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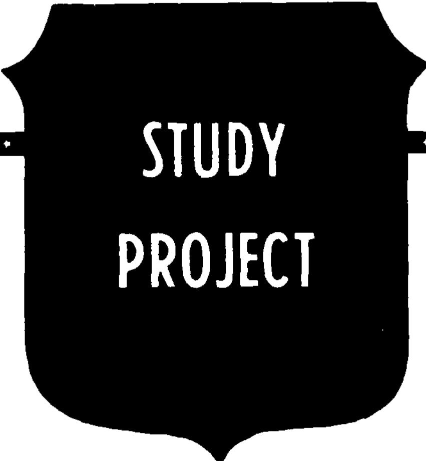

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THE HUMAN FACTOR IN THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES: LEADERSHIP, COHESION AND EFFECTIVENESS

BY

COLONEL HOWARD T. PRINCE II

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This study is an evaluation of the potential combat effectiveness of the Soviet armed forces based upon evaluation of variables that affect the human dimension of combat. Cohesion, leadership and stress training are the variables that are considered. The Soviets use an approach to combat motivation that is not based on cohesion but rather on ideology. Small-unit leadership is weak among both officers and NCOs. Stress training is not adaptive with respect to modern high-intensity combat. The important determinants of cohesion and leadership are weakened by systemic factors that make change difficult and unlikely for the foreseeable future. The human factor is a significant weakness in the Soviet military and should be taken into account in assessing the threat that the USSR represents today and tomorrow.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE HUMAN FACTOR IN THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES: LEADERSHIP, COHESION AND EFFECTIVENESS

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

Colonel Howard T. Prince II, PR

Colonel David T. Twining, MI
Project Adviser

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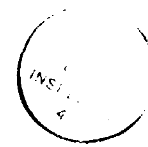

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INTRODUCTION

Many factors determine the effectiveness of the armed forces of a state. These include the clarity and coherence of policy, strategy and military doctrine; technology and equipment; popular support by the nation; and the human factor. The human factor refers to a number of variables that determine the willingness and ability of the people who make up the armed forces to fight.

The national security policy of the United States should be based upon a realistic assessment of U. S. interests and potential threats to the realization of those interests. In judging the capabilities of the Soviet Union as a threat to U. S. interests, we have tended to weight more heavily those determinants of military effectiveness that are most objective. For example, military doctrine can be discerned from statements by national leaders and written documents. Equipment and force structures can be evaluated for their military potential. But the human factor is much more difficult to assess and to do so requires a greater degree of subjectivity. Accordingly, we may have tended to neglect the human factor relative to other determinants in developing national security policy and planning for national defense.

As a result of recent changes initiated in the Soviet Union by President Gorbachev, moreover, there is renewed reason to take greater account of the human factor as we

examine the potential represented by the Soviet military. Retired LTG William Odom has recently observed, for example, that

> Another set of constraints is also beginning to confront the socio-political aspect of Soviet doctrine. Morale and discipline in the armed forces have increasingly become a problem. Mutinies and disorders in the navy have been reported, and suicides and breaches of discipline are apparently frequent in the ground forces. At the same time, the effects of the war in Afghanistan are working their way among Soviet youth and parents, particularly in attitudes toward military service. In a few instances, officers have been active in the Soviet dissident movement. These developments are difficult to assess for their overall impact; they are subjective factors, changeable, but nonetheless probably worrying to the political and military leadership. Glasnost and perestroika are bound to give them greater vent, creating ambivalence in the General Staff about the price to be paid for the promise of industrial modernization.[1]

Based upon an analysis of the variables that determine the quality of the human factor in the Soviet military, there is evidence that, under some circumstances, the armed forces may be less than fully effective in carrying out their assigned role. The nature and pace of changes currently underway in the Soviet Union may either exacerbate existing problems or alleviate them to some extent, depending upon the actual direction of changes that may affect the Soviet military. At present, the quality of the human factor in the Soviet military is reduced by a number

of longstanding practices and policies that derive primarily from the fundamental nature of the Soviet society and its political system. Thus changes that would improve the overall effectiveness of the human factor in the Soviet military can only come from basic changes in the these broad areas. Whether such changes are likely is impossible to determine for the time being.

In applying contemporary models of human effectiveness to the Soviet military system, it is difficult to obtain high quality empirical data. While it is increasingly possible to study Soviet sources in many forms, it would be desirable to systematically observe, survey and interview members of the Soviet armed forces. Although this is obviously not possible, even in the age of glasnost, some data are available as a result of changes in Soviet policy regarding emigration over the last two decades. Behavioral scientists and others may debate the limitations of the available data in terms of potential methodological biases. However, we have few, if any, alternatives at present to using the available data, keeping in mind the limitations and potential weaknesses. In this regard, the survey data collected from Soviet emigres by Richard Gabriel and the interviews of Soviet emigres conducted for the Rand Corporation by Alexander Alexiev and Enders Wimbush are especially important to a contemporary assessment of the human factor in the Soviet military.

COHESION

Among Western students of human behavior under combat conditions there is a growing consensus concerning the important determinants of effective performance. Perhaps the most central variable is that of cohesion. Cohesion is, in large measure, a function of certain leadership actions at both the face-to-face level of interaction in the small unit as well as at the more indirect level of the larger organization. In a classic study of combat performance and motivation, Shils and Janowitz discovered that even long after it was clear that the Nazi cause was doomed, soldiers of the Wehrmacht fought on effectively during WWII and were highly resistant to Western attempts to undermine German combat behavior through psychological operations.2 Not unlike many contemporary views of the Soviet military, many in the West considered the Nazi military man to be driven primarily by ideology. However, based on interviews of Nazi soldiers, Shils and Janowitz concluded that the conditions of what they referred to as primary-group life were significantly more important than political conviction or other beliefs and value systems in determining the combat effectiveness of the soldier.3

The classical definition of the term primary group is that of Charles Cooley. He characterized the primary group as one in which human interaction is intimate and face to

face, involving sympathy and mutual identification that could be summarized as a strong sense of "we-ness."[4] According to Shils and Janowitz, combat motivation is a direct function of the capacity of the primary group to avoid social disintegration. To the extent that the primary group (i.e., small military units such as squads, sections, and maybe platoons) satisfied the soldier's basic physical, security and social needs; provided affection and esteem from leaders and comrades alike; adequately buffered the soldier from higher authority; and gave him a sense of power (e.g., through strength in numbers), the German soldier was then able to subordinate self-concerns such as survival and contribute to the effectiveness of the group.[5] The capacity of the military primary group to resist disintegration in the Wehrmacht was not dependent on culture, politics, or ideology or their symbols unless these became associated with the primary gratifications provided within the primary group.[6] The impact of the larger organization of the Wehrmacht was felt through indirect acts of leadership such as providing adequate supplies, establishing appropriate strategic and/or tactical dispositions, and providing for an effective leadership system that developed and assigned high quality junior officers and NCOs to the primary groups.[7]

Although not officially recognized or accepted by the U. S. Army as the basis for doctrine, the conclusions of Shils and Janowitz have come to be widely accepted by American psychologists and sociologists of the military.

The basic propositions have been tested, confirmed and elaborated by others in different settings such as the Korean and Vietnam wars as well as in other theaters during WWII.[8] However, only the Israeli Defense Forces have made the development of cohesion and morale a primary concern in their military doctrine. They have developed their military manpower and leadership doctrine to optimize human performance on the battlefield and they regularly measure cohesion, morale, and leadership as part of their unit readiness measurement system.[9]

In addition to the functional aspects of primary group influence on the motivation and performance of soldiers in combat, there are certain structural aspects of the primary group that impact on motivation and performance. Studies of group behavior show that the stability of group membership over time, the degree of heterogeneity of group members with respect to relevant variables such as ethnicity that affect social interaction, the variety and frequency of interactions and the degree to which roles are exchanged in different activities are all relevant factors that affect whether or not a primary group will form.[10] These factors provide a useful framework for studying the impact of variables such as ethnic diversity on the emergence of cohesion in the Soviet military.

As Shils and Janowitz observed, a loss of cohesion as measured by desertion and surrender was most frequent in the Wehrmacht in units with heterogeneous composition (e.g.,

when members of two or more ethnic groups such as Austrians, Czechs and Poles were assigned together). Communications problems due to language differences, resentment toward the Germans, and inability to identify with leaders of a different ethnic group all worked against the development of cohesion in such groups.11

In general, any factor that prevents the development of primary group interaction or interferes with the assimilation of the individual by the primary group will undermine combat effectiveness, according to the work of Shils and Janowitz.

The cohesion that develops within primary groups provides not only motivation to fight when survival is at risk but may also buffer the soldier from the effects of combat stress, according to contemporary behavioral science theory. Severe stress is recognized as a feature of modern warfare by armed forces in both East and West. Combat stress is a function of many factors, the most important of which is the intensity of battle. Since at least November, 1969 when Marshal Grechko announced that Soviet military doctrine envisioned fighting under nuclear as well as nonnuclear conditions,12 the leadership of the Soviet military has been concerned with increasing the ability of its forces to withstand new levels of combat stress through a variety of means. We will examine the Soviet approach to preparing troops for combat stress as part of this study.

The most significant variable in developing combat effectiveness, according to U. S. military thinking, is leadership.13 It is the small-unit leader who is most instrumental in determining the development of primary-group functioning and in linking the small unit to the larger military organization so that its efforts are supportive of larger goals.14 Senior leaders establish larger patterns of behavior that have their effect on combat performance indirectly. For example, the emphasis in the Soviet military on ideological commitment as a principal determinant of combat behavior is a senior leadership indirect influence on the behavior of the members of small units.

THE HUMAN FACTOR IN SOVIET MILITARY SCIENCE

The Soviet scientific approach to creating effective soldiers and combat units is somewhat different than an approach grounded in Western behavioral science would be. The importance of the human factor is clearly recognized in Soviet military literature as the "Soviet military gives man the decisive role in war."15 When opposing forces are equally well-equipped, "victory will be won by the army whose personnel share the goals of the war and have high morale."16 Victory will go to the "people who have mastered their arms, who are ideologically united, who are strong in psychological and moral terms, and who possess a will to

win."17 Combat is viewed as a psychologically stressful experience because it will be dynamic, full of danger as well as the unexpected, and characterized by great loss of life and equipment. Moreover, the imperialists are prepared to use "agents which affect the minds of men."18 Such experiences will place "high demands upon the mental strength of the soldiers and on the psychology of military collectives."19 Accordingly,

> military psychology is confronted with the task of analyzing the psychological component of troop morale, determining the character of the effect of diverse factors of a modern war and combat on the psychology of men and collectives, as well as seeking out ways for reducing the negative effect and raising the efficiency of combat activity.20

Soviet military science holds that modern combat which may include the use of nuclear weapons will elicit strong emotional reactions that will range from enthusiasm and aggressive impulses to fear and uncertainty. The key to controlling such emotional vacillation, according to Marshal Grechko, is to prepare the soldier "in moral-political and psychological terms so that in any conditions he is able to quickly surmount the effect of negative factors." 21 A modern war "can be won only by an ideologically indoctrinated soldier who totally loves his Motherland and is ready for the sake of this love to carry out heroic deeds."22 Accordingly, one of the fundamental leadership tasks consists of indoctrinating a feeling of love of the Motherland and loyalty to the cause of the

Communist Party. This is not a natural occurrence and "the role of the commanders and political workers in this area is great."23 Moral-political training consists of "the purposeful indoctrination of a scientific, Marxist-Leninist world outlook, communist ideals, convictions, and moral principles of behavior in soldiers and sailors."24

The Soviets also acknowledge the value of personal contact between commanders and political workers with the troops during moments of danger during combat, the importance of the commander's personal actions in setting an example of bravery and courage, and the soldier's need for a sincere word of approval in time of danger. However, Soviet military science repeatedly emphasizes that the

> basic task of commanders and political workers is to improve the forms and methods of Party political work, the combat-moral and psychological training, as well as to indoctrinate men in communist ideological loyalty, loyalty to the Soviet Motherland, faithfulness to Lenin's legacy, patriotism and internationalism, as well as a constant readiness to defend the victories of socialism.25

This is a "complex process which is organically linked to the entire system of military and political training, military indoctrination, and the entire way of army life."26 According to Jones, 90-100 minutes of the soldier's training day is spent on political training and two-and-one half to four hours are spent in such activities on days off.27

Despite the primacy of ideology in combat motivation described above, Soviet military psychology does recognize

the potential importance of group influences on behavior. Primary groups are characterized by being small and featuring almost constant personal contact and interaction. Examples include a military subunit, a shop, or a school class. Intragroup phenomena exert influence over the behavior of group members. Soviet military psychology distinguishes two different types of groups: the collective and the corporation. A collective is distinguished by the presence of "socially significant goals" while a corporation is a group whose goals "arise only out of intragroup needs and interests."28 The Soviet military is concerned with establishing the psychology of military collectives which is done primarily by controlling day-to-day activity. This is done "in the interests of its functional efficiency" through systematic and purposeful activity or preparations for such activity.29 A connection between the primacy of ideology and the importance of the collective is achieved through the psychological preparation of a collective "carried out on the basis of moral and political training and in close unity with it."30 What this means in practice is that the existence of soldiers is highly controlled, military training is extremely demanding and considerable time is devoted to ideological training as well.

Several useful descriptions of the Soviet soldier, his military life and his leaders are available.31 From these we will be able to create a basis for assessing how well the human dimension functions within the Soviet military in

preparation for war. We will also be able to determine whether there are likely to be problems of human performance in combat and under what conditions these are likely to occur.

Since 1939 universal military service has been the basis of the Soviet military manpower system. The current law dates from 1967, when the age of call-up was reduced from nineteen to eighteen. The term of service is two years for ground forces and three years for the navy. Conscripts are called up twice annually so that every six months the military trains a new cohort of inductees. At every other call-up a new cohort of junior officers fresh from one of over 140 military commissioning schools must also be integrated into units and trained. There is no career NCO corps that would be comparable to those found in many Western armies such as the British and the American military. Instead, NCOs are chosen from each entering cohort and are given a rudimentary leadership preparation. There are other NCOs on extended duty beyond the term of conscription, but their numbers are relatively small and by no means make for a career force on the scale found in many Western armies. One consequence of this form of military manpower system is that Soviet military units are training units that experience high levels of personnel turbulence. To the extent that stability of group membership in small units is an important determinant of cohesion and thereby

military effectiveness in combat, this system interferes in its basic form with the establishment of cohesion.

By all accounts life in Soviet military units is harsh. This is especially so for the conscript enlisted soldier and his enlisted leaders. Soviet junior officers also lead a difficult existence. Some features of this tough military life may be consistent with the development of cohesion while others appear to detract from its emergence. Conscripts are paid almost nothing, have little free time, are seldom allowed to leave their units, are not allowed to wear civilian clothes, and undergo strenuous military training in small units. They are almost universally subjected to severe treatment as new members of their unit, although "hazing" and "hooliganism" are a matter of official concern. New soldiers are often beaten and have their new military clothing and individual equipment taken from them by older members of their unit. New soldiers even have to give their food to older soldiers in some cases.

The net psychological effect of such practices is mixed with respect to the formation of small-unit cohesion. Sharing common experiences over time should increase cohesion among group members. On the other hand, interaction patterns that divide group members into subgroups such as "newbies" and oldtimers may be harmful to overall group effectiveness. Soldiers are not assigned to units near their homes; instead, they are assigned to units in another region of the Soviet Union. This severs the

social support previously provided by family and friends and creates the potential for the replacement of older primary group relations with new ones, if the organization can create the conditions that lead to the formation of new primary group ties. Given the actual social conditions to which conscripts are introduced in Soviet units, the opportunity is, in the main, missed, especially for conscripts from non-Slavic ethnic groups.

THE ETHNIC FACTOR IN THE SOVIET MILITARY

The Soviet Union is a diverse multinational state comprised of over one hundred different ethnic groups speaking an equal number of different languages. Given the policy of universal military service for males, this ethnic diversity represents a significant factor in Soviet military manpower policy that bears directly on the human dimension of combat. Moreover, the demographic trend is in the direction of a decline in the proportion of Slavs to other ethnic groups in the draft cohorts. While in 1970 the proportion of Slavs was 70 percent, by 1985 it had dropped to 63 percent.32 The percentage of Slavs will have dropped even further to 46 percent of the draft pool by 1995, according to a Rand Corporation study.33

Ethnic diversity is potentially significant with respect to combat effectiveness because of cultural, language, and educational differences in background.

According to Ellen Jones, the most significant factor is lack of fluency in Russian for about 15-20 percent of the enlisted conscripts.34 Since Russian is the official command language in the Soviet armed forces, those who are not fluent cannot be assigned to specialties requiring communications skills and will have difficulty undergoing classroom training conducted in Russian. To some extent, these problems can be overcome by careful assignment policy since the number of Russian-speaking Slavic conscripts exceeds considerably the number of positions requiring language competency. However, the issue of interethnic tension remains, despite careful use of assignment policies.

Although there is a tendency to assign the majority of the non-Slavs to various support or construction units, some are assigned to combat units. According to Soviet emigre reports, there may be as many as 10 percent non-Slavs in the Strategic Rocket Forces and 15-20 percent in other combat units.35 These ethnic minorities usually serve in noncombat roles and often receive no additional systematic training beyond their initial basic training in their combat units. The Soviet officer corps is basically Slavic with very few officers from ethnic minority groups.

In addition to the problems of training conscripts who do not speak the language of command fluently, other problems arise in ethnically diverse Soviet units. Some minorities capitalize upon the situation through dissimulation, according to emigre reports.36 This is an

obvious source of reduced combat effectiveness as well as a source of mistrust that is related to another significant problem which is ethnic conflict due to communications breakdowns. Confronted with soldiers who do not respond to instructions or commands, leaders and other soldiers become frustrated and often abuse ethnic minority soldiers verbally with coarse racial epithets. Physical abuse is also not uncommon.37 Indeed ethnic-related violence is more likely to occur in combat units with distinct ethnic minorities than in elite military units with very small or no minority groups or in construction and other support units in which ethnic minority groups constitute a majority of the soldiers assigned to those units.38

The effects of ethnic heterogeneity on the development of cohesion in Soviet military units appear to be negative in general, although there is disagreement among those who have studied this in detail. For example, Jones minimizes the effects of ethnic diversity by emphasizing the power of the common experience of the harshness of military life and the policy of assignment of all conscripts to geographic regions that are distant from their homes.39 Henderson minimizes the problem based on the fact that, for the most part, ethnic minorities make up less than 20 percent of the combat units.40 The growing percentage of ethnic minority conscripts in each new cohort must be a matter of long-term concern, however. And, based on emigre reports, there is

evidence that unit effectiveness is, in fact, reduced by interethnic tensions.

The stresses of modern combat are likely to exacerbate these tensions and reduce the effectiveness even of combat units which may have up to 20 percent non-Slavic soldiers assigned mostly in noncombat roles within these units. For example, these soldiers would likely become combat replacements in the event of actual combat at mid-intensity or high-intensity levels. Finally, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan portends the difficulties of using multiethnic forces in future wars. Though the reports of the use of large numbers of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in the invasion forces vary with regard to the percentages of non-Slavic soldiers actually observed, it seems clear that the Soviet leadership departed significantly from the historical policy of not relying on ethnic minorities on any large scale in actual combat roles.[41] Based on the results, the Soviets are not likely to do so again unless absolutely forced to do so by high combat losses. Soviet Muslim soldiers were said to have "distinguished themselves by indifferent motivation and poor combat performance... resulting in serious reliability problems."[42] There were serious problems involving trading of military equipment and fraternizing with the Afghan population as well as cases of desertion. Overall, "Soviet Muslim soldiers deployed in sizable numbers as part of the invading force thus proved a dubious asset at best and were promptly replaced by more

traditionally staffed units within the first two months of the war."[43]

THE SOVIET APPROACH TO COMBAT STRESS

As noted earlier, the Soviets emphasize the stressful nature of modern combat. In addition to the strong emphasis on ideology as the primary basis of combat motivation, realistic combat conditions are stressed in training. Effective combat training may lead to many desirable outcomes. These include physical stamina, skill development, teamwork, confidence in equipment, as well as mutual trust and respect among soldiers and between soldiers and their leaders based upon demonstrated competence in a difficult shared experience. Of these, the Soviet approach to training for combat stress emphasizes skill development and physical stamina.[44] "Ideological hardening" is also an important byproduct of stressful training for combat.[45]

There is good evidence that overlearning of psychomotor skills makes them more resistant to deterioration under stressful performance situations such as combat.[46] In other words, for basic skills such as firing a weapon and moving under fire, repetition is the key to good training. For more psychological skills, such as decision making or computing firing data, simplification or practice of improvisation are the relevant strategies for reducing the effects of stress.[47]

The Soviets emphasize simplification through drills. In the Soviet system initiative is reduced to a process of matching the appropriate response to a given situation. However, beginning in the mid-70's there has been an increasing awareness that the conditions of modern combat may be quite fluid and unpredictable at the tactical level, a situation calling for greater leadership initiative on the part of officers who are the key leaders in the Soviet system.48 Richard Armstrong has cautioned against underestimating the ability of the Soviet leader development system to foster initiative, pointing out that this term has different connotations based on the prevailing psychological models within different cultures.49 Armstrong argues that the use of norms and overlearning within the Soviet system may, in fact, be very consistent with Western research findings on decision making under conditions of stress. He suggests that what the Soviets attempt to do is make it easier and more likely that their leaders will be able to generate novel solutions under stress that are consistent with the overall effort, pointing out the similarity to German auftragstaktik. His argument sounds similar to the concept of initiative in relation to the commander's intent in contemporary U. S. doctrine found in FM 100-5.50 In practice, Soviet officers are ambivalent at best about displaying initiative because of the rigidity of the overall Soviet system which is highly bureaucratized and

centralized, demanding high levels of conformity for advancement, if not survival.

Performance expectations in training are unrealistically high and are justified on the basis of the threat from NATO and others as well as Soviet military history, in particular, the Great Patriotic War. The stress from these high expectations is multiplied for the officers in combat units because of frequent testing and "socialist competition" between units. Rewards are given to good performers and poor performers are subject to harassment and ridicule. Needless to say, there is often cheating and distortion of effort. For example, activities that are subject to quantification such as gunnery and marksmanship receive priority of emphasis from many commanders at the expense of tactics and maneuver. As Chris Donnelly notes "quality of training had by mid-1988 become one of the main targets of 'restructuring' within the armed forces."51 The need for restructuring of training is based on evidence "that statistics on achievement of norms have been falsified, inadequacies have been covered up, and incompetence overlooked."52

SOVIET SMALL-UNIT LEADERSHIP

The weakness of NCO leadership in the Soviet military was mentioned earlier. The reliance on conscripts for small-unit leadership and the social and organizational

distance of Soviet officers make the leadership system one of the weaker links in realizing the potential of the human factor in the Soviet armed forces.

Officially, the Soviets hold many views about leadership that are similar to those found in Western leadership theory.53 At the level of the combat unit or the collective, the Soviets consider interpersonal relations to be important. Such relationships are linked to productivity, solidarity and organization, discipline and combat readiness. Of particular importance are the relationships involving seniors and their subordinates. Such relationships are to be based on a principle of humanism or "sensitivity, responsiveness, and the greatest possible concern for subordinates."54 Mutual trust and confidence are important in senior-subordinate relationships.

The limitations of using conscripts in small-unit leadership roles also is openly acknowledged.

> In contrast to officers, sergeants (senior NCOs) are not significantly older than their subordinates, and hence they have little advantage in experience which is an important factor in the moral and psychological influence upon people. Also, for completely understandable reasons, sergeants (senior NCOs) can only slightly surpass their subordinates in service experience. However, in comparison with officers, they are less trained in pedagogical concepts and are not always able to find a correct approach to the men or use their disciplinary rights.
>
> According to the conditions of military service and everyday life,

> sergeants do not differ from their subordinates. The sergeants sleep, eat, and study along with their subordinates and are constantly in full view of their subordinates. They are also more susceptible to the influence of the soldier's opinion than are officers. All of this makes it difficult for sergeants (senior NCOs) to establish authority as the moral and psychological basis for proper relations with soldiers (sailors).55

A number of factors combine to make officer leadership in practice also something less than the ideal described in Military Psychology. The hectic pace and unrealistic demands of combat training in the unit, the narrow technical specialization of officer education and training and an elitist attitude on the part of officers toward others, especially conscripts, combine to effectively separate the potentially most effective Soviet leaders from their followers.

A useful concept for examining the nature of leadership influence is that of bases of social power.56 Soviet officers derive their influence primarily from their control of rewards and punishment as a power base.

Legitimate power is also a source of influence for Soviet officers. This means that through their premilitary socialization experiences Soviet citizens have been taught to accept and follow the directions of those perceived to be in legitimate positions of power such as officers or other officials. Soviet citizens are taught to submit to authority figures throughout their childhood and adolescence and are thus prepared to accept military orders.

Leaders may also draw upon their expertise as a base of power to influence others. People will follow those who are perceived to have relevant expertise in relation to a given task or situation. As Henderson points out, the expert power of the Soviet officer may be strained in situations for which he has not been trained because of the narrowness of officer specialization and because the political officers found in combat units may undermine the expertise of the commander, especially in the all-important area of moral-political training.57

Soviet officers are very weak with respect to the base of power that is likely to be most important in leading soldiers under the extreme stress of modern combat, referent power. This is a form of influence that is based on identification of the soldier with the leader in an intense emotional bond.

Perhaps the best way to assess leadership effectiveness is to ask the followers. In his surveys of Soviet emigres Gabriel was able to obtain data that will be useful for this purpose. There are many important leadership dimensions that may be assessed in terms of the perceptions of subordinates and others. For example, one of the most widely accepted leadership dimensions is setting the example for others. Among those surveyed by Gabriel, only 20.4 percent agreed that their officers consistently set a good example.58 In terms of developing cohesion and providing support during the stress of combat, one of the more

important variables is the extent to which leaders are perceived as sharing the risks and hardships of battle. Only 22.1 percent of Gabriel's respondents agreed that their officers shared hardships with the troops.59 These results are illustrative of the overall pattern of subordinate perceptions of officer leadership along a number of relevant leadership dimensions. Gabriel summarized his data on officer leadership as follows:

> In general the Soviet soldier does not see his officers as setting an example in military life, as being a good exemplar for a young soldier, or as encouraging risk, daring, or initiative. Moreover, the Soviet soldier is likely to see his officers as stifling initiative and being unfair. Negative judgments seem most intense among those soldiers who hold no command or supervisory positions but who, in the event of war, must bear the burden of combat. At the very least the Soviet officer is seen by his troops as selfish, not sufficiently concerned with the welfare of his men, and not sharing the hardships of military life.60

The development of cohesion and the effective linkage of the small unit to the larger organization depends in large part on the degree to which strong human bonds are established between leaders and their subordinates. Gabriel's data show that this too is a problem for the Soviets. For example, only 28.3 percent of the respondents agreed that officers went out of their way to show interest in their men.61 Over 80 percent see their officers as too remote from the men.62 Astonishingly, 99 percent of the junior NCOs felt that officers never developed personal ties

with them.[63] Almost 60 percent of those who had served as officers saw themselves as failing to establish close bonds with their men.[64]

One of the most useful items on a survey of leadership as seen by subordinates is to ask whether a leader is perceived as someone with whom the respondent would like to go into combat. Gabriel reports that while officers rate themselves and their fellow officers fairly high on this perception, the enlisted soldiers do not.[65] Further, only 22.8 percent of the soldiers indicated that they would trust the judgment of their officers in combat.[66] Gabriel has summarized his findings on subordinate perceptions of officers in future combat situations as follows:

> By and large the Soviet officer is seen by his men as failing to establish close ties with either his unit or his troops and failing to know either his men or their capabilities well. Soviet troops know that their officers have not established strong ties to them and many suspect that they are seen by their officers as mere instruments or resources to be managed to the benefit of the officer and his career. These conditions are joined to an obvious lack of trust in officer abilities, especially when those abilities are associated with combat. Most soldiers, and even most commanders, do not believe their officers would make good men to go into battle with.[67]

The Soviet military is a large bureaucracy within a highly bureaucratized society that is dominated by the control of the Communist Party. To the extent that military leaders operate in bureaucratic ways in peacetime as they

prepare for combat, they are likely to repeat such behavioral patterns in actual combat, at least until the consequences become apparent to those who survive the early period of war. Gabriel gathered data about such possible manifestations of bureaucratic patterns as the tendency to avoid responsibility, to be overly concerned with one's own career and personal advancement, to overemphasize technical skills and political/bureaucratic loyalty. The results suggest

> that the Soviet officer corps is a highly bureaucratized institution...The officers are highly ambitious and overtly concerned with career advancement. They seem to avoid responsibility and problems by assessing blame on others...What is surprising is the degree to which these tendencies have penetrated through to the small-unit level...There appears to be a basic tension between the application of bureaucratic technique and its attendant depersonalization and demythologization and the development of strong primary-group bonds among the officers and men within small units...That the officers at the small-unit level continue to exacerbate this tension within Soviet units seems certain.68

The structural weakness in leadership at the small-unit level created by a reliance on conscript NCOs rather than a profession NCO force has already been mentioned. The data from Gabriel's survey verify that the junior NCOs do not compensate for the deficiencies in officer leadership at the small-unit level. If anything, the data paint a picture even more negative than that for officer leadership. The results are consistent with the official Soviet assessment

of NCO leadership cited earlier. According to Gabriel, his data suggest that

> if the focus of analysis is placed upon combat-related leadership skills of the Soviet NCO as measured by the perceptions of his peers, his subordinates, and his superiors, it seems valid to conclude that the Soviet NCO corps has simply failed to develop many of those skills that have been generally associated with a high level of effective combat leadership and ability. The evidence suggests that the Soviet NCO does not know his men well, nor does he know their capabilities and limitations, nor is he perceived by his troops or officers as a `good man to go into combat with.' Further, the Soviet NCO is not seen by his peers or subordinates as possessing the kind of judgment needed in a combat environment. Even more evidence of serious shortcomings is drawn from the fact that large numbers of Soviet soldiers perceive their NCOs as inflexible and lacking initiative. The evidence suggests strongly that the Soviet NCO corps suffers from very severe leadership and combat-related deficiencies.69

BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AND MOTIVATION IN THE SOVIET MILITARY

There is some risk in considering the perceptions of Soviet soldiers with respect to Western notions of effective leadership and the importance of cohesion to combat motivation and resistance to combat stress. It may be that this vantage point is not only ethnocentric but theoretically flawed. Whether this is so can be tested by

examining further data from Gabriel's work that bear directly on this issue.

Soviet emigres report behavioral problems that are considered by most observers and professional soldiers to be indicative of problems in discipline and morale. Despite their subsistence-level of pay, Soviet soldiers manage to abuse alcohol, not infrequently on duty. The problem of alcohol abuse cuts across all ranks and all types of units, with survey evidence that officers are even seen under the influence of alcohol at work.[70] In fact, 30.1 percent of those who replied to Gabriel's survey agreed that the amount of drinking in their unit affected its ability to perform the mission.[71]

Another behavior problem is that of leaving the unit without authorization or going AWOL. This too is a problem in Soviet units despite the degree of control exerted by the authorities over soldiers. The AWOL problem is related to drinking since soldiers report that the three main reasons for going AWOL are, in order, to get alcohol, to find women and to create a short break from military life.[72]

A more serious indicator of leadership problems as reflected in the behavior of subordinates is physical assault upon leaders by their soldiers. According to Gabriel's subjects, 36.3 percent reported personal knowledge of physical assault on an officer and 62.8 percent reported such knowledge with respect to NCOs.[73] The data do not allow estimates of the actual frequency of such incidents in

Soviet units but the fact that it occurs at all in such a rigid, highly authoritarian institution is cause for grave concern.

Despite strong punishment, desertion is also a problem for the Soviet military. In Gabriel's data group 49.6 percent reported that someone in their unit had deserted.[74]

Suicide and attempted suicide are extreme acts under any circumstances, usually representing extreme frustration and loss of hope in living. Actual rates for such behaviors are impossible to determine by survey and yet there is evidence that such extreme behavior is a problem and that it is of concern to the Soviet military leadership.[75]

One must wonder about the relationship between such dysfunctional behavior under the stress of military life in training and the potential for similar conduct under combat conditions. Gabriel summarizes the picture presented by his data as follows:

> The presence of such major indicators of low morale and poor discipline as alcoholism and alcohol abuse, high AWOL rates, assaults on officers, high desertion rates, and suicides indicates very strongly that Soviet military units are likely to have grave problems of morale and discipline.[76]

The fundamental leadership problem in combat is motivation. It is an irrational act to place one's life at risk by exposing oneself to enemy fire. Yet this is exactly what often must be done in order to accomplish the assigned mission. As described above, the Soviets stress the potency

of ideology in determining the soldier's will to fight. In contrast, Western behavioral scientists and a growing number of professional military officers consider the intense emotional relationships that arise within military units over time through shared experiences to be the principal determinants of combat motivation. One way to test both ethnocentrism and competing theories is to survey Soviet soldiers. When asked how important on a scale from one to ten ideology is in motivating a soldier to fight well, Gabriel's respondents rated ideology very low in importance.77 The mean score was 2.6; 75 percent of the scores were three or less. On a five-point Likert scale, 16.8 percent considered ideology to be "not very important at all" and 62.8 percent considered it to be "almost totally unimportant." The pattern is the same whether looking at data from the ranks, from NCOs or officers. Thus, it is clear that "at all ranks in the Soviet Army, the proposition that ideology is an important factor in motivating soldiers to fight is simply not strongly held, despite its central position in official Soviet military doctrine."78

When asked which of several possible factors were most important in motivating soldiers to fight well, the most frequently cited factor was "not wanting to appear a coward in front of one's friends."79 Almost half of those responding chose this as the most important motivational force. The second most frequently chosen factor was "close ties to one's comrades in the unit."80 Together these two

variables were chosen by 64.6 percent of the respondents. Although ideology was a possible choice it was selected by only a small percentage of former Soviet soldiers. The same is true for a feeling that one's leaders care about one, even among those who had held leadership positions. These data are obviously not supportive of official Soviet views on the sources of motivation in battle. Moreover, Soviet leadership and organizational practices do little to promote the factors soldiers consider important and are even at odds with such motivational forces.

The kinds of problems described in earlier works on the Soviet military persist and may even be worse today, according to public accounts in a number of recent Soviet publications. For example, a recent article in Krasnaya Zvezda reported growing "pacifist" sentiment among the majority of young men who reported for their draft call-up.81 Young men reporting during draft week expressed the view that they did not want to serve in the armed forces, expressing fears about hazing, interethnic relations, low pay, and the absence of leave opportunities. In 1989 every other draftee failed to report on schedule at the draft commission, according to this report.

In another recent article Krasnaya Zvezda reported on the growing problem of trying to detect drug addiction by the draft commissions, noting that there had been an increase of 4.4 percent from 1987 to 1988 in the number of

adolescents who use drugs and that 12 percent of juvenile crime is drug related.82

Pravda expressed concern not long ago over the fact that it had received so many letters about "bullying" which "degrades and sullies the honor and dignity of the Motherland."83

A growing problem of crime in military units was reported by *Krasnaya Zvezda* in September 1989. Alcohol-related crimes and group crimes such as stealing weapons and explosives and misuse of vehicles are on the rise in many units while cases of insubordination and disobedience were reported to have decreased.84

The combination of ethnic problems and AWOL were noted in still another article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* in November 1989.85 According to this report, Soviet Armenian soldiers have gone AWOL and have refused to return to the Siberian military district from Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. These soldiers were said to be dissatisfied with service in military construction units where discipline is very harsh. Such problems are the topic of discussion at meetings of the leadership of the Soviet armed forces, as noted in a report of the party aktiv meeting for the Central Group of forces where the main topic of discussion was "bullying and interethnic relations in military collectives."86

The political leadership of the Soviet armed forces also has expressed concern over these current problems. As reported in *Pravda* the Minister of Defence, Army General

Yazov, speaking to officers at a military command school in 1989, told the officers that "their main tasks are to develop professional skills, to master the `secrets' of dealing with people, and to establish genuine spiritual affinity with their subordinates."87 He went on to add that they must assert legal order in their units and maintain military discipline, achieving "a close combination and fusion of a high degree of exactingness toward subordinates with tireless concern for their needs and requests."88 In an interview with Krasnaya Zvezda, Colonel General G. Stefanovskiy, deputy chief of the Soviet Army and Navy Main Political Directorate, called for "new ideas and approaches" to organizing the political, military, moral, and legal training of servicemen, adding that the All-Army Conference of Leading Ideological Workers is to help answer such questions.89

A growing anti-military sentiment among civilians, especially in the more rebellious republics such as in the Baltic region, has been reported also. According to one such report, service families have complained of "disrespectful attitudes" in public places such as hospitals and stores.90 This article went on to state that civilians are referring to the military as "second-class" citizens who should not be allowed to vote or hold office.

CONCLUSIONS

President Gorbachev has announced a number of policies that affect the future of Soviet military developments based on his so-called "new thinking." The significance of these policies has become the subject of debate and analysis both at home within the USSR and abroad among the countries of the NATO alliance.91 Not surprisingly, most of the debate is centered on issues of military doctrine rather than on internal changes within the Soviet armed forces, perhaps because it is still too early in the debate. However, with respect to the Soviet human factor, there are unavoidable consequences of the new thinking that go beyond defining "sufficiency," clarifying "defensive orientation," shifting to qualitatively different conventional weapons, and effecting force reductions in light of changes in eastern Europe and elsewhere.

If Soviet forces are removed from the other Warsaw Pact countries and significant reductions in both NATO and Warsaw Pact forces are agreed to and carried out, then the likelihood of war in Europe will be markedly reduced which is consistent with Gorbachev's view that security is mutual and is best achieved through political means. The constabulary role of the Soviet forces stationed in the Warsaw Pact countries will disappear and the NATO "threat" will be eased. If relations with China continue to improve, the remaining roles for the conventional forces of the

Soviet military are general deterrence, dealing with regional conflict and maintaining internal order. And yet as Stephen Meyer observed recently,

> the Red Army, the foundation of Soviet superpower status, is in serious trouble. Its huge stocks of modern weapons remain, but the foundation of a fighting force is the people in uniform. In this respect, the state of the Soviet military today and its ability to carry out its traditional mission are worse than at any time since the Stalinist purges of the 1930's.[92]

Neither Meyer nor I would argue that the Soviet military is incapable of defending the Motherland against invasion. But that is the least likely scenario for their employment and a highly improbable event. Potentially explosive ethnic tensions, both within the armed forces and between members of the armed forces and Soviet citizens in many of the Soviet republics where political and ethnic unrest are strong, represent only one contemporary force that impairs the effectiveness of the Soviet military in some of its potential roles. Other forces such as declining patriotism among Soviet youth, civilian challenges to military competence and professionalism, and losses in economic support for the military that range from reduced military budgets to problems in providing housing and employment for officers and men who are released due to Gorbachev's force reduction initiatives, all serve to exacerbate the longstanding internal problems of human

performance within the Soviet military and would undermine its effectiveness in many scenarios.93

There appears to be an awareness on the part of some Soviet thinkers of the need for qualitative improvements in the human dimension of the Soviet armed forces. For example, one official stated recently that "optimization is directly tied up with the principles of manning the Armed Forces and with the level of combat training."94 A Western observer commenting on the implications of new technology for concentrating firepower and thereby changing the military art has concluded that increased ability to concentrate firepower means being able to accomplish the mission with fewer forces and weapons in a shorter time.95 "As a result, the qualitative characteristics of troops and weapons acquire paramount importance."96

However, other than the familiar exhortations from senior officials to tackle such problems as hazing and bullying, there is little evidence of a willingness to address fundamentally human performance problems through a form of perestroika that would lead to human performance improvements within the Soviet armed forces. One partial solution might involve going to a volunteer system to replace the conscript manpower system in use today. Although this suggestion has been made by the chairman of the Supreme Soviet's new committee on defense and state security, there has been strong opposition from the military leadership. Senior military figures such as Marshal

Akhromeev reject this idea on economic grounds, citing both increased wage costs as well as the need for more housing to accommodate a volunteer force.97

According to the foregoing analysis the most needed reforms have to do with the way in which the Soviets go about the practice of leadership and the establishment of primary group relations that could lead to cohesive military units. And yet, such systemic changes are likely to be resisted most strongly since they represent an attack upon the fundamental nature of the Soviet military and political systems. To allow leaders to exercise initiative and to develop combat motivation based upon small-group phenomena such as intragroup loyalty would be to repudiate the very basis of the Soviet system of control based on the Party and its version of ideology. It would be difficult, if not virtually impossible, for leaders to take the risks and responsibility that such a reform implies without completely altering the bureaucratic network of which the military is an integral part. Such fundamental changes are not likely in the foreseeable future despite the current pace of glasnost and perestroika.

Most likely the Soviets will continue their current system of conscription for economic reasons. They will continue their current leadership and motivational practices for ideological reasons. Despite the shortcomings of the current system, there are tangible benefits to the Soviets. They are able to raise large forces more cheaply than they

could if they chose a more professional volunteer career force. They are able to train large numbers of men who comprise a very large reserve force that can be mobilized if needed. And they are able to expose large numbers of young men to intense socialization experiences which they view as important in a diverse population, despite the difficulties they have encountered.

The Soviet armed forces are likely to be most effective in combat situations where they are able to maintain control to the degree that they are able to execute their carefully prepared and rehearsed plans. However, to the extent that their plans can be disrupted or they can be forced to improvise, they are likely to become less effective and, in the extreme, may even be pressured into disintegrating at the tactical, if not the operational and strategic levels. The nature of leadership as currently developed and practiced is likely to be inadequate under the stresses of modern combat except under the most favorable conditions.

As we develop a U. S. strategy for a changing world and prepare military forces to implement our strategy, we should take into account not only those features of potential threats that allow for a quantitative assessment of capability but also the capabilities and limitations of the human factor. We should recognize that the human dimension of the Soviet military is a weak link in current assessments and develop ways to take full advantage of this weakness in the event that deterrence fails.

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