, was seen by many as a reward to the Army for its role in suppressing Yeltsin’s parliamentary opposition. A detailed summary of the 1993 military doctrine, plus an analytical assessment, is contained in a Special Report of *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, No. 1, January 1994. The full text of the military doctrine was a classified document and was not published. Also see, James F. Holcomb and Michael M. Boll, *Russia’s New Doctrine: Two Views*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle PA, July 20, 1994.

than continuing the policy of mixed manning by both conscripts and contract servicemen. The doctrine's introduction declared it to be a transitional document, while Russia itself was in transition. A product of the early Yeltsin/Grachev period, it is viewed as providing inadequate guidance for Russia's armed forces either in their present state or for future reform and restructuring.¹³⁰

On May 7, 1997, Yeltsin approved an official "National Security Concept," drafted by his Security Council, headed by Ivan Rybkin. Most of it remains secret but some aspects of this 30-page document were revealed at a televised Security Council session. Writing in the government newspaper, *Rossiiskiy Vesti*, Rybkin said,

Of singular importance is the conclusion made in the concept ... that the main threats to Russia's national security come from the internal political, economic, social and spiritual spheres, and are predominantly non-military. This conclusion gives us a chance to redistribute the state's resources so as to use them above all for the solution of internal problems of national security.¹³¹

The new security concept stresses the importance of establishing economic and social stability, strengthening federalism and the power of the state, accelerating reintegration among the Soviet successor states, and assuring Russia a prominent role in a multipolar world. This security concept could help provide the basis for a coherent national security strategy — if top political and military leaders treat it seriously.

Conflict Over Military Reform

Increased public debate and political conflict over military reform was spurred by the Russian Army's poor performance in Chechnya, rising concern about the status of the armed forces, the parliamentary (December 1995) and presidential (June-July 1996) election campaigns, and in-fighting within the government, especially during Yeltsin's long illness (July 1996-February 1997).

In June 1996, when Grachev was dismissed as Defense Minister, Lebed was named to head the Security Council, and Lebed's candidate, Rodionov, was appointed Defense Minister, Lebed was heralded as the new "defense supremo." Lebed confirmed that military reform was a high priority. He and Rodionov floated some ideas, including reducing the number of hollow army divisions to a small number of full-strength units, and creating powerful, highly mobile rapid reaction forces. There was general agreement on the desirability of moving from mass conscription to a smaller all-volunteer force, but not on how quickly this could be done. Lebed, however, soon became emersed in negotiating an end to the Chechen conflict, and shortly after that, in October 1996, was dismissed by Yeltsin and

¹³⁰ "The 1993 doctrine was never considered at the Defense Ministry as a serious document. The top brass straightforwardly called it 'toilet paper.'" Felgengauer, Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure, p. 25.

¹³¹ Ivan Rybkin, "Russia Has a National Security Concept," *Rossiiskiy Vesti*, May 13, 1997.

replaced by Ivan Rybkin, former Speaker of the Duma, a politician with no professional military experience. Rodionov proposed reducing airborne forces by 30 percent and subordinating all airborne units to the Ground Forces Command. This was thwarted by Airborne Command and its supporters, who appealed over Rodionov's head to Yeltsin, who canceled the order. Rodionov then became embroiled in an open and increasingly polemical dispute with Yuriy Baturin over military reform. Baturin, head of the recently created Defense Council, was backed by Chubais, whose star was rising. Contrary to popular belief, neither Rodionov nor Baturin put forward a comprehensive military reform plan. Their fight was over a principle. Rodionov insisted that any serious military reform would cost a good deal of money to implement and that it was futile to talk about reform unless the government was willing to substantially increase defense spending.¹³² Baturin argued that Russia's budget crisis ruled out the possibility of increased defense spending and that the military would have to draft reform plans based on current spending levels.¹³³ Neither protagonist would back down. No progress was made on reform. Yeltsin finally resolved the dispute by firing Rodionov on May 22, 1997.

The televised firing and humiliation of the Defense Minister and General Staff Chief caused a sensation and may have helped spur Yeltsin to actually move military reform onto the front burner. Yeltsin pledged to take personal control. He set July 25, 1997 as the deadline for a military reform plan. The new Defense Minister, Gen. Sergeev, and General Staff Chief, Gen. Kvashnin, quickly espoused the view that military reform can and must go forward at once, even if the defense budget is further reduced by sequestration in 1997. A month and a half after taking office, Sergeev submitted a draft reform plan emphasizing administrative reorganization and downsizing. Yeltsin signed these in the form of four presidential decrees on July 16.

Proposed New Military Reforms

- The five military services (Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force, Air Defense Forces, and Strategic Rocket Forces) inherited from the Soviet era would be consolidated initially into four and later three services. Initially, Air and Air Defense Forces would be merged. There are at least two competing visions for a three-service military. The first would be organized functionally as follows: **Strategic Missile Forces**, consisting of present Strategic Rocket Forces, Military Space Forces, anti-ballistic missile defenses, and possibly long-range aviation; **Deterrence Forces**, consisting of present Air

¹³² Said Rodionov to military affairs reporter Felgengauer at a lavish Moscow reception in January 1997, "What kind of `#&*%@?!' reforms are you talking about?! We are starving!!" Felgengauer, *Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure*, p. 20.

¹³³ Part of the dilemma is that there is merit in both positions. Military downsizing is expensive in the short-run. It costs more to disband an army division than to maintain it for one year. (By law, a discharged military officer with over five years of service is entitled to a pension, two years' salary, ownership of an apartment, and payment of all other arrearages.) On the other hand, Russia cannot economically sustain its present military force structure and must downsize. The MOD must learn to live within the state's reduced economic means.

Defense Forces and some Air Force and Navy units; and **General Purpose Forces**, consisting of present Ground Forces and the balance of Air Force and Navy units. The second variant is a more traditional division among Ground, Sea, and Air Forces.

- The office of Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces would be abolished, with control of ground forces and tactical air going to the commanders-in-chief of the military districts. Russia's eight military districts would be reduced to six in 1998 and finally to four — Moscow, North Caucasus, Urals, and Far East — redesignated as operational theater commands, whose commanders (like U.S. theater C-in-Cs) would have operational command of all forces in their theater.¹³⁴
- Military manpower would be cut by 500,000, from 1.7 to 1.2 million and civilian MOD employees by 50 percent.¹³⁵ The defense budget would be held to no more than 3.5 percent of GDP. And the MOD's central administration would be limited to no more than 1 percent of the defense budget and 1 percent of total military manpower.
- The MOD's Road-Building Administration and Railroad Troops would be shifted to other government agencies and over 100 military construction organizations and the military retail trade network would be privatized, freeing the MOD from these non-military tasks. Military reforms would be financed in part by selling surplus military equipment and land, with 87 percent of the proceeds earmarked for the MOD.

In addition to these reforms, Sergeev revealed that the General Staff, under his direction, was working on a seven-part "blueprint" to include assessments of: the military threats to Russia's security; the economic resources available for meeting Russia's security needs; existing Russian armed forces; other militarized formations that might contribute to Russia's military security; the military-industrial complex; defense mobilization; and options for more far reaching military reforms. According to Sergeev, the first six parts are due by the end of July 1997, the last by September 1997.¹³⁶ The outline of this blueprint suggests the components of a comprehensive national security strategy and military strategy.

¹³⁴ The future configuration of military districts or operational theater commands might be influenced by, and perhaps linked to, the outcome of the CFE adaptation talks (see p. 54) and future NATO enlargement.

¹³⁵ 1.7 million is authorized, not necessarily actual, strength. In an interview on July 21, 1997, Yeltsin said 120,000 officers, warrant officers and contract soldiers would be cut. Government and MOD leaders are working hard to reassure the Army that discharged officers will not be "thrown onto the street." In addition to pledging to pay all back wages by September 1, 1997, they are promising the construction of 100,000 new apartments for discharged military men, but with half to be paid for by regional governments, a big unfunded mandate.

¹³⁶ Izvestia, July 22, 1997, p. 4.

The proposed reforms of July 1997 have aroused powerful opposition among senior military men and politicians. Sergeev acknowledged that while the reforms are supported by key leaders in the General Staff (where they were drafted), many generals and admirals are opposed. The fact that such a fundamental issue as the character and composition of the future military services has not yet been resolved indicates that there is considerable uncertainty about the future of military reform. Sergeev said he would spend weeks visiting with mid-level officers across the country to sell the plan.¹³⁷ First Deputy Defense Minister Kokoshin explained to the MOD staff that reductions in the strength of the armed forces is “a forced and painful measure, which is not an aim in itself but just one of the ways to preserve the army”.¹³⁸

Nationalist and communist politicians have denounced the reforms as likely to, if not intended to, wreck the army. It was in response to these proposed reforms that Duma Defense Committee Chairman Rokhlin issued his inflammatory open letter calling on Russian servicemen to launch organized resistance to the reforms. In July, Rokhlin began stumping the country, speaking against the reforms. He has formed a political movement with the declared aim of saving the army, which demands Yeltsin’s resignation.¹³⁹ Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Russian Communist Party and of a broad opposition coalition called the Popular Patriotic Union, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, head of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party, and Generals Lebed and Rodionov have all denounced the proposed reforms and backed Rokhlin’s movement. Pavel Felgengauer, Russia’s foremost military affairs journalist and a political moderate, also wrote several blistering critiques of the proposed reforms.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Yeltsin appears to be giving Sergeev and his reform program strong political support. In addition, the apparent payment of military salary arrearages by September 1, 1997, as promised, also strengthens Sergeev’s hand within the MOD as a minister who was finally able to deliver on something concrete and meaningful that his predecessors had repeatedly promised, and failed, to do. The defense section of the government’s 1998 budget, and the defense budget that

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ RIA Novosti, August 22, 1997.

¹³⁹ Rokhlin’s All-Russia Movement of Support for the Army, Servicemen, Defence Industry and Military Science plans a founding congress in September and nationwide protests in the autumn. The Communist Party, which has the largest bloc in the Duma, supports this program and promises to hold wide ranging parliamentary hearings on national security issues in the autumn. Rokhlin and Zyuganov insist that in contrast to the government’s proposed cap of 3.5% of GDP for defense spending, no less than 5%-7% of GDP is required for the 1998 defense budget to save the army from collapse.

¹⁴⁰ Felgengauer charged in Segodnya [Moscow], July 21, 1997, that the reforms were drafted by a small clique of MOD and General Staff officers in pursuit of narrow bureaucratic interests, then railroaded through the new military reform committee chaired by Premier Chernomyrdin, bypassing the Defense Council, whose civilian experts privately dismiss it as, “a nightmare ... ill-founded, ill-prepared, and ill-considered.” Felgengauer’s voice adds more respectability to the opposition’s criticism of the proposed reforms. FBIS, July 28, 1997.

parliament approves — probably in December 1997 — will give an early indication of the prospects for military reform.

Mismatch Between Ends and Means

Some U.S. and Russian analysts warn that there is a dangerous mismatch between the Russian political leadership's expansive view of their country's vital interests and its much reduced conventional military capabilities. In the words of Foreign Minister Primakov, "[T]he international situation itself requires that Russia be not merely a historically great power, but also a great power right now." Nor should Russia's temporarily limited capabilities bar it from an active world role, since its policy is being carried out "by no means on the basis of current circumstances but on the basis of [Russia's] colossal potential."¹⁴¹ Analysts critical of this approach warn that unreconstructed attitudes about the ends of Russian interests could lead to imperial overreach, drawing Russia into conflicts beyond its military means, with potentially dire consequences.¹⁴²

In 1992-1993, the Russian Army fought in Moldova and Georgia and is still deployed there against the will of the "host" governments. The Russian 201st Mechanized Infantry Division is engaged in the civil war in Tajikistan. These conflicts denote an arc of instability along Russia's southern flank that poses dangers both to Russia and its neighbors.

Pavel Baev, a former civilian MOD analyst, wrote recently that, "Russia's space for maneuver in the Caucasus and Central Asia is becoming more limited as the states in those regions assert their independence," while Russia's own resources are diminishing, facing Russia with "the necessity of strategic retreat ... as far as military presence is concerned."¹⁴³ At the same time, the political pressure in Moscow to conduct a more pro-active course remains high," while the post-Yeltsin succession, "further increases the possibility of unbalanced, poorly thought-out, and incomprehensible actions."¹⁴⁴

According to Sherman Garnett, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the "new military environment" that Russia faces includes numerous actual and potential conflict zones along its periphery. However,

Real suppression of existing conflicts, such as the Tajik civil war, calls for a great increase in financial and military resources. Other sources of instability lie scattered around the region. Russia has defined them all, in advance, as vital to

¹⁴¹ Primakov in Trud, June 25, 1996 and Krasnaya zvezda, April 2, 1996, cited in Garnett, "A Wedged Bear in Great Tightness," p. 13.

¹⁴² Many would argue that the consequences, at least for Russia's neighbors, would be even more dire if Moscow's desired ends were within its means.

¹⁴³ CIA and DIA analysts consulted in connection with this report share this view.

¹⁴⁴ Pavel Baev, Challenges and Options in The Caucasus and Central Asia, paper presented at the U.S. Army War College conference on Russia's Future as a World Power, Carlisle, PA, April 24, 1997, p. 17.

its interests, yet is hardly prepared to respond effectively to any one of them. As Chechnya has demonstrated, there are no “little wars,” especially for Russia’s broken military machine.¹⁴⁵

Russian forces see themselves and are seen by the combatants as a potentially critical factor.... It is difficult for Russian forces to avoid being drawn into a conflict, whether by material inducements, honors, or even the impossibility of staying out of the line of fire. This gravitational pull on stationed Russian forces applies whether or not there are additional pressures from Moscow to shape, or at least to take advantage of, a conflict. Yet for a weakened Russian military, these conflicts are a great La Brea tar pit, drawing it deeper and deeper into a mire from which it cannot extricate itself.¹⁴⁶

Others, such as Stephen Blank of the U.S. Army War College, argue that Russian involvement in conflicts on its periphery is part of an imperialist design. “After all, Russia has had 400 years of empire, so that imperial policy is not a surprise. It would be surprising if Russia were not pursuing that policy.” For Blank this is, because of Russia’s military weakness, “strategic irresponsibility.”

As during Nicholas II’s rule (which it resembles in too many ways), the government pursues a ruinous strategic overextension and foreign intervention.... Russia’s instability and irresponsibility have international repercussions.¹⁴⁷

This line of analysis warns that Russia, whether by imperial design, geographic proximity, or political incompetence, may find itself embroiled in military conflict(s) that exceed its (now limited) resources and capabilities, and that this is a dangerous and unpredictable situation.

On the other hand, some argue that except for Chechnya, post-Soviet Russia has not done so badly on its periphery. In this view, with the cooperation of certain regimes that see some Russian presence as a stabilizing factor, Moscow might be able to maintain an influential presence along the periphery using classic tactics of subversion, manipulation, and relatively modest military force.

Future Prospects

This section examines several near-term scenarios for the evolution of Russia’s armed forces as well as questions of how long it might take for Russia to rebuild its military and what kind of force it might be.

¹⁴⁵ Garnett, “A Wedged Bear in Great Tightness,” p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ Sherman Garnett, “The Revolution in Eurasian Military Affairs,” *The Future of the Russian Military*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen J. Blank, “Strategic Overextension: A recipe For Failure? Notes on Russian Security Policy,” *The Future of the Russian Military*, p. 10.

Near-Term Scenarios

Although Russia has been in transition for about a decade, it seems clear that the transition is far from complete. Simultaneous revolutions in the political and socio-economic systems, the extent and character of the state and its spiritual/ideological underpinning have not run their course. True stability may be a generation or two in the future. The magnitude of change on so many different axes makes prediction difficult. Even the short-term scenarios (3-5 years) suggested below are speculative. The further out one tries to project, the greater the uncertainty.

Present Trends Continue. In July 1996, Yeltsin was reelected to a four-year term that will expire in the year 2000. Even with the simplest assumption — that the political and economic trends of the past few years continue — experts disagree on where those trend lines lead. Some see increasing economic stability based on the government's successful monetarist policies. Others predict continued declines in production and mounting socio-economic distress. There is less optimism about the prospects for political stability, whether or not Yeltsin serves out his second term. Western and Russian experts on the military, however, are in general agreement that if the military trend lines of the past few years were to continue, conditions would soon become literally unsustainable. That is what lies behind the warnings of possible military collapse, mutiny, implosion, or coup. Despite these dire warnings, it is also possible that the Russian Army will continue to muddle along, relying on the seemingly inexhaustible stoicism of its servicemen.

A variant of this scenario is that present political and economic trends continue, but with some military reforms, perhaps along the lines indicated in June-July 1997. This probably would not be sufficient to reverse most of the downward military trends identified earlier in this report. It would, however, increase the likelihood of averting an apocalyptic outcome. In any case, the continuation of present trends implies a low level of Russian conventional military capability relative to the West for a decade or more, in part because of the long lead-time needed to create large, complex, modern military systems.

Economic Recovery. Optimists believe that Russia could begin to experience significant economic recovery as soon as 1998. This is not to say that the economy will have recovered in 1998, but that a turning point will have been reached in which economic contraction finally gives way to growth. Estimates of the contraction of the Russian (not the Soviet) economy already in this decade range between one-third and one-half. Few experts believe that losses of such magnitude can be quickly made up. Virtually all agree that little if any progress can be made unless there is substantial structural demilitarization of the economy and the defense burden is kept low. This implies that even rapid economic recovery, if it comes, will not be accompanied early on by a rapid defense build up. Substantial economic recovery would certainly provide the basis for rebuilding powerful armed forces in subsequent years.

Given Russia's size, geographical location (adjacent to Central Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and China), and history, assuming economic recovery, Moscow is likely to reestablish itself as a major military power. How long that might take is discussed below. Among the key factors that will shape

the character of Russian military power will be whether it evolves in a predominantly Great Russian nationalist or a western-oriented context. Another key factor will be Russian threat perception, not least regarding China.

Resurgence of Authoritarianism. It is quite possible that the reforms of the first phase of Russia's post-Soviet transition will falter and give way to a resurgence of authoritarianism. Most analysts believe a restoration of the Soviet system is unlikely and that a turn toward authoritarianism would more likely take the form of a nationalist/populist or neofascist regime. Such a regime would probably seek to quickly rebuild its armed forces, retaining or reconstituting as much of the old Soviet force structure as possible. Whether it would have the means to do so, however, is problematic. If it were overtly anti-western, it might forfeit much foreign assistance, technology, trade, and investments needed for economic recovery. If it were hostile to market-oriented economic reform, the economy would probably sink into even worse shape than that which presumably helped bring the authoritarians to power. If the regime relied on ethnic Russian nationalism, it would be anathema to most of the other Soviet successor states and would find little political, economic, or strategic cooperation there. Such a regime would be likely to intensify the mismatch between national security ends and means discussed above. The authoritarian regime most likely to be able to rebuild the Russian military would be one that combined populism, nationalism, and market reforms. But in the short run, simultaneous economic recovery and rapid military buildup seem incompatible. Absent substantial economic recovery, major remilitarization is probably unsustainable.

How Long to Rebuild Conventional Military Capabilities?

Rebuild to what level? Unless Russia regains control of most of the former Soviet Union, it cannot hope to reconstitute anything like the military force capabilities of the mid-1980s, because of the vast human and material assets that Moscow lost when the U.S.S.R. disintegrated. One measure would be to think in terms of the time needed for Russia to become a military peer-competitor of the United States (at present U.S. force levels).

The answer to this question, of course, is scenario-dependent. Given Russia's size, immense wealth of natural resources, large well-educated population, history, and culture, it seems quite likely that Russia will again be a great power with formidable military might. But virtually no experts on the Russian military predict that this could be accomplished in the next 3-5 years. Privatization has removed massive amounts of wealth, property, and productive forces from the hands of the state. Though this may be necessary (but not sufficient) to jump start the economy, it reduces Russia's ability to swiftly mobilize resources for national security objectives.¹⁴⁸

Optimistic assessments (from Moscow's perspective), such as those given by First Deputy Defense Minister Kokoshin and General Staff Chief Kvashnin, say that Russia will "begin to rearm" in 2005. 2003-2005 is also the time frame often cited for completing the transition from a conscript to a "professional" army. Russian

¹⁴⁸ Garnett, "A Bear Wedged in Great Tightness," p. 2-3.

press accounts cite an MOD plan to turn over 5 percent of its weapons inventory annually, beginning in 2005 and ending in 2025. If large-scale force modernization began in 2005, it would be many years before that process yielded a large, robust, highly capable army. Much of the inventory of weapons built in the 1970s and 1980s would be largely useless by then and rearmament would resume from a relatively low base. Although it may seem counterintuitive to many in the West who grew accustomed to the idea of a massive Soviet military threat as a geopolitical given, it seems that Russia's best-case scenario for force reconstitution may be toward the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

If that is a best-case scenario, the time frame for major force reconstitution could well be longer. This prospect is highlighted by findings of a classified CIA study, *Global Trends 2010*, which reportedly predicts that "Russia's economic and social woes will continue to drain resources from defense," and does not foresee Russia as a military peer-competitor by 2010.¹⁴⁹ There is no objective basis for trying to forecast the maximum time it might take for Russian conventional force reconstitution.

Russia would not, however, be militarily inconsequential or powerless in the interim. It presumably would remain a nuclear superpower. It would also retain large residual conventional forces and probably some highly effective smaller specialized units, especially vis-à-vis weak states on its periphery. But that is a far cry from former Soviet military capabilities.

What Sorts of Armed Forces Will Russia Have?

Among other unknowns, the political controversy in Russia over military reform makes it difficult to predict how, or whether, the Russian armed forces will evolve in the next few years. The shibboleths of Russian military reform call for more compact, efficient, and highly mobile forces. There is broad support for shifting from a conscript to a "professional" army.¹⁵⁰ The latter presumably would be a smaller force, but it would also be far more expensive. The government seems to lack the economic means or the political will to fund this transition at present.

Alexei Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, has written two extensive studies recently proposing radical downsizing and restructuring of Russia's armed forces.¹⁵¹ He argues that given Russia's economic realities, it cannot possibly maintain anything like its present force structure (inherited from the Soviet

¹⁴⁹ "WHO'S THE ENEMY? It's Chaos, and It's Here to Stay," U.S. News and World Report, May 12, 1997.

¹⁵⁰ On May 16, 1996, a month before the presidential election, Yeltsin signed a decree mandating that conscription be replaced by a professional all-volunteer force by the year 2000. This may have won some votes, but was ridiculed by military specialists as unachievable in that time frame.

¹⁵¹ Arbatov, *The Russian Military in the 21st Century*; and "Military Reform: Doctrine, Troops."

era),¹⁵² — nor is there any reason to do so, since Russia faces no large-scale military threats in the next few years. Arbatov wants to move very quickly to a smaller, professional force, reducing total military manpower to 1-1.2 million by 1998 and 800-900,000 by 2001, with 300,000 ground force troops in 15-20 heavy and light divisions by 2001. In his view, the air and air defense forces would need 1,000-1,500 combat and transport aircraft; the navy 70-80 major surface warships and 40-50 attack submarines.

Some less radical plans move in a similar direction. One of former Defense Minister Rodionov's early proposals was to restructure the Ground Forces' 61 (mostly hollow) divisions and scores of independent brigades into 13 full-strength divisions. The recently approved plan to abolish Ground Forces Command would pave the way for disbanding hollow and empty divisions.

As noted above, however, political and military-bureaucratic resistance to radical military reform is quite strong. If it prevails and a muddling-through approach is adopted, either explicitly or by default, Russia will probably try to retain its present, economically unsustainable armed forces, whose qualitative deterioration will continue, and probably accelerate. Arbatov warns that,

If present policies continue, Russia will maintain its large, qualitatively weak army for the next 5 years — when there are no major military threats to Russia. BUT, 10-15 years from now, Russia will have a crumbling military infrastructure at a time when it may face real threats in the East, the South, or even the West.¹⁵³

Gap Between U.S. and Russian Military Capabilities

It is widely acknowledged that the United States has no peer competitor in conventional military power at this time. Furthermore, the gap between U.S. and Russian conventional capabilities is widening. How long this condition lasts will depend on many variables, not least of all, U.S. perceptions of Russian and other threats. In view of the relative size and strength of the U.S. and Russian economies and high technology sectors, if the United States has the will to do so, it could maintain and widen the gap in military capability for years to come.

Implications for U.S. Policy

The most obvious implication of the deterioration of Russian conventional military capabilities for U.S. policy is that the traditional Russian military threat is significantly reduced, not just for the present, but well into the next decade, at least.

¹⁵² For example, in order to maintain the Russian Army at the U.S. level of equipment, readiness, training, etc., says Arbatov, it would be necessary either to reduce the force to 100,000 men (less than the Greek Army), or increase the defense budget to 1,000 trillion rubles (twice the entire Russian federal budget). "These are extreme alternatives," he admits, "but they illustrate the scale of the problem." Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵³ Arbatov's oral presentation at U.S. Army War College, April 23, 1997.

In the late 1980s, Georgi Arbatov¹⁵⁴ warned Americans wryly that Gorbachev's reforms were going to present the United States with an acute case of threat deprivation. His implication was that the Pentagon and U.S. defense contractors would not appreciate this. In the event, the older Arbatov would conclude that the reforms begun by Gorbachev and accelerated by Yeltsin succeeded too well in depriving the United States of its military threat. He was at least partly right in that this has led to major changes and reductions in the U.S. national security establishment, a process that many believe has by no means run its course. Many past and present senior U.S. military leaders ruefully predict massive cuts in U.S. defense spending in coming years because of the disappearance of the threat that virtually defined U.S. national security strategy for two generations.¹⁵⁵

Not only is the traditional military threat greatly reduced, but the warning time associated with it is greatly increased. In the worst days of the cold war, NATO military planners viewing the Soviet/Warsaw Pact threat feared that they might only have a few weeks of warning time in the event of an imminent attack, and in the worst case, of a "standing-start attack," perhaps only days of warning time. NATO vs. Warsaw Pact mobilization timetables seemed nightmarish. Now, in view of the amount of time needed for Russia to significantly reconstitute its conventional military capabilities, it seems that warning time for a Russian military threat to Central or Western Europe can be measured in years, probably quite a few years. That is a tremendous luxury for military planners and gives the United States not only added security but much more flexibility. Since the United States has and is further developing interests in regions on Russia's periphery (such as the Baltic and Caucasus), however, warning time for Russian military contingencies in such regions might well be measured in months now. Moreover, there might be very little warning time for some unconventional Russian military contingencies such as a mutiny, implosion, or coup.

There are negative implications for U.S. interests of the dramatic deterioration of Russian conventional military capability. Minimal conventional military capability leads explicitly to greater Russian reliance on strategic and tactical nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence at ever-lower levels of conflict. Russian defense analysts and government officials acknowledge this, as does Russia's 1993 Military Doctrine and the May 1997 National Security Concept. Defense analysts warn that this lower nuclear "threshold" and the deterioration of Russia's strategic warning

¹⁵⁴ Then director of the prestigious Soviet Institute for the Study of the U.S.A. and Canada, a senior advisor to President Mikhail Gorbachev, and father of Alexei Arbatov, of the Duma Defense Committee.

¹⁵⁵ Lectures by senior U.S. military leaders at the National War College, 1995-1996.

systems¹⁵⁶ could leave Russia with a dangerous and destabilizing “hair trigger” nuclear posture.¹⁵⁷

One of the “loose-nukes” scenarios associated with the general deterioration and possible implosion of the Russian Army is the specter of renegade officers seizing control of nuclear weapons. Former Defense Minister Rodionov warned obliquely of such a danger when he told the press in February 1997 that, “Russia might soon reach the threshold beyond which its rockets and nuclear systems cannot be controlled.”¹⁵⁸

Another implication, in the view of many, but not all, U.S. experts, is that a catastrophic collapse of the Russian armed forces (e.g., in the form of implosion, fragmentation, mutiny, or coup) is not in the U.S. interest. Such scenarios imply a threat to democratic, civilian government and market reforms. A senior State Department intelligence officer, who spent much of his career confronting the Soviet threat, said recently of the rapid deterioration of the Russian armed forces, “As an American official, I’m not sure if I should be applauding or wringing my hands.”¹⁵⁹ A U.S. military intelligence expert observed that,

The Russian military hasn’t fallen off the cliff yet. They’re on the edge of the cliff. It’s a very dangerous and unpredictable situation.... Military collapse could occur with little or no warning. So don’t be surprised if you’re surprised.¹⁶⁰

One way to decrease the likelihood of being surprised is to increase U.S.-Russian military-to-military contact and cooperation programs. This would give U.S. officials more insight into conditions and attitudes in the Russian Army. It might also provide a means of exerting some positive influence on attitudes and developments within the Russian armed forces by education, positive example, exposure to western norms of behavior, and undermining anti-western stereotypes and propaganda. The Clinton Administration supports U.S.-Russian military-to-military contact and cooperation through NATO’s Partnership for Peace program and through direct bilateral efforts such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction program funded by the Nunn-Lugar Amendment. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry

¹⁵⁶ For example, in 1995 the launch of a Norwegian scientific research rocket apparently triggered a false alarm in Russia’s early warning system, causing Moscow to put strategic nuclear forces on alert. Bruce Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1995, p. 47.

¹⁵⁷ *Russia’s Nuclear Forces: Doctrine and Force Structure Issues*. CRS Report 97-586F, May 23, 1997, p. 26-27.

¹⁵⁸ Reuters, February 6, 1997. This was part of a long complaint to Yeltsin about the awful conditions in the armed forces. Some observers believe Rodionov was trying to frighten Yeltsin into allocating more money for defense. See also, Robert Bykov, “A Nuclear Launch May Happen Accidentally,” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 15, 1997; and “Threat? What Threat?” *Washington Times*, October 29, 1996, p. 16.

¹⁵⁹ Discussion with State Department official, March 1997.

¹⁶⁰ Discussion with senior U.S. military intelligence official, March 1997.

was a strong advocate of such efforts and took a leading personal role in expanding contacts and cooperation with the Russian armed forces.

Those who believe that a catastrophic collapse of the Russian Army threatens Russia's democratic transition, regional stability, and U.S. national interests, would like to see Russia's large, inefficient, unsustainable, and unstable army move toward a smaller, more efficient, professional force. Some contend that the United States should, to the limited extent possible, encourage Russian movement in this direction. One tack would be to further reassure Moscow that it faces no military threat from the West. This would help free Russia from the burden of maintaining powerful and expensive forces to confront NATO. One of the challenges for such a policy, however, according to U.S. analysts, is how to reassure Russia in the west while proceeding with NATO enlargement, a top Administration foreign policy goal.

Some see the CFE adaptation talks (aimed at adapting the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe to post-cold war conditions) as one means of giving Russia such reassurance. The original CFE Treaty set equal limits on certain types of weapons that NATO and Warsaw Pact states could station in Europe. Moscow has argued for years that CFE must be modified because: the old bloc-to-bloc ceilings make no sense after the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, Russia has different borders and security concerns in Europe than the former Soviet Union, and the prospective entrance of former Warsaw Pact states into NATO fundamentally alters the European security picture. On July 22, 1997, representatives of the United States, Russia, and the 28 other CFE states reached a framework agreement that would modify CFE by replacing the bloc-to-bloc ceilings with national and territorial limits.¹⁶¹ This satisfies a basic Russian demand. The specific limits, however, were not set and will be the subject of further negotiations. Modification of the CFE Treaty will require Senate approval. Perceptions of Russian military capabilities and intentions will help shape Russia's national ceilings under the new treaty as well as the territorial limits on equipment that can be stationed in prospective new NATO members, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Some observers are concerned that the Clinton Administration may seek to "reward" Russia (for agreeing to NATO enlargement) with favorable CFE numbers.

There are some in the United States who argue that as far as the Russian Army is concerned, "the worse, the better." They are skeptical about Russia's transition toward democracy and a market economy, view Russian policy as hostile to many important U.S. interests, and see Russia's large army as at least a potential threat. In this view, even a catastrophic collapse of the Russian army would further reduce the threat and would be bound to be in the U.S. interest. Proponents of this view believe the United States should do nothing to impede the collapse of the Russian armed forces.

U.S. policy is concerned with Russian arms sales, particularly sales that are considered geostrategically destabilizing or sales to countries that sponsor international terrorism. For example, the House approved an amendment to the

¹⁶¹ Details of the framework agreement were explained at a White House press briefing on July 22, 1997.

FY1998 foreign aid bill (H.R. 1757) prohibiting aid to Russia if that country sells SS-N-22 missiles to China.¹⁶² The Clinton Administration is trying to pressure Moscow to stop selling arms to Iran. The Russian Government's sharp cutback in procurement of military equipment, however, puts added pressure on defense enterprises and the government's arms export agency (Rosvooruzhenye) to maximize foreign arms sales. According to a Kremlin official, 75 percent of the revenue being received by defense industries comes from arms exports.¹⁶³

Russian arms sales fell sharply in the period 1992-1994, following the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. and the success of U.S. arms in the Gulf War, but increased significantly in 1995-1996.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Premier Chernomyrdin, expressing dissatisfaction with the level of arms exports, declared in August 1997 that Yeltsin had just put him in charge of supervising Rosvooruzhenye and that he would push to accelerate foreign arms sales.¹⁶⁵ Besides China and Iran, India, a traditional Soviet customer, remains a major buyer of Russian arms. In addition, Moscow has won some important aircraft contracts recently from Malaysia, Peru, and Indonesia. The United States is concerned that Moscow is strongly motivated to increase potentially destabilizing arms sales to China and Iran and turn to other traditional clients such as Iraq, Libya, and Serbia. Moscow has been honoring the U.N.-imposed arms embargoes against the latter three states, but it makes clear its desire to see those embargoes lifted so that it can resume "normal" trade relations. Such a development would complicate U.S. policy and might strain U.S. relations with Russia. Russian officials often say that U.S. complaints about Moscow's apparent eagerness to sell arms to "pariah states," reflect commercial competition, U.S. unwillingness to allow Russia a share of the market among "civilized" countries, and, some claim, a U.S. desire to see Russia's defense industries completely ruined.

Another implication for U.S. policy derives from the mismatch between deteriorating Russian conventional military capabilities and Moscow's still expansive sense of geostrategic interests. There is the potential for Russia becoming involved militarily at some flashpoint on its periphery which it is unable to resolve successfully, but from which it is unwilling or unable to withdraw. Prolonged conflict could derail democratization and reform in Russia. Vertical or horizontal escalation could threaten regional stability. Either could jeopardize important U.S. interests. Washington has limited influence over Russian national security decision-making. Many believe that use of that limited influence to help Moscow avoid damaging military entanglements would serve U.S. interests. This raises the delicate

¹⁶² See CRS Issue Brief 95077, The Former Soviet Union and U.S. Foreign Assistance, (updated regularly).

¹⁶³ Interfax, August 28, 1997.

¹⁶⁴ Russian foreign arms sales agreements for the period 1992-1994 averaged \$2.8 billion (constant 1996 dollars) per year. The average rose to \$6.5 billion in 1995-1996. CRS Report 97-778 F, Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1989-1996, August 13, 1997, p. 79.

¹⁶⁵ Simon Saradzhyan, "Russia: Arms Giant Told To Sell More," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), August 7, 1997.

issue of how to clearly inform Moscow about U.S. interests in regions on Russia's periphery without creating the impression in Moscow that Washington is trying to expel or supplant Russian influence in what it views as its own "backyard." Some who consider Russia still to be a threat, however, might not necessarily regret seeing Moscow bogged down in conflict on its periphery, if that led to its further weakening and isolation.