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RESERVE FORCES IN THE SOVIET MILITARY

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JUN 28 1990
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BY

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2 APRIL 1990



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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM	
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER	
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Reserve Forces in the Soviet Military		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Study Project	6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) LTC F. Edward Jones, TC		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS	
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Same		12. REPORT DATE 2 April 1990	13. NUMBER OF PAGES 31
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified	
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)			

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Reserve Forces, Soviet Military, USSR, Military Organization, Foreign Policy, Readiness (JG)
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) When the Soviet military complex is examined in depth in light of the current transformations that are taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a question is sometimes asked; "Is there really an effective reserve force structure in the Soviet military?" This study seeks to examine some of the areas that currently affect the Soviet military and its reserve system and then conclude by highlighting a few of the problems that the Soviets will encounter in the years to come.

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RESERVE FORCES IN THE SOVIET MILITARY

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
2 April 1990

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: F. Edward Jones, LTC, TC

TITLE: Reserve Forces in the Soviet Military

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 2 April 1990 **PAGES:** 32 **CLASSIFICATION:** Unclassified

When the Soviet military complex is examined in depth in light of the current transformations that are taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a question is sometimes asked: "Is there really an effective reserve force structure in the Soviet military?" This study seeks to examine some of the areas that currently affect the Soviet military and its reserve system and then conclude by highlighting a few of the problems that the Soviets will encounter in the years to come.

Is there a Viable Reserve Force in the Soviet Military?

When the Soviet military complex is examined in depth in light of the current transformations that are taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a question is sometimes asked: "Is there really an effective reserve force structure in the Soviet military?" To address this issue, one needs to examine a number of areas that currently affect the Soviet military and its reserve system to arrive at a conclusive answer to address the above question.

BACKGROUND

On 7 December 1988, in a speech before the United Nations, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced a surprising program of unilateral military force withdrawals and reductions - reductions that could have a significant impact on the structure of the Soviet military. He said that by 1991 the Soviet Union would:

- **Withdraw six tank divisions from East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and disband them;**
- **From the same countries, he would withdraw assault**

landing troops and several other formations and units, including assault bridging units with their weapons and combat equipment;

- Soviet forces in these countries would be reduced by 50,000 men and 5,000 tanks (This was later increased to 5,300 tanks by including tank withdrawals from Poland);
- Soviet forces in Eastern Europe and the Western Soviet Union would be reduced by 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems and 800 combat aircraft; and
- Soviet forces remaining in Eastern Europe would be reorganized so that their structure would become clearly defensive.

Along with the above, Mr. Gorbachev also said that the Soviet Union would reduce the overall size of its armed forces by 500,000 men and would make reductions in the Eastern USSR as well.¹

Early Period

Prior to the Red Army, men in the Tsar's Imperial Army served for a period of three years and then were discharged into a reserve category until age 39. In this category the former soldiers

received some peacetime training, but not much (approximately 4 months total). What training they did receive was of poor quality. At age 39 they served in the next tier of reserve status until age 43. In this category they received no training of any kind. After age 43 they had no further military obligation.

In 1936, the draft age of the Soviet male was reduced from 21 to 19 to accommodate two areas of concern for the young draftee. First, it allowed the draftee to get his military service out of the way prior to marriage. Soviets at that time had a tendency to marry early, and trying to raise a family while in the service was a tremendous burden to achieve, if not impossible. Secondly, it allowed the draftee to complete his military service before embarking on his respective career or studies.

Not all men served on active duty with the Red Army. There were two basic tiers in which he could serve. The first tier was the active service and first category reserves; the second was the second category reserves.

In 1938 there were approximately 2,000,000 men in the Red Army. Approximately 700,000 men were in each part of the above described first tier (active service and first category reserve). The remainder, because of various reasons, i.e. filled quotas, etc., spent their service in the reserve of the second tier (second category reserve) and served up to the age of 50.

In the fifteen years between the reorganization of the Red Army, 1925-26 and 1940, some 11,000,000 men had the equivalent of basic training and another 11,000,000 received small amounts of

military training.

This does not take into account those who received military "pre-army" training from army instructors in the schools and various clubs. In most schools, two hours were set aside weekly for elementary and preparatory military training for students of thirteen and over. It is asserted that close to the entire population received some sort of military training. It is estimated that this prepared over 75,000,000 people (men and women) for some sort of military assignment.¹

Military Service

For the male citizen, service in the Soviet military is mandatory. They have no choice; there are no options. If the Soviet male looks upon military service as something unavoidable and something to get behind him as quickly as possible, he was dealt a small favor in 1967.

Just prior to 1967, the Soviet armed forces determined that at the present rate of induction of individuals, the armed forces would far exceed the numbers required to fill vacancies. A new law entitled Law on Universal Military Obligation was passed that year to resolve this situation. The new law did basically two things. First, it reduced the obligation by one year for draftees, requiring two years service instead of three for all individuals except those being drafted into the naval service. Those going into the naval service had their term of service reduced from four

years to three years. Secondly, the law reduced the draftable age for the Soviet male from nineteen to eighteen years of age and allowed only a few deferments.³

There is another reason in reducing the length of service for the Soviet male. As some Soviet military leaders have observed, the shorter the period of service, the greater the number of individuals cycled through the military. These individuals will possess valuable military training and when discharged, will go into the reserve providing a tremendous manpower pool.⁴

In 1989, as a result of the downsizing of the Soviet forces, a USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Decree has been issued changing the law on military conscription. Now day students at higher educational institutions have been granted a deferment of Army conscription until the completion of their education. The important point to make here is that a deferment of conscription into active military service is now granted to students at all day higher educational institutions, rather than just some of them, as has been the case in the past. Also, graduates of these institutions and secondary specialized academic institutions, who have undergone instruction in military departments and training courses with the troops and who have passed examinations in military training, will be given the title of officers in reserve without undergoing active military service. The new law provides for the period of active military service being reduced to 1 year for soldiers, seamen, sergeants, and ranking NCO's with a higher education.⁵

There are two organizations in the Soviet structure that have a major impact in the training and mobilization of the Soviet armed forces (this includes notifying those who are to be drafted and those who will be allowed a deferment). They are: (1) the military commissariat; and (2) the DOSAFF (The Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and the Fleet).

Throughout the Soviet Union, military commissariats, controlled by the General Staff of the Ministry of Defense, are local agencies of military administration. Military Commissariats exist at every level of government within the military district. Each of the Soviet republics has a military commissariat usually headed by a general major, who is the military commissar of the republic. Below the republic level, commissariats are usually commanded by a Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel, depending on the importance of the commissariat. They consist of a council of local officials who form a commission, meeting at regular intervals to discuss the implementation of policy, to resolve problems, and to arbitrate in draft deferment requests.⁶ They are charged with:

- (1) putting into effect measures pertaining to preparing for and conducting troop mobilization;
- (2) calculating and registering human and economic resources in the interests of the Armed Forces;
- (3) preparing youth for carrying out military service;
- (4) conducting call-ups for active military service and training assemblies;
- (5) carrying out other defense measures envisaged by the Law of General Military Obligation;
- (6) selecting and nominating candidates for military schools, training assemblies, and courses for reserve officers and also for the positions of praporshchiki and michmen (warrant Officers) in troops units; and
- (7) examining and resolving complaints and applications of call-ups, reservists, servicemen, disabled veterans, and members of their families and families of deceased servicemen.

For those individuals seeking a deferment, there are basically

three types of educational deferments: high school, college, and specialized secondary. The high school deferment is designed to avoid drafting males who for one reason or another have not yet finished high school by age 18. Eligibility for the high school deferment ends after age 20. Youths who take advantage of this deferment are not eligible for the reduced terms of service allowed college graduates. The net impact of the high school deferment is assumed to be very small. Perhaps 1-5 percent of the 18-year old males use it to postpone service for an average of two years.

A second type of educational deferment is provided for full-time students of higher educational institutions that are on the list of colleges and universities authorized for such deferments by the Council of Ministers. Students who are granted the college deferment must be continuously enrolled in an authorized program from their first year of study, and the deferment is contingent upon the student maintaining a good standing.

A third type of educational deferment covers students of specialized secondary schools that are on the list of authorized institutions and who are enrolled in a reserve officer training program. The combined effect of the college and specialized secondary deferment may affect 1-10 percent of the 18-26-year-old males.

Regardless of the actual percentage who receive college or specialized secondary deferments in a given year, not all young men who receive a deferment actually escape conscript service. Some are enrolled in a reserve officer training program while in school.

Although all such individuals are exempt from conscript service, an undetermined number of them--particularly those in engineering fields--are later called to active duty as reserve officers for periods ranging from two to three years. Those who are not part of a reserve officer training program will theoretically be eligible for the draft after completion of studies, although their tours of service are reduced to eighteen or twenty-four months. However, repeated educational deferments may serve to postpone eligibility for the draft until the individual is in his twenties, by which time he may have acquired a wife and two children, thus qualifying for a family deferment.

Another category of exemption from service as conscripts are those who are accepted by one of the 150 officer commissioning schools. The proportion of draft-age males who avoid conscript service by attending officer commissioning schools could vary from 2 to 10 percent.¹

Reserve Service

As required by Soviet law, draftees, once they have completed their two year obligation of universal service, are automatically placed into the reserves and are assigned to a reserve category depending on their age until they reach the age of fifty. At age fifty they no longer have a military service obligation. Soviet reservists are not organized into ready reserve units as are some U.S. reservists. They do not perform reserve duty on a monthly

basis with units. Their status is probably most similar to the U.S. Army IRR (Individual Ready Reserve) program. The IRR consists of a pool of soldiers who have completed a specific period of active service and are released from active duty and put into the reserve pool. The Soviet reservist, unlike the U.S. reservists, is subject to call-ups at various times. See table 1.

TABLE 1
Reserve Service for Soviet Soldiers and Sailors

Category	Service Over One Year (First Class)	Service Less Than One Year (Second Class)
First Category (to age 35)	Reserve call-up four times, three months each	Reserve call-up six times, three months each (after twelve months total service, transferred to first class)
Second Category (35 to 45)	Reserve call-up one to two times, two months each	
Third Category (45 to 50)	Reserve call-up time, one month	

Source: Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott, The Armed Forces of the USSR (Westview Press, Bolder, Colorado, 1982), P. 322.

Organization of the Reserve

The most significant aspects of the Soviet reserve system are: (1) the positive cost impact of maintaining such a system; and (2) the flexibility the Soviets achieve by either increasing or decreasing the size of the armed forces quickly as the situation dictates.

The Soviet ground forces are not only made up of the standing army but also a very large cadre army. The Soviets have in this

cadre system not only regiments and battalions but also divisions. Generally these cadre units are staffed with the various commanders and their staffs and a few conscripts to move vehicles around the motor pool and to do odd and sundry jobs. For example, take an atypical regiment that could have between 2200 to 2400 men (the total depends on the particular unit and the particular mission) authorized for wartime configuration. For a peacetime configuration the unit could total around 300 to 400 men assigned.

The Soviet Armed Forces have in existence a most efficient means of transferring a formation from "ready" to "cadre" status, i.e. from almost full strength to 15% strength, yet leaving the command structure intact. Thus a division could be reduced to less than a brigade in size, but be capable of expansion to full strength within a matter of weeks in event of necessity.

The exception to cadre units is the nuclear rocket battalions of the Strategic Rocket Force which are kept at full strength.

Every five years, all cadre units deploy with full wartime authorized strength to a designated training area. Most of the unit's vehicles and its equipment are stored in unit depots which are very similar to the United States Army's POMCUS (Prepositioned Material Configured to Unit Sets) sites in Western Europe. However this equipment is not used for the most part except for annual or semi-annual training exercises. Most training is conducted on equipment specifically designed for that task at a particular training area. This is similar to the U.S. Army National Guard and Reserve forces. For the most part, all U.S. Army unit combat equipment, i.e., tanks, personnel carriers, etc., is kept at a depot or training area location in quasi-storage while one or two

pieces of the various pieces of equipment are at the individual unit armory or reserve center for the unit to conduct hands-on training. When the unit deploys for its annual training, usually during the summer months, it draws its unit equipment out of storage and commences its two weeks of training. In most U.S. Army National Guard and Reserve units, each has almost a full complement of wheeled vehicles. They might not be the current issue that is being provided to the active components, but they are serviceable and have an adequate supply of repair parts to keep them running. This is not the case in the Soviet cadre units. Most cadre units have only a handful of wheeled vehicles with the balance in two places. A number of vehicles are in depot storage with the difference of those authorized provided by the civilian sector.

As we all know, in the classless society of the Soviet Union every individual is guaranteed a job. In so doing, those individuals that have a job as a truck driver have a dual function. First, they work for whatever organization that their job is associated with. For example, they could be drivers who shuttle machine parts from their factory in Kiev to outlying areas. Second, these drivers are registered with the local civilian transport enterprise (Avtokolonna) who receive requirements from the commissariat for a designated number of trucks for mobilization or a particular military exercise. As these drivers are well trained and are driving a truck that they have driven many times before (civilian trucks are identical to the military version - you

could do a one-for-one exchange and not suffer any decrement of the mission) they work out very well. The commanders who are receiving these drivers with their trucks, know exactly how many vehicles they will receive, where they're coming from, their license numbers, and the driver's name.¹⁰

As Donnelly indicates in his book, Red Banner, many Western analysts feel that the reserve organizations as the Soviets envision them would not be very effective with short periods of training as mentioned above. Donnelly states that these views are not taking into account several important factors:

- Soviet equipment is from model to model very similar. Soldiers trained on small arms made years ago will have little problem in familiarizing themselves with the newer versions. Donnelly feels that a similar comparison could be made with tanks.
- As opposed to the soldier in the United States Army, the soldier in the Soviet army is not expected to be a full rounded soldier. He has learned to do some very limited things while in the service but those things that he has learned to do, he does well.
- When the Soviet formations reach the main battle area, they will be facing NATO forces that are depleted or are reserve forces which have had little time to

prepare and in all probability will not be any better equipped.

- The Soviet view is that in any future war there will almost certainly be a period of heightened diplomatic interaction prior to any belligerency. As the crisis gets closer and closer to armed intervention mobilization will have taken place. Reservists will then have been with their units for a period of time and be somewhat prepared. This notwithstanding, there will have been a large number of reservists who will have been discharged within two years and thus easily assimilated into their units with little or no training necessary. As Donnelly indicates, this will enable the Soviet army to double in size very easily.
- With the Soviet system, allowances can be made for a division filled out with reservists to be related in combat effectiveness to a regular Soviet division and deployed accordingly.¹¹

Readiness

The readiness of the Soviet Ground Force divisions are graded in three different categories.

In Category I there are forty-plus divisions which are

considered combat ready with 75-100 percent of their wartime strengths.

In Category II there are thirty-plus divisions which are at a reduced strength with 50-75 percent of their wartime strengths.

In Category III there are 105-plus divisions which are at a reduced strength of less than 50 percent or are at "cadre" strength.¹²

Reserve Personnel

The number of officers discharged each year from the armed forces and retained on the military register is usually very small in comparison with the mobilization requirements. Therefore, a reserve of younger officers is created in peacetime mainly from several sources: career officers who have been released from active duty; men with higher education who have completed their compulsory military service and probably have received commissions in reserve officer training classes while in school; soldiers with higher or secondary education, who have served on active duty and returned to civilian life; soldiers in the reserve, who receive a higher or specialized secondary education akin to a military specialty; and inductees in the reserve with an eight year education who have served on active duty, and have participated in training for reserve officers and passed the appropriate requirements; and from warrant officers with at least five years' experience who receive an officer rank upon transfer to the

reserves. As in the Tsarist system, reservists can be mobilized for training muster, the number and duration of which are based on their reserve category as described in table 1 above.¹³

Reserve officers can be assigned during peacetime to full active duty for two to three years if they are under thirty years of age. There is no real accurate data available to determine how often this recall is exercised. Both officer and enlisted reserves are often brought back for refresher training during major maneuvers.¹⁴

The option to recall reserve officers for two to three years of active duty is exercised quite frequently. Soviet discussions of training, discipline and other problems of the officer corps make frequent references to cases involving young reserve officers who resent their recall from civilian life. These officers recalled from the reserves for two to three years constitute an appreciable portion of Soviet technical or engineer officers. Their recall from the reserves frequently interrupts a professional engineering career in civil society. Officers with specialties that are in high demand and others who have had no prior active military service are also likely to be called up. The latter are presumably persons in specialized secondary and higher schools who are in the reserve officers training program.

The negative attitudes of these recalled reserve officers does not help the Soviet military establishment, which seeks to encourage reserve officers to stay in the armed forces as professional soldiers.¹⁵

During their required training all reservists receive from their respective factories or institutions half their regular earnings. They can return to their same jobs once released from their required training.¹⁶

There is no rapid "up or out" in the Soviet armed forces comparable to that in the United States armed forces. An example is a Soviet junior lieutenant who can serve in that grade until he reaches the age of forty. As shown in the below table, there are mandatory ages for leaving active duty and going into the reserves and mandatory retirement ages for officers from the reserve as well.

TABLE 2
Mandatory Retirement Ages and Reserve Categories for Officers

	Age Limits			
	Active Duty	Reserve First Category	Reserve Second Category	Reserve Third Category
Junior Lieutenant, Lieutenant, and equivalent	40	40	45	50
Senior Lieutenant, Captain, and equivalent	40	45	50	55
Major and equivalent	45	45	50	55
Lieutenant Colonel and equivalent	45	50	55	60
Colonel and equivalent	50	55	--	60
General Major, General Lieutenant, and equivalent	55	60	--	65
General Colonel, Admiral, and equivalent	60	--	--	65
Women Officers	unknown	--	--	50

Source: Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott, The Armed Forces of the USSR (Westview Press, Bolder, Colorado, 1982), p. 324.

The primary source of trained reserves is the pool of draftees who have served their regular active duty terms and have been discharged into the reserves. The reserve manpower pool is augmented by two other sources: men who have been deferred but who have been classified fit for military service in wartime; and women with medical or other specialist training. It is interesting to note that women with medical, veterinary, or special technical training can be registered and enrolled in the army and navy

reserve, holding regular army officers' ranks and called up during required training periods.¹⁷

Mobilization

As mentioned above, reserve officers under thirty years of age may be called up for two to three years of active duty if their specialties are required. The numbers to be called up annually are determined by the Council of Ministers.

With the specialized training each draftee receives during his two (or three) years of active duty, the approximately 1.8 million men released from the Soviet armed forces each year should be able to become combat-ready in a very short period of time. Many of these individuals, if not all, should have undergone some refresher military training after their release from active duty. Those whose mobilization assignments are in specialized or technical areas will most likely have had refresher training.

Should the Soviet leadership wish to mobilize part of the population for what ever reason, they should be able to contact any or all males of military age within a very short time period. This is made possible by the system as described above, of military commissariat offices and the fact that all Soviet citizens, except for certain categories of farm workers, must possess internal passports. If an individual travels from one part of the country to another and remains for more than a few days his passport must be registered with the local militia. When a worker changes jobs,

he must appear within a specified number of days on the roster of the military commissariat of that location. Although the Soviet system of internal controls over its citizens may be far from perfect, the location and status of almost every adult male within a given area should be known to the local military commissariat office.

Should they want to, the Soviet military could mobilize 2 million to 3 million men in 24 hours; an equivalent number could be called up within a 48 hour period giving a total of men in uniform in a two day period of between 9 million and 11 million men. Given the number of men in the reserves that have had military service within the last five years, the Soviet military could reach a total of 13 million to 14 million men in uniform in less than ten days should they wish to do so.¹⁸

Soviet military mobilization plans involve both filling existing undermanned units and creating new ones. Prerequisites include: a trained manpower reserve; reserve equipment; and a mobilization administration. Of the various branches of the Soviet armed forces, mobilization occurs most extensively in the ground forces and the civil-defense forces.¹⁹

The reserve base and the mobilization system are critical components for enlarging the Soviet armed forces. The commitment to this system stems from a conviction, which the Soviet leadership inherited from its imperial Russian predecessor, that fighting and winning a war requires a mass of trained reservists. Like Tsarist military authorities, Soviet military officials see active duty

training of conscripts as the most effective way of creating the reserve base they feel they need. Therefore, they must maintain large numbers of trained military reservists and a system to call them up and get them where they are needed in event of war or crisis. The requirement for a military force which is both combat ready and capable of expanding through mobilization has a critical influence on Soviet manning policy.¹⁰

The Soviet experience with mobilized reservists also raises questions as to how well the system works on the battlefield. The effectiveness of units manned by reserves probably varies greatly, depending on the proportion of slots designated for reservists to fill, quantity and quality of reserve equipment, how recent the reservists' active duty training was, the time available for refresher training prior to commitment to the battle area, and the rapidity of changes in military technology. A former Soviet officer involved in the mobilization preparations for the Czech invasion noted that artillery, infantry (motorized rifle), and tank units mobilized with significant numbers of reservists - even reservists whose active duty service had taken place ten years before mobilization - were ready for combat after a short training period; but air defense, antitank rocket, and chemical units that were filled up with reservists were not combat-ready, even after four months of intensive training. The Soviet mobilization system does not produce uniformly well-trained, well-equipped, and combat-ready units.¹¹

The biggest benefits of the Soviet system are twofold. First,

it produces the massive standing force the Soviets are convinced they need. Second, the system produces a massive body of reservists to create huge numbers of ground force divisions. Readiness and training levels of divisions created in this way may be low, but the sheer masses of men used effectively (if not efficiently) in World War II, defeated a much better-trained adversary. As the Chief of Staff of the Germany Army in 1941, General Franz Halder noted that "even though there (mobilized Soviet) divisions were not as well organized, equipped, or led as the German ones, they nevertheless existed and had to be defeated."¹²

In practice, mobilization either takes the form of supplementing existing military organizations with trained men and combat equipment until a war footing is reached or else new units and commands are formed. The cadres commanding the new formations are usually chosen from existing troop units.

In the military training of reservists, a network of civilian institutions is used in preparing different types of specialists needed by the armed forces: mechanics, radio operators, telegraph operators, chauffeurs, etc. The reserve includes trained individuals who have not served in the military and who have a civilian specialty which can be used in military service. Individuals not called up to serve in the army are partially trained at specially organized classes at the military-training centers.¹³

The formation of new units and commands in the other services

of the Armed Forces, in addition to being governed by the presence of trained manpower reserves, is also governed, as indicated above, by the length of time it takes weapons and military equipment to come from industry during the course of the war, weapons and equipment which it would be inadvisable to accumulate in peacetime due to their rapid obsolescence.²⁴

It should be noted that the formation during mobilization of certain special units (repair, automobile transport, hospitals, etc.) can be accomplished directly by civilian ministries and departments.²⁵

As General Sokolovskiy indicated in his book, Soviet Military Strategy,

an integral and very important element of the organization and development of the armed forces is their training for mobilization and deployment in the event of war. Not a single state, no matter how powerful it may be economically, is in a position to maintain in peacetime such massive armed forces as it requires for the attainment of the goals of war. These forces are always kept at the minimum strength required to assure the safety of the state at the outset of war and to provide for the preparation of military trained reserves.²⁶

Ethnic Mix

Of great concern to the leadership of the Soviet military is that estimates of the ethnic breakdown of the conscript pool indicate that the proportion of dominant Slavs is declining drastically. Slavs constituted 74 percent of the 18-year-old males in 1970. By 1985 the Slavic share had declined to an estimated 63

percent. These trends are due to the slowing population growth rates of both Slavs and other "European" nationalities. Small families with one or two children have become increasingly popular among Europeans, while Soviet Muslims have only very recently begun to limit family size. The fast growing Muslim minorities increased from 13 percent of the draft pool in 1970 to 24 percent in 1985.

The biggest problem in absorbing the expected increase in non-Russians in the decades to come is not education, but the language barrier. The command language of the Soviet armed forces is Russian. A minimal level of Russian fluency is necessary to understand commands and absorb basic military training. The fluency levels of draft-age youth tends to be much higher than that of their parents and grandparents. The 1970 Census conducted in the Soviet Union showed that over seven out of every ten draft-age non-Russians reported either native or fluent command of the language. As of 1985 it is estimated that 80-85 percent of the current draft pool is fluent in Russian. The rest can speak it with difficulty.¹⁷ Notwithstanding the above, there appears to be still significant problems in the Soviet military especially in units where the Slavs are not the majority.

Another issue that seems to be escalating and keeps coming up in the Soviet press is that of minorities being beaten, abused and mistreated by their fellow unit members. An example, which has appeared in the Soviet press a few times is of Slav soldiers sending these minorities out into the winter cold dressed only in light clothes to fetch vodka from great distances for the other

unit members.

Soviet Technology

Use of active duty service as a method of reservist training, in the USSR as in other national settings, also places very real limits on technology. Soviet design philosophy has traditionally placed heavy emphasis on rugged, straightforward equipment design. This is partly because much of the equipment, particularly in the ground forces, will be used by draftees; technologically sophisticated operation and maintenance routines would be difficult for the conscript army to absorb. This does not necessarily mean that the ideal weapon system for a conscript army is a technically primitive one. Some relatively simple designs can require extremely long training and high skill levels to operate effectively. Conversely, some of the most technically sophisticated designs produce weapons that are extremely easy to operate. Many such weapons are highly susceptible to breakdown, and maintenance procedures are complex. The ideal weapon for a conscript army, from the Soviet view, is one that combines relative ease of operation with reliability, ruggedness, and ease of maintenance. Reliance on a conscript army to produce a large reserve, in contrast to the use of long-term military professionals, places direct constraints on weapons technology.²¹

The utility of the current system - using the two-year active duty service term for reservist training - hinges on the longevity

of weapons systems and tactics. While some skills learned during the draft tenure are transferable to new weapons designs, a reservist whose active duty tour was spent learning to operate a weapon of a particular design will clearly contribute less to modernization potential once that design has become obsolete. This is particularly true of weapons that require lengthy training to master. As Soviet military scientists have noted, the average length of a weapons system generation has decreased steadily in recent decades. If this trend continues, it may well undermine the military justification for the current reliance on a two-year draft tour as a form of reserve training while enhancing the attractiveness of alternate systems such as the mixed cadre.¹¹

Sister Services

The Air Force can operate from the outset of the war in the same composition in which they existed during peacetime but the formation of combat and particularly transport units and rear-area airfield units might be needed.

The Navy accomplishes mobilization by equipping the existing ships with sufficient supplies, removing from them excess equipment and personnel with practical experience, putting into service ships of the reserve that are being kept in mothballs, converting certain ships of the civilian fleet into warships and auxiliary ships, and the formation of means of ensuring the basing of the fleet, for which purpose the equipment of civilian ports and shipyards is

used.³⁰

Conclusion

In reviewing what was discussed above, one has to come away feeling that the reserve forces of the Soviet military are, on paper at least, a mighty force to contend with. However, with recent events taking place within the Soviet Union in the last few months, there appears to be some question as to the reliability of the reserves and of the individuals making up this reserve force.

When clashes and open warfare took place in Azerbaijan between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians, the Soviet military called up reservists to man units to be sent to the troubled area. No sooner had the call-up been made when protests were heard from not only the reservists themselves (which in and of itself would have been just a few years ago, a punishable offense with a one-way journey, after a quick conviction, to the Soviet labor camps in greater Siberia), but from their mothers, wives and/or girlfriends. The cries and demonstrations to rescind the call-up were so great and of such a magnitude they put such intense pressure on the Soviet military and the ruling members, the call-up was canceled very quickly and not implemented again. Regular Soviet units were instead sent to the troubled area. This brings forth the question, if it happened there, what will kept it from happening again somewhere else? The Soviet Union is seething with nationalism. Could it happen in the Baltic republics where nationalists are

currently and peacefully demanding independence. What if the demonstrations turned nasty? The Soviet military would be hard pressed to quell yet another disturbance with regular units. Having forces in the Caucasus and other bordering areas is a major commitment for the Soviet Armed Forces and to deploy more troops elsewhere would be a real burden. At some point they would be compelled to call-up reservists to supplement their regular forces. Can they be trusted? What if they refuse to go as they did in the Caucasus? It is felt by some that once the Soviets get on this slippery slope, it would be very difficult for them to stop or reverse the trend. This appears not only in the reserve structure but also within the regular forces. If the regular forces (manned by draftees) see reservists refusing to serve, this refusal could easily become assimilated into the regular forces. What kind of armed forces will the Soviets have on their hands then?

Another problem area is the ethnic issue. In addition to what was stated about the ethnic area above, major problems continue to exist. It is estimated that by the year 2050, Slavs will make up less than 50% of the population. The Russian language, although it is mandatory in most schools, is not universally spoken. To be a commanding officer of non-Russian speaking units could be a commander's nightmare. Just to get members of a unit headquarters or the driver of a vehicle to clearly understand what the commander wanted done, could lead to unforeseen tragedies. It has been reported that a Russian speaking tank commander, on maneuvers with his unit, directed his tank driver to cross some

railroad tracks in their avenue of attack. The driver took the tank up the embankment and on to the tracks. However, when he got on top of the tracks he stopped the tank. The Russian speaking tank commander ordered him to proceed off the tracks and go down the other side. The tank driver unfortunately did not speak Russian very well and did not understand what the excited tank commander was saying. So he did nothing. The sad thing was that a train was coming over these same tracks and the tank commander wanted the driver to leave the area post haste. As it was, the train slammed into the tank and the result was that numerous injuries were incurred. The whole incident could have been averted had they been able to understand one another. This is just a local incident - but what if it occurs within the majority of the Soviet Armed Forces? What kind of Armed Forces would the Soviets have?

The issue of minorities, as I discussed above, being abused, beaten and mistreated is a very serious problem for the Soviets. Not only are the minorities being mistreated in the predominately Slav units but also the reverse is true. The Slavs in predominately non-Russian units are being mistreated with the same degree of dislike. It appears that they all hate each other and there could come a time that no one may want to serve in the military service under any circumstances.

Tied in with the issue of reservists not wanting to serve when called upon to do so, as I discussed in the above, is the issue of reservists who are minorities not wishing to fight against those of their own faith. In 1972 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan

with units that were filled out with reservists that came from that region. Many of these reservists were Moslems or as they say in the atheistic Soviet Union, held strong beliefs concerning their Moslem brothers to the south. There was a great deal of concern and misgiving by these individuals about what the moslems considered a holy war. They did not wish to fight the freedom fighters and in some cases expressed their feeling openly. Gradually these Moslem oriented reservists were replaced by regular troops generally Slavs. In a few instances, as reported by the major U.S. news networks, some reservists had refused to fight at all, and in some cases deserted to the freedom fighters to fight, and very aggressively so, against the Soviet military.

In essence, Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, is not only facing major challenges of holding the Soviet Union together but is also facing an equally daunting challenge of keeping the Soviet Military structure together. The reserve force that Mr. Gorbachev has may in fact be very diluted and may not be very effective at all. This force structure may have in effect become just too fragmented. The Stalinist approach of the heavy hand to solve these problems, in all probability, will not work any more.

The only thing that might possibly bring the various factions together at this point in Soviet history, and now that might be even too late, is an external invasion of their homeland. But others wholeheartedly might welcome an invasion, i.e., the Georgians.

The Soviets still have the capability to mobilize an amazingly large number of reservists to fill the ranks of the standing Soviet military. But how effective that military is is questionable.

Endnotes

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