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## The Future of the Russian Military: Managing Geopolitical Change and Institutional Decline

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# THE RUSSIAN MILITARY'S HOUR OF TRUTH

*Ariel Cohen, Ph.D.*

Assessing the present condition and future prospects of the Russian military presents a serious challenge to American foreign policy professionals, intelligence analysts, and policymakers. Today's Russian armed forces are facing their deepest crisis since the fiascoes of the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. Both of these earlier defeats led to revolutions and the eventual collapse of the Romanov empire. But today's deep crisis was brought about not only by military failure. While the Soviet military lost the war in Afghanistan, and the Russian army failed abysmally in Chechnya, it was the broader changes in the Soviet and Russian societies that caused the demise of the second-largest war machine in the world.

How did the Russian armed forces develop from the heyday of the Soviet era? How are economic reforms and market developments influencing this once formidable institution, one of the most privileged in Soviet society? What are the chances that the current military leadership under Defense Minister Igor Rodionov is capable of picking up the pieces and saving what is left? How politicized is the military likely to become if it faces a renewed power struggle in the Kremlin as President Boris Yeltsin's health declines? What regional and foreign geopolitical challenges are the Russian state and its military facing, and are they adequately prepared to deal with them?

To answer these fascinating questions we have assembled a panel of three preeminent specialists in the field: Sherm Garnett of the Carnegie Endowment, Steve Blank of the U.S. Army War College, and Jake Kipp of the Foreign Military Studies Office of the U.S. Army.

First, Dr. Garnett focuses on the environment and addresses the question of how the collapse of the Soviet Union changed the power balance in Eurasia. The Russian military has involved itself in devastating ethnic conflicts. In some cases, it exacerbated these conflicts; and in other cases, it caused them. Fighting between the Romanian-speaking Moldovans and Russian speakers in Eastern Moldova (the Trans-Dniester region) in 1992 placed Moldova's independence in question and led to the stationing of Russian military units on its territory. In 1993, Russia delivered a blow to Georgian territorial integrity by supporting the Abkhaz separatists. Moscow tried to save the communist regime in Tajikistan and transform the Karabakh conflict between the Armenians and the Azeris into a state of "suspended animation"—neither war nor peace, as this would best suit the Kremlin's role as imperial peacemaker in the Caucasus. Thus, the expeditionary corps—a new type of armed forces that is basically a professional infantry suited to colonial and "peacemaking" missions—will play an increasingly important role. We have already seen the emergence of the "Afghan" and "Chechen" groups in the Russian military, and we will witness their ascendancy in the future. Simultaneously, the role of the Strategic Rocket Forces will increase: As its conventional forces are deteriorating, Russia is progressively relying on its nuclear rockets.

New state players are moving into the formerly Soviet-dominated imperial space. First, there is China, the fast-growing giant in the East which may have designs for Central Asia. There are also the Islamic states of the southern Eurasian rimland—Paki-



stan, Iran, and Turkey. After winning the “Great Game” of the 19th century against the British Empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Russia is suddenly faced with new players which she does not understand, and at a time when the resources at her disposal are severely limited. Finally, if NATO expands east, there will be increased Euro-American interest and influence in the Baltic states and Ukraine.

Steve Blank focuses on internal constraints and challenges to the Russian military: the syndrome of the failing state. Indeed, the privatization of Russian industry, which has been underway since 1992, has decreased the resources available to the state for military industrial production. The treasury is empty, and officers and enlisted personnel go unpaid for months. Russia is suffering from a collapse of the state-provided “social safety net”; health services, education, and social security are all in catastrophic condition. Millions of refugees are streaming to Russia from the states of the so-called near abroad—the former Soviet republics. The rule of law has disappeared, to be replaced by the “privatization of justice,” gangland style. Such an unhealthy society can only wreak havoc on its military.

With the Russian presidency weakening, and state institutions such as the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs involved in political rivalries, private interests such as the natural gas monopoly Gazprom (formerly headed by Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin) and the oil company Lukoil are becoming foreign policy players vying for control of the oil reserves in the Caspian sea. Against this background, Russia is pursuing ambitious policies of imperial overextension. It nurtures geopolitical ambitions stretching from the Kuril Islands in the Pacific to the Pamir mountains in Tajikistan, and all the way to the Polish border. This is a recipe for disaster that Russia can ill afford.

Finally, Jake Kipp brings it all into focus by zeroing in on the institutions in crisis: the multiple Russian militaries. As in some schizophrenic dream, the army, the Interior Ministry troops, the Border Guards, the presidential guard are all vying for diminishing resources, power, and prestige. The Russian “pluralistic” militaries have difficulty implementing the long-needed reform and making the transition to a professional force. Kipp analyzes the debacle of Chechnya and the politics of that wretched war. The demise of Yeltsin loyalist Pavel Grachev, the ascendancy of General Igor Rodionov, the rise and fall of charismatic paratrooper General Alexander Lebed, the survival of Interior Minister General Anatoliy Kulikov—all of these scenarios are not just first-rate Kremlin intrigues; they also reflect competing visions of the future of the Russian military.

With the next millennium at the gate, and the bills for its multimillion-dollar armed forces rising amid growing poverty, Russia desperately needs to sort out the mess—and the clock is ticking. As Jacob Kipp notes in his presentation, “Either the government will recognize the profound need for new concordance among the military, the political elite, and the citizenry, or it will face the army.” It is most timely that U.S. observers examine these issues.

# THE REVOLUTION IN EURASIAN MILITARY AFFAIRS

*Sherman Garnett, Ph.D.*

**W**hen Igor Rodionov, the Russian Minister of Defense, states that he is “presiding over destructive processes in the army and can do nothing about it,” it is clear that something revolutionary is underway in Eurasian military affairs.<sup>2</sup> This revolution is not defined by a leap forward in technology or operational art, the usual ingredients of military revolutions, but rather by the overturning of the established security order in the center of Eurasia. This revolution is important because of what it says about the declining prospects for Russian state power, the sources of instability and stability in the former USSR, and the potential impact it will have on key U.S. national interests in the crucial adjacent regions of East Asia and Central Europe.

The ongoing revolution in Eurasian military affairs is made up of three closely related elements:

**First**, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Soviet military power—and the continued weakness of the Russian military—which reversed the decades-long trend of a strong and expansive center putting pressure on the Eurasian rimlands. The center itself is now weaker and more fragmented than at any time since the Bolshevik Revolution.

**Second**, the rise of a new belt of states on the territory of the former Soviet Union and, in at least some of these states, a new military environment likely to be defined by regional and low-intensity conflicts.

**Third**, the changes taking place in the rimland states themselves, particularly in China, and their newfound freedom to conduct their own affairs and to become real sources of political, economic, and even military influence on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

This unprecedented shift in the polarity of continental political, economic, and military power undermines the basis for past diplomatic calculations which put Russian and Soviet power and ambitions at center stage. In the new balance of power, Russia will hardly be an insignificant state, but it will no longer be the central preoccupation of diplomats and military planners.

## THE WEAK CENTER

The collapse of the USSR and Russia’s five-year struggle to find political and economic equilibrium have taken its toll on Russian power. Economically, Russia has slipped out of the top ten world economies, experiencing five straight years of negative growth. Of greater long-term significance, even when growth returns, is that privatization has effectively removed resources that were once the state’s to dispose. Politically, the central government suffers from fragmentation and chaos, particularly in its for-

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<sup>2</sup> *Interfax*, February 7, 1997.

eign and security policy structures. In just the past year, Boris Yeltsin has changed foreign and defense ministers and national security advisors twice. He has set up several special oversight bodies for coordination of foreign and defense policy. Yet these structures have not brought order to the process as individual ministries, and even industries or regions, make crucial foreign policy decisions on their own.

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. Whether one looks at quantitative figures—such as the number of divisions, tanks, fighter aircraft, or ships at sea—or qualitative measurements of morale and fighting spirit, the Russian military is suffering serious decline. The military's performance in Chechnya should not be taken as the only indicator of how well this force could fight in other circumstances, but the serious shortcomings of the military in Chechnya, from poor morale to gross mismanagement, would surely be present in any other military operation these forces could conceivably conduct over the course of at least the next decade.

The Russian military is a demoralized and ineffective force. Its personnel received no salaries for four months in 1996. Perhaps as many as 100,000 officers lack adequate housing. Many facilities lack the infrastructure to care for the families of servicemen. Infectious disease has increased dramatically. Widespread draft-dodging has left the military with a conscript pool of low professional quality and widespread health problems. Corruption is rampant throughout the army. The military is short of food and fuel. In 1995, the army used up 35 percent of its food and fuel war-stocks.<sup>3</sup> Soldiers in Chechnya this winter wore sneakers and winter hats donated by Menatep Bank.<sup>4</sup> Imagine the U.S. having to conduct Desert Storm with the help of Nike. In October 1996, Defense Minister Rodionov warned that "because of the chronic shortage of funds Russia's Armed Forces reached the limit beyond which extremely undesirable and even uncontrollable processes may arise."<sup>5</sup>

The current state of the Russian military, existing security priorities, and tight fiscal constraints conspire against genuine reform. Simply caring for the needs of officers, the enlisted, and their families will continue to gobble up an increasing share of the budget. Maintaining Russia's nuclear forces will remain a key priority, as these forces are Russia's sole remaining claim to superpower status. Indeed, conventional military weakness may place new demands on these nuclear forces. Senior defense officials—including Rodionov—and military analysts have stressed the potential for use of nuclear weapons, including tactical systems, to respond to NATO expansion or to meet other threats on the horizon.

Supporting the military's ongoing involvement in the conflicts or near-conflicts along the periphery will also consume resources. There will almost certainly be an attempt by the military-industrial complex to obtain large subsidies and special protections from foreign competition. If the current crisis continues, an attempted end run on the treasury from at least some components of this sector is inevitable. If such a run occurs, it

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3 Andrew Wilson, "Russian Military Haunted by Past Glories," *Jane's International Defence Review*, May 1996, p. 26.

4 *OMRI Daily Digest*, March 4, 1996.

5 *ITAR-TASS*, October 25, 1996.



is doubtful, given the history of the distribution of state assets to date, that it would follow some carefully planned strategy of preserving critical technologies or the most vulnerable industries. It would likely be distributed the way much of state property has already been distributed: willy-nilly, with those best positioned on the inside, regardless of the defense product or service they offer, receiving the lion's share. It is quite likely that for this year and many to come, analysts of military reform will yield the same judgment President Boris Yeltsin made with regard to 1995; namely, that "military reform made virtually no headway...."<sup>6</sup>

## THE NEW MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

The collapse of Soviet and Russian military power—and of the Soviet Union itself—created a space within which new states could emerge. These new states are a diverse lot, by no means simply the collective "near abroad" of the Russian imagination. Politically, they run the gamut from Belarus's old-fashioned one-man rule to genuinely pluralistic systems in the Baltic states and in Ukraine. A similar range of outcomes is apparent when one examines economic prospects and the patterns of reform. There remain some states that continue to look to Russia, either out of their own internal weakness or to counter other threats in the neighborhood. Others look to strengthen ties with the outside world. Some are clearly stable, with long-term futures. Others remain question marks, torn by internal conflict or even civil war.

The most unstable states represent a new military environment in the former USSR, one of regional and low-intensity conflicts and internal political violence. One can blame ethnic tensions or outside pressures—and both factors play a role—but the root cause of violence in the zones of conflict is an indigenous political failure: a failure to consolidate a regime that has enough legitimacy and capabilities to defend itself and to hold at bay the forces that seek to destroy it. It is present in Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan. It is also present in the Chechen conflict, where the failure is of the Russian government itself. Of course, the Russian military is not simply a silent spectator to this failure. At times, it has contributed to it. At other times, it has exploited it. But the vulnerability and, perhaps, the small size of the states and state structures remain root causes of violence in the zones of conflict.

Violence assumes a central role in the politics of failing regimes and becomes an accepted means of resolving disputes. Private factions and parties tend to have their own soldiers, as their Western counterparts have their own lawyers and accountants. These non-state military forces include a wide variety of militias, paramilitary structures, and private armies loyal to a political leader, clan, region, or cause. The national army is made up of various combinations of these groups, making them an unstable political coalition rather than a stabilizing factor in the regime. In this atmosphere, a small amount of force can go a long way.

This array of irregular forces produces a violence that is persistent, fast-moving, and fast disappearing. The military units that dominate the scene are well-formed one day, yet melt back into the civilian population the next. Their possession of relatively modern weapons guarantees that the present conflicts will be bloodier than those in the

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6 *ITAR-TASS*, February 29, 1996.

past. These weapons—along with the traditional advantages enjoyed by guerrilla forces—increase the staying power of these forces *vis-à-vis* traditional armies, particularly demoralized ones like the Russian Army. Though these small units may appear amateurish, ill-equipped, or ill-trained in the use of modern equipment, they are perfectly suited to the emerging military environment in which they act.

The impact of these conflicts on the surrounding security environment is quite clear. Regional conflicts are the enemy of political and economic stability. States in the midst of disintegration, civil strife, ethnic conflict, or small wars with their neighbors are unlikely to be vibrant democracies or economic success stories. Moreover, these conflicts impose military burdens even on disinterested neighbors, drawing scarce resources away from political and economic reforms to the military and security spheres.<sup>7</sup> In a political environment in which force is all too common, Russian forces see themselves and are seen by the combatants as a potentially critical factor in the success or failure of local factions. It is difficult for Russian units 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 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.

## THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The core of Eurasia is now open to the outside world. The economic links, transportation patterns, and cultural and linguistic orientations that were sustained by Russian and Soviet domination are already under challenge by alternatives in China, South Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe. Russia will never be a marginal country for the new states of the former USSR, but it is unlikely to enjoy anything like its current advantages in the coming years. Even a revived Russia will have to contend with the fact that these states will have a much wider range of options for economic, political, and even security cooperation than are now imagined in Moscow and in the West. These options will come from the outside world.

The projected growth of the economies of China and other Asian states will, early in the next century, change the patterns of world consumption of oil, natural gas, and key natural resources, increasing the importance of sources of these commodities in Central Asia and Russia itself. Asian requirements will stimulate new transportation links, pipelines, and trade patterns. A similar transformation of the states on Russia's western border could well be carried out by the expansion of the European Union, even if none of the new states of the former USSR are immediate candidates for membership. If the Visegrad states become members, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and even the Kaliningrad district of Russia will border on countries integrated into Western Europe. The influence of this market will be irresistible.

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7 According to a recent estimate, there are 40,000 Russian troops stationed in Central Asia and 22,000 in the Caucasus. See Jed C. Snyder, "Russian Security Interests on the Southern Periphery," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 6, No. 12 (December 1994), p. 548. This figure does not include the approximately 40,000 or more troops sent to Chechnya in December 1994, of which 20,000 to 30,000 remain.



However, it is the changes in political and military power that could have the greatest consequences. China is likely to emerge in the next decade as a full-fledged world power. Its power is waxing as Russia's contracts. Over time, China will bring serious economic and demographic pressure to bear on Central Asia and the Russian Far East. The sheer size of the Chinese economy and the dynamism of its development are likely to be much more important factors in the development of Siberia and the Russian Far East than regional economic initiatives from Moscow.

NATO expansion is already changing the security orientations of the states of Central Europe. Though a fact little understood in the West, the inclusion of Poland in NATO inevitably creates Western interests in—and increased interaction with—the bordering states of the Baltics, Belarus, and Ukraine. For Russia, the big test will be whether it sees these new interactions in old-fashioned, zero-sum terms or understands they are the inevitable consequence of a more integrated world which Russia, too, wants to join.

The states of Central Asia will also be shaped by Islamic influences from the rim of Eurasia and inevitably will become a part of the Islamic world. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and other Islamic states of the region will become bigger players in the economics, politics, and potentially the security of these countries. There will be no wholesale shift away from Russia. There likely will be no new ties formed as an alliance against Russia. More likely, Russia's weakening grip will be supplemented in a thousand ways by other regional and global powers. For some states of Central Asia, these outside powers could pose dangers of their own which will keep them looking to Moscow. Others see their future success dependent on expanding their ties beyond the former USSR. This process could well be accelerated by Russia's inability to fulfill its existing obligations and ambitions in the South. Where outside countries like China or Iran now see the utility of Russia's exerting a stabilizing influence on the internal and external developments of these new states, if Russia's influence is weak or nonexistent, these outside countries may see the utility of adopting a more assertive posture in the region.

Farther out, along the rim of Eurasia, the end of U.S.-Soviet rivalry has left a vacuum for the states of this region to fill. Russia (and the United States) must deal with the rise of middle powers in this area. Though this problem is obscured from view by Russia's preoccupation with conflicts in the militarily weaker states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, these powers just beyond the borders of the former USSR are modernizing their military forces with advanced conventional systems, long-range missiles, and even nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Regional conflicts between these powers could well include the threat of, or even the use of, these weapons. The rimlands could well give rise to ambitious powers, with significant military capabilities, that would cast a shadow inward over the core of Eurasia—as well as outward over sea lanes vital to the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

This brief discussion could do no more than offer a rough sketch of the three trends at work reshaping the Eurasian security environment. These three trends do not, by themselves, make peace or war. They are merely processes at work reallocating power in Eurasia to reflect existing economic, political, and military strengths and weaknesses. These trends do not lead inevitably to disaster. On the contrary, properly understood, they could help anchor the states of the former USSR—and Russia in par-

ticular—in the more positive economic developments of the outside world by demonstrating the end of the viability of the Russian imperial tradition. But they could also generate strategic surprises and shocks, particularly for a Russia accustomed to seeing itself—and being seen—as an influential power. Nothing is as yet written in stone, except that these processes will continue reshaping Eurasia and challenging diplomats, generals, and leaders to fashion policies that make those patterns conducive to prosperity, stability, and reform.

For the U.S., this “revolution” seems a world away, involving countries many would rather ignore. Yet if it truly reshapes the flow and balance of power throughout Eurasia, there will be serious implications for the U.S. and its allies in East Asia, the Middle East, and Central Europe. The emerging linkages between the formerly closed USSR and regions of clear and unambiguous U.S. national interest will inevitably make this revolution a preoccupation of U.S. policymakers and military planners. The emancipation of the states of the Eurasian rimland from the constraints imposed by the U.S.-Soviet rivalry will present its own set of challenges as these states pursue their regional ambitions and upgrade their military capabilities to support those ambitions. On a host of issues—including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, unstable regional balances of power, and theater and strategic missile defenses—the revolution in Eurasian military affairs could well create new common ground for the U.S. and Russia to explore. It would require both sides to travel a considerable distance from the current tensions in the U.S.-Russian relationship. Most of all, it would require Russia to understand and accept the fact of this ongoing revolution and for the U.S. to see clearly how deeply this revolution will remake the economic and political geography, not only of the former USSR, but of Eurasia as a whole.

# STRATEGIC OVEREXTENSION: A RECIPE FOR FAILURE? NOTES ON RUSSIAN SECURITY POLICY<sup>8</sup>

*Stephen Blank*

**A**lthough few Russian elites admit it, the real threat to Russia stems from undemocratic, lawless, violent, and irresponsible government. This situation has been accompanied by a return to imperialistic "great power" rhetoric and goals that evoke the last century's Realpolitik. Accordingly, the disparity between Russian national objectives and Russia's real resources is the greatest factor threatening Eurasian stability.

Some believe that the rhetoric of reintegrating the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) around Russia is more pose or posture than operative goal. However, elite institutions and policymakers constantly invoke it as the main policy goal. Presidential Decree No. 940, issued on September 14, 1995, stated this and directed the entire state apparatus to carry out the fundamental task of reintegration. While this has not succeeded, Russian bureaucrats have acted, especially in economics, towards this goal. Kazakhstan's Deputy Premier, N. K. Isingarín, chairman of the CIS Integration Committee, observed that Russian bureaucrats try to restore union in a Soviet style. They forget that the empire is over, and they entertain the common belief in Moscow that the CIS states are artificial states. And while the CIS has utterly failed to integrate, this stems as much from the cupidity of Russian institutions, CIS members' resistance, and the costs of integration which force second thoughts whenever a real attempt to integrate is made.

Disturbing examples of Russia's coercive efforts to unify the CIS include its continuing military intervention in Moldova in defiance of the Helsinki treaty, Russian military intervention in Georgia, the coups that Moscow fomented in Azerbaijan, the blackmailing of Central Asian states and Azerbaijan over energy projects, Russian governmental and intelligence efforts to foment unrest in Crimea against Ukraine, and the decree of 1994 on Russians abroad that outlines a state policy evoking 19th century imperialism's claim of extraterritoriality in defense of Russians or Russian speakers abroad. Moscow regularly attacks the Baltic states, even though every foreign inspection found that Russians are not suffering from apartheid or undue discrimination. These are Russia's policies when it is weak and almost prostrate. What will it do when it recovers if it is not hedged around by internal and externally imposed restraints?

Thus, the continuing belief in Moscow that reintegration is objectively necessary generates an imperial policy, not just a gambit for surmounting an identity crisis by feeling good about Russia. Americans should eschew psychologically driven theories of Russian geo-neuroses, which Henry Kissinger called the therapeutic approach to Russia, to

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<sup>8</sup> This is a shortened and revised version of a paper presented to the Conference on the Future of Russia, held in Paris, France, on September 9-10, 1996. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.



explain Moscow's policy. After all, Russia has had 400 years of empire, so that imperial policy is not a surprise. It would be surprising if Russia was not pursuing that policy.

But now several very disturbing factors pertain to this well-established policy. CIS reintegration does not just gratify an imperial urge or duplicate traditional policies of creating a zone of buffer states or a sphere of influence. Rather, Yeltsin's decree and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov's mandate expressly state that this policy will counter centrifugal trends within Russia. A major rationale of reintegration is the ancient imperialist hope to divert the population from domestic demands by foreign aggrandizement. This alone should alert analysts or Russia's partners.

This rationale illustrates the regime's fundamental strategic irresponsibility. As during Nicholas II's rule (which it resembles in far too many ways), the government pursues a ruinous strategic overextension and foreign intervention. If this is added to the elites' belief that Moscow has an objective mandate that justifies its efforts to undermine its neighbors' integrity and sovereignty, it becomes obvious that Russia's instability and irresponsibility have international repercussions.

A second concern is over what Russia gained from reintegration. Arguably, Russia's peacemaking or peace enforcement operations in the North Caucasus have stopped those wars and the one in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But Russia's intervention has aggravated, not stopped, the war in Tajikistan, which shows no sign of going away. In the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, a frozen instability has resulted; i.e., no war but no peace. Russia is now the regional gendarme which must police these endless conflicts when its military budget and capability have collapsed. How can Russia effectively police a region when its Defense Minister, former general Igor Rodionov, correctly announced that not one regiment can conduct combat operations and that, due to massive government arrears to the army, it was a miracle that a coup or mutiny did not break out?

Moreover, how can Russia maintain these forces in place indefinitely? This is no recipe for stabilizing Russia's South, the CIS, or Russia itself. Indeed, the quest for hegemony over the CIS precludes an effective multilateral conflict resolution mechanism there. Russia alone must shoulder that burden which it cannot even accomplish at home in Chechnya. Russia's internal political rivalries weaken its ability to enforce conflict resolution, peacemaking, or peace enforcement in the CIS. Instead, in an age of ethnopolitical mobilization and a revolution in information technologies, this policy ensures long-term strife, if not the worst kinds of war. Ruining Russia to save the empire does not answer current security challenges. Nor will Russian economic power alone colonize the CIS. Russia cannot support itself by its own means. Nor can it take on the CIS's economic burdens or compete with world capital. Trade figures show that CIS members are decisively integrating into the world economy, but not Russia. While Russia will remain a major player throughout the area, exclusivity is beyond it for a long time and fundamentally endangers Russian security.

Finally, Yeltsin's rule represents the first act in the post-Soviet record. But it is a failed rule and has led too often to violent and irresponsible policies. Unless these failures are overcome, Russia may yet fulfill Chekhov's observation that if a rifle is hanging on the stage in Act I, it will be used in Act II.

# MILITARY PLURALISM AND THE CRISIS OF RUSSIAN MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM: REFLECTIONS OF A MILITARY HISTORIAN

*Jacob W. Kipp, Ph.D.*

The Russian armed forces are in a serious, protracted crisis. For five years, the world has watched Russia try to bring order to the military that it inherited from the Soviet Union. Talk of military reform and restructuring gave way to cynicism and distrust of the government. Russian troops fought and lost a war on Russian territory. Now the new leadership at the Ministry of Defense—especially Minister of Defense Igor Rodionov and General Viktor Samsonov, Chief of the General Staff—have set out on a new attempt at military reform, even as they proclaim the intensity, diversity, and seriousness of the crisis within the armed forces. Thanks to the relative openness of Russian society and the existence of a wide range of military-to-military contacts, we have a very good sense of the crisis within the armed forces of the Ministry of Defense and the efforts to deal with their problems. This is a distinct product of the existing transparency associated with Russia's political transformation.

At the same time, it is important to note that other trends affect the condition of the Russian military. While one of the anticipated results of Russia's transformation was the demilitarization of state and society, in fact a very different trend can be discerned: the appearance of more and more military and paramilitary formations belonging to various agencies outside the Ministry of Defense, which gives Russia multiple militaries and a state system of control over these forces that could be characterized as military pluralism. The issue of civilian control over these militaries is one of the most important for the sustainment of Russian democracy and sovereignty.

## THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES: A PARADOX

The Russian armed forces are today in many ways a paradox. First, they are not the Soviet armed forces of the Cold War in terms of either quantity or quality and do not pose a serious military threat to Russia's neighbors. At the same time, they occupy a core position in Russian society and can be a force for either stability or disorder. Russia inherited the bulk of the Soviet armed forces, but with only half of the population base (150 million). In sheer numbers, the Russian Army, excluding Border Guards and Internal Troops, has billets for about a third (1.7 million) of the 5 million men who made up the Soviet Army. Estimates of actual personnel in service in the Russian Army and Navy are between 1.2 and 1.5 million, for a personnel shortfall of 500,000 to 200,000.

The overall number of men in uniform is, however, much higher. Current estimates on the manpower of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs put its troop strength at 264,000 and that of the Border Guards at 210,000.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Fyodor Bobrov, "Silovoy sektor," *Novoe vremya*, No. 13, March 1996, p. 13.

Indeed, as the personnel of the armed forces have been steadily cut since 1992, “the personnel of other force structures increased: the Federal Border Guard Service, Internal Troops, Emergency Situations Ministry, Federal Agency for Government Liaison and Federal Road Construction Department.”<sup>10</sup> The present Secretary of the Security Council, Ivan Rybkin, recently put the figure for men in uniform at 4.5 million under arms. Rybkin goes on to suggest that Russia’s military pluralism has created chaos: “the lack of organization is incredible.”<sup>11</sup>

The Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs began to expand in the last years of *perestroika* as unrest developed in the periphery republics, grew greatly since August 1991, and especially grew after the confrontation between President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament in October 1993. Valery Borisenko, in an early 1996 press report, stated that General Anatoliy Kulikov now commands 29 divisions and 15 brigades, a force that would seem to rival the Ground Forces of the Ministry of Defense in size, if not combat capabilities.<sup>12</sup> The current numerical strength of the Internal Troops is about 264,000 men.

Within the Army itself, the Ground Forces now have an authorized strength of 670,000 but include only about 430,000 men at present. The ratio of officers to men in the Ground Forces has reached 1:2, reflecting both officer retention during force downsizing and serious and persistent recruiting problems. Within the armed forces (Army and Navy), there are about 1,800 general officers, or about one general officer for every 833 enlisted men. However, the total number of generals now in service is closer to 4,800.<sup>13</sup>

Over 70 percent of those subject to conscription now are eligible for draft deferments. The quality of conscripts has also declined. Only 76 percent of the conscripts in 1993 had a high school education, compared with 93 percent in 1988. To supplement the shortfall of conscripts and to provide experienced personnel in key technical positions, the armed forces have begun to use contract troops for extended service. However, a contract soldier costs six to seven times as much as a conscript, and the Duma recently ordered the total number of contract soldiers cut by 80,000 from the current 350,000 now serving in the Ground Forces.<sup>14</sup> As a result of this cut and the increased manpower requirements of the war in Chechnya, the Duma extended the term of conscript service to two years and imposed an additional six months on the service time of those already drafted on an 18-month tour. Whether these measures will solve the Russian armed forces’ manpower problems remains open to debate. With regard to manpower for the war in Tajikistan, General Andrey Nikolaev, Commander in Chief of the Border Guards, recently pointed out that the Russian contingent has been kept quite small and professional in composition. Of the 18,000 Border Guards serving in Tajikistan, 12,000 are native Tajiks and another 2,000 are troops from Kyrgyzstan,

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10 *Nezavisimoe voyennoe obozrenie*, No. 11, June 11, 1996, p. 3.

11 *Rossiyskie vesti*, November 29, 1996, p. 2.

12 Valery Borisenko, “Gendarmarie or Army?” *Moscow News*, No. 9, February 15-21, 1996, p. 3. The Internal Troops are—in their armaments, organization, and training—a gendarmerie. If they must engage in heavy combat, as was the case in Chechnya, tank and artillery subunits of the ground forces are attached to their units.

13 *Ibid.* In the Russian case, the term “Army” embraces all four other branches: Air Forces, Air Defense Forces, Strategic Rocket Forces, and Ground Forces.

14 Borisenko, “Gendarmarie or Army?” p. 3.



Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. There are no conscripts among the Russian contingent there, only long-term non-commissioned officers (NCOs), contract soldiers, and officers.<sup>15</sup>

## CAPABILITIES OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES

Russia's economic crisis has meant a budget crisis for the Russian state and a shortfall in Russia's defense budget. The lack of funding has, in turn, translated into a lack of funds for training activities; for instance, a shortage of fuel to conduct normal training activities in the Air Force and Army Aviation is to the point where many pilots are not getting sufficient hours to maintain basic flight proficiency, much less advanced combat skills. Over the last four years, there has been a significant trend to increase the utilization of troops for non-military duties, including construction and farming. Officer morale reached new lows. *Dedovshchina* (hazing), cases of absences without leave (AWOL), and crime are on the rise. Procurement of weapons is now at levels far below those of the 1980s. Armor acquisitions fell from over 2,000 per year in the 1980s to 40 tanks in 1994. Procurement of infantry fighting vehicles also fell to a similar degree. Weapons modernization, which was a high-priority goal in the 1980s, had fallen to less than half the force by 1996, and the best estimate is that, if present trends continue, only 5 percent to 7 percent of the force will be modernized by 2005.<sup>16</sup>

The poor combat performance of the Russian armed forces in Chechnya can be attributed to two key problems: the neglect of the military over the last several years and the failure of the military itself to learn the lessons of Afghanistan and adapt to the realities of combat in local wars. Critics of the operations in Chechnya, including the charismatic Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Lebed, warned that Chechnya could easily turn into another Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the situation was much worse. The consistently poor performance of Russian forces in the war in Chechnya, beginning with the original storming of Grozny in January 1995, exposed problems of ineffective troop control, poor training, lack of cooperation among the various militaries, and the lack of discipline. Speaking of the "elite" units that conducted the storming of Grozny, one analysis focused on the chaos, confusion, and hostility within their ranks:

Any meaningful combat in Grozny was conducted by motorized rifle units, naval infantry of the Northern, Baltic and Pacific Fleets, airborne troops, and *spetsnaz*. The soldiers themselves point to the low level of discipline among the Federal forces. Aside from "accidental" firing on their own troops there were many documented incidents of premeditated firing at each other in clarifying various sorts of conflicting relationships. For instance, such incidents occurred during "clarifying relationships" among airborne, naval infantry, and OMON units.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Victor Loshak, "Border Politics," *Moscow News*, No. 8, February 29-March 8, 1996, p. 5.

16 Rob Arnett, "Assessment of Military Capabilities: Russian Ground Forces," presentation to the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, Alexandria, Virginia, January 31, 1996.

17 Russian Information Agency release in English, Moscow, 15:21 GMT, December 13, 1994.

18 N. N. Novichkov, V. Ya. Snegovskiy, A. G. Sokolov, and V. Yu. Shvarev, *Rossiyskie Vooruzhennye Sily v chechenskom konflikte: Analiz, itogi, vyvody (Po materialam otkrytoy rossiyskoy i zarubezhnoy pechati)* [The Russian Armed Forces in the Chechen Conflict: Analysis, Results, Conclusions (Based on Materials from the

The Chechen conflict heightened the already high political disaffection of the officer corps from the government and existing order and made the military into an unknown factor during the current political crisis.

After a year of fighting, the facts are that Russian casualties were higher in the first year of fighting in Chechnya than for any year in Afghanistan. General Boris Gromov, the last commander of the Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan, told a press conference in Moscow on February 14, 1996, that Russian casualties in Chechnya for the first four months of 1995 exceeded the highest yearly losses in Afghanistan, which occurred in 1984 when 2,227 Soviet soldiers were killed. Gromov identified two sources of the high casualties: the failure of the Army to learn the lessons of Afghanistan and the negative consequences of "Grachev's loyalty to one person rather than the Army."<sup>19</sup> The successful Chechen assault on Grozny in early August 1996 and the inability of Russian forces to re-take the city further underscored the decline of Russia's military. General Lebed's comments on the troops in Chechnya—comparing them to an armed rabble and not an army—left no doubt that the Russian military was no longer an effective fighting force.

## THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES: COMMAND AND CONTROL

Unlike the Soviet Union, which had an effective system of state and party controls over a unified military establishment throughout most of its history, Yeltsin's Russia inherited from Gorbachev's *perestroika* a system of military control in crisis. It has managed to make that situation worse by creating multiple militaries. These militaries, all nominally subordinated to the President, in fact owe their loyalties to rival bureaucratic-institutional entities involved in a bitter competition for scarce resources and infected by partisan conflict. At the top of the edifice are the power ministries (Defense, Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service, and Border Guards). But there are also many other institutions, agencies, and groups with various armed hosts under their operational control.

The ineffectiveness of Yeltsin's control of the militaries only reinforced the importance of the 1996 presidential elections, because the final winner inherited a sovereign presidency with sufficient power to bring the militaries back under central, unified control.<sup>20</sup> This constitutional situation is one of Boris Yeltsin's own design and reflects the President's distrust (after September-October 1993) of the regular Army's willingness to be used for domestic political purposes. One critic of the military structure under Yeltsin has suggested that the current military structure is "evidence of Russia's transformation into a police state in which every second bayonet at the least is turned inside the country."<sup>21</sup> Professional military observers have noted this trend and have proposed that the existing non-system of control over Russia's multiple militaries be scrapped and replaced with a new centralized system based on a revitalized General Staff.

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*Open Russian and Foreign Press*] (Moscow: Kholveg-Infoglob—Trivola, 1995), p. 69.

19 *OMRI Daily Digest*, Part I, No. 34, February 16, 1996.

20 Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Autumn 1995), pp. 417-422.

21 Borisenko, "Gendarmarie or Army?" p. 3.

During the parliamentary election campaign, General Lebed forged a close political alliance with General-Colonel Igor Rodionov, Chief of the General Staff Academy and head of Lebed's own organization for military reform, the "Honor and Motherland" Movement (*Dvizhenie Chest' I Rodina*). Thanks to Lebed's support, in July Rodionov was appointed Defense Minister to replace the fired Pavel Grachev. General Rodionov is an experienced soldier, a gold metal graduate of the Academy of the General Staff, veteran of Afghanistan, and a serious military theorist. He had a distinguished military career down to the bloody events in Tbilisi in 1989, and in their aftermath was appointed Commandant of the Academy of General Staff in 1990. General Rodionov, a Congress of Russian Communities (*KRO*) candidate for the Duma, had played a prominent role in the writing of the draft military doctrine of 1992 for Russia and outlined *KRO's* military program, in which he stressed the need for preparations for a full range of conflicts against potential and real enemies, and not just local wars and peacekeeping operations, but centralization of control over all military organizations, a revitalized role for the General Staff, and the creation of a "special organ (perhaps within the Security Council) which would be responsible for the defense of the country, military security, and the conduct of military reform."<sup>22</sup>

In July 1996, Yeltsin created the Defense Council but put Yuriy Baturin, the former Secretary of the Security Council, in charge. He transferred to the Defense Council the vexing problem of military control and gave it responsibility for senior personnel matters. The Chief of the General Staff became a member of this body. This development has the complete support of Minister of Defense Rodionov:

The reformation of defense requires the most precise synchronization and coordination of the efforts of all the "power" structures. It would be unwise to reduce the managerial structures, which duplicate services and general positions, in one department, while allowing the same structures to grow in another. This is the way the Defense Council is to play the first fiddle at the present stage of reform. It is to be the brain trust and coordinator of decision-making on the entire complex of defense issues.<sup>23</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF THE POWER MINISTRIES

The maneuvering among power ministers late in Yeltsin's first term gave a distinctive coloration to the crisis of Russian civil-military relations during the war in Chechnya. Generals of the Army Pavel Grachev (Minister of Defense), Anatoliiy Kulikov (Minister of the Interior), Mikhail Barsukov (Federal Security Service), and Andrei Nikolaev (Border Guards), and General-Major Aleksandr Korzhakov (head of the Presidential Security Service) owed their rapid rise to President Boris Yeltsin. They were loyal to him to varying degrees and knew that their personal fates depended on the outcome of the upcoming presidential elections. They all were engaged in a conspicuous jockeying for position in a very unstable political atmosphere. Differences in pay and benefits among the various militaries further contributed to dissatisfactions and rivalries among the militaries. General Kulikov, who also served as Commander in Chief for Chechnya from February to May 1995, in February 1996 proposed the nation-

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<sup>22</sup> Igor Rodionov, "Kakaya armiya nam nuzhna," *Zavtra*, No. 44 (100), November 1995, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Nezavisimoye voyennoe obozrenie*, November 28, 1996.



alization of Russia's fledgling commercial banks to raise money to cover the debts of the cash-starved Army and Interior Troops, a radical shift in state economic policy toward a Soviet-style economy.<sup>24</sup>

These rivalries reflected profound differences over the nature of the security threats to Russia. General Barsukov, who previously served as commander of the guard for Lenin's tomb, while running the operation to free hostages held by Chechen irregulars at Pervomaiskoe in Dagestan declared: "the Chechen can only be a murderer, or a robber, or at least a thief. There is no other Chechen."<sup>25</sup> The statement set off a wave of indignation among supporters of human rights, since it seemed to suggest a justification for indiscriminate attacks on all Chechens. The General Staff remains weak under General of the Army Mikhail Kolesnikov, and the National Security Council cannot guarantee that presidential directives will be carried out by the power ministries. This applies to normal business and in crisis situations. In November 1995, President Yeltsin ordered the removal of General-Colonel V. V. Vorobyev, then Chief of the Main Directorate of Military Budget and Finances, "for crude financial violations and the unsatisfactory fulfillment of government decrees." But Minister Grachev did not act on his Commander in Chief's order for two and a half months.<sup>26</sup>

Even within the armed forces subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, there was compelling evidence of weak central control, political competition for authority, and blatant partisanship. The political posturings of Admiral Baltin, the Commander of the Black Sea Fleet, and General Podkolzin, Commander of Airborne Forces, during the recent parliamentary elections are obvious evidence of the problem. Baltin's removal from his post in February and Grachev's move to radically reduce the size of Podkolzin's command and transfer four independent brigades and two divisions to their resident military districts only suggest that these struggles will continue.

Russian journalists suggested that the quarrel over the re-subordination of airborne units was actually a matter of making the force available to President Yeltsin in case there was a need to impose a state of emergency in connection with the June-July 1996 presidential elections.<sup>27</sup> Aleksandr Lebed, then a recently elected member of the Duma, presidential candidate, and former airborne general officer, protested the move.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it should be noted that senior officers in the Ministry of Defense joked that Yeltsin's decisive electorate would come from the interior troops and police should the President choose to cancel the June elections.<sup>29</sup> Lebed's defense of the Airborne Forces from proposed cuts in the fall of 1996 apparently brought about an open break between Minister Rodionov, who had proposed such cuts, and Lebed. This was the backdrop to Minister Kulikov's move against Lebed in October 1996, leading to his removal from the Security Council.

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24 *OMRI Daily Digest*, Part I, No. 30, February 12, 1996.

25 Jamestown Foundation, *Monitor: A Daily Briefing on the Post-Soviet States*, Vol. II, No. 17 (January 25, 1996).

26 *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, February 15, 1996, p. 2.

27 *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 27, 1996, p. 1.

28 *OMRI Daily Digest*, Part I, No. 18, January 23, 1996.

29 Borisenko, "Gendarmarie or Army?" p. 3.

## THE CHECHEN CRISIS AND ALEKSANDR LEBED

There was much speculation about Aleksandr Lebed's emergence as the champion of peace in Chechnya. Some accused him of political opportunism. His maneuvers were only part of an elaborate chess game positioning Lebed to checkmate his rivals in the Kremlin by delivering peace at a time of a weak and absentee President. But Lebed did not just bring peace to Chechnya. He managed to get the Chechen leadership to accept a five-year delay in a vote on independence in exchange for the withdrawal of Russian military forces.

Some commentators compared Lebed's peace settlement with the Russian Navy's defeat at Tsushima, a national humiliation. But given what the many senior commanders recognized as the deteriorating condition of the armed forces, Lebed's settlement may be best seen as an effort to save the Army from disintegration. General Lev Rokhlin, a veteran of Afghanistan and Chechnya and the Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, presented a stark portrait of a military in the process of coming apart. Rokhlin, who had supported Rodionov's candidacy for Defense Minister, spoke of the explosive situation in the Army. He recited all the well-known problems that were contributing to the decline of morale and suggested that action by the government to ameliorate these conditions had best be speedy:

With each passing day more and more servicemen openly express dissatisfaction with their difficult material situation and indignation at the state's failure to meet its guarantees on their social protection and the protection of members of their families. There have already been cases of open protest and even the formation of strike committees.<sup>30</sup>

Rokhlin went on to lament the empire-building of Russia's multiple militaries and called for immediate actions to resolve the budgetary underfunding that drives the collapse of soldiers' morale.

Only a week later, Minister Rodionov echoed the same sentiments. He placed the crisis of the Russian Army on the same scale as that of the Soviet Army in the post-Civil War period when a 5 million-man army was reduced ten-fold to 500,000. He stated flatly that Russia did not have "a single regiment which is capable of beginning military operations given two or three hours' notice, or of re-deploying using either motor, rail or air transport."<sup>31</sup> The Minister outlined a plan to replace numerous "paper/flag" divisions with 12 that could in fact be supplied, paid, and trained. In terms of investment priorities, Rodionov played down procurement and emphasized research and development for the 21st century. His key concern, however, was personnel. He tied increased funding to the fate of the officer corps:

We must save our officer corps, in the first place. In the past, Russia's officers were regarded as its priceless asset. Other countries of the world have also respected their officers in the past, continuing to do so even

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30 Nikolai Sautin, "Those Who Light Fires Near Powder Kegs," *Rabochaya tribuna*, August 23, 1996; distributed by *Johnson's Russia List Archive*, an electronic archive.

31 Alexander Zhilin, "Igor Rodionov: Cutbacks in Armed Forces a Must," *Moscow News*, No. 32, August 21-27, 1996, p. 3.

today. Therefore we must save our officer corps no matter what. Believe me, this country will need its officers more than once.<sup>32</sup>

While admitting to crime and corruption as an increasing problem, Rodionov set his goal as preserving the professional nucleus of the officer corps, whom he described as pushed to the limits of endurance:

However, one should keep in mind that the absolute majority of our officers now serve on the verge of the breaking point. They don't receive their pay grades, which are guaranteed by a multitude of laws and resolutions, for many months in a row. Mind you, such pay grades constitute the only means of existence for most officers and their families. On the other hand, the law expressly forbids our servicemen to work on the side. Terrible as it may seem, but cases of undernourishment are now being registered in many garrisons, what with officers' families withering on the vine. This is simply outrageous. Not a single country of the world can "boast" similar developments. Any foreign officer and soldier will refuse to serve in such atrocious conditions.<sup>33</sup>

The disengagement in Chechnya is directly tied to the problem of re-stabilization of the armed forces and a necessary precondition for military reform. Russia's civil-military relations are at a critical juncture. Either the government will recognize the profound need for new concordance among the military, the political elite, and the citizenry, or it will face the Army.

## LEBED'S FALL AND THE FATE OF MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

Peace may be the most important factor in the ability of Minister Rodionov to deliver on his plans for military reform, but that process will also require an end to Russia's multiple militaries and their intense competition for scarce resources. Russia's military professionals are in a state of deep unrest. General Kulikov's charges that General Lebed was plotting a coup, while outlandish in its details, reinforces the image of a deeply politicized military pluralism. The circulation within the General Staff and subsequent publication of an open letter to Minister Rodionov with an openly hostile tone toward the government and the Minister led to the firing of General Kolesnikov and his replacement as Chief of the General Staff by General Samsonov in October 1996. The recent firing and then non-firing of General Semenov, the Commander of Ground Forces, for conduct dishonoring his uniform provides only the most recent manifestation of disarray among Russia's senior military leadership.

Significant reform to overcome the militaries' many problems will require a fundamental restructuring of the Russian national security system as it has evolved under President Yeltsin. It will demand a considerable period of time and stability. Rodionov recently made exactly this point:

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32 *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, August 29, 1996.

33 *Ibid.*



There are grounds to state that Russia has several independent armies. However, the managerial functions of the General Staff cover only the Army and the Navy. There are other "armed forces" beyond the control of the Defense Ministry. It has become a kind of fashion in Russia for many ministries to maintain their own military units. If we do not realize right away and do not agree that this sphere needs urgently to be reformed, our defense expenditures will grow considerably. What is more, all the military formations should be under the control of the General Staff.<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Russia's armed forces need peace and professionalism to restore their stability and to create a climate for their effective subordination to lawful civil authority. Military pluralism, especially in conjunction with the conduct of armed conflicts within Russia and in the so-called near abroad, represents a significant danger not only to Russia's struggling, semi-democratic order, but also to the general peace and stability of Eurasia. The West, as Chris Donnelly of NATO has asserted, has a profound interest in the demilitarization of Russian society, and that demilitarization can probably be best achieved by the re-establishment of a competent, affordable military guided by military professionalism under effective civilian direction. Minister Rodionov's recent retirement from the active-duty military and his continued service as a civilian in the post of Minister of Defense may be a harbinger of both reform and enhanced civilian control. It remains to be seen whether Russia's other militaries will also be brought under effective civilian supervision. With the last Russian unit out of Chechnya, Rodionov may have an opportunity for reform.

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34 *Nezavisimoye voyennoe obozrenie*, November 28, 1996.