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**V. L. Berseneev, I. E. Duniushkin,
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voennaia reforma v Rossii : istoriia
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V. L. Berseneev, I. E. Duniushkin, R. R. Sadriev, N. A. Salmin (eds.), Doklady nauchnoi konferentsii voennaia reforma v Rossii : istoriia i sovremenost', Ekaterinburg, November 2002.

- 1 The book consists of thirty-one essays presented at a major conference in Yekaterinburg in 2002 on historical and contemporary Russian military reforms from the Tsarist, Imperial, Bolshevik, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, up to the present day. The book focuses primarily on military issues and problematics: ultimately, the equation of optimal resources for optimal outcomes during the time periods concerned is the issue at the heart of the papers presented; economic and social factors are only considered in terms of negative effects. However, viewing the reform problematic in a historical continuum forefronts the inter-relation of the Russian military's development with that of Russia as a culture and spatio-temporal entity since the birth of the modern era and, as such, usefully anchors contemporary reform debates in a historical context. Thus, the book provides a useful overview of Russian military reforms in history and their relevance to contemporary conceptions of the reform problematic: but one that errs towards military history.
- 2 The first section of the book focuses on the history of military reform in Russia. The challenge of the military reform in Russia is consistently related to the problem of limited resource allocation. The dialectic is quickly established : reformers had to choose between two concepts : extensive (large, but cheap and unprofessional army) versus intensive (small, but well trained and equipped army) forces. Usually, due to limited resources, the choice fell on the former.
- 3 The authors identify seven phases of military reform in Russia up to the post-Soviet independence, the ebb and flow of which elucidates the book's character.
- 4 Firstly, those during the reign of Peter I (1720s), the main achievements of which were the creation of the regular army and a naval fleet. These intensive reforms facilitated Russia's victory in the 'Northern War' with Sweden, underpinning the contributors' reverence for Peter I's military reforms, with them reckoned as the most successful in Russian military history.
- 5 Secondly, Arakcheev's reforms (1805-07), whose main goal was the increase of the Russian army, while at the same time saving state resources on the army maintenance. A system of military settlements was created (a self-sustaining military-agricultural system, in which the peasants were transformed into military recruits, responsible for army maintenance). Their ineffectiveness, the Arakcheev-instigated system being abolished in 1857, precipitated a new wave of reforms begun in earnest after the Crimean war.
- 6 Thirdly, Milyutin's reforms (1860-1870s), during which the transition from recruit to universal compulsory military service system began (completed only by 1874), and the systematic creation of military academies fomented a large military intelligentsia. With the reequipping of the army with more modern military equipment, the beginning of railway construction, division of Russia territory into fifteen military districts (which existed up to the disintegration of the Russian Empire), and the reduction of the term of service to fifteen years, the military took a more modern shape.
- 7 Fourthly, Sukhomlinov's reforms (1905-1912), precipitated by a period of stagnation of the military reform and army bureaucratization (1880-90s), represented a new wave of the military reforms that consisted in the growth of military expenditures (up to 25-40 per cent of the state budget), the militarization of the economy, and an increase in the armed forces' size.
- 8 Fifthly, the post-Civil War reforms of the Red Army. After First World War the Russian army ceased to exist - the Red Army created during the Civil War, and which went on to defeat

the White-Russian forces, assert control over the Caucasus and conduct the later ‘Storm over Asia’, consisted of workers and peasants, whose sole purpose was to defend the newly created Soviet state in the time of the civil war. The Bolsheviks’ government extensive reduction of the armed forces (from 5.5m to 600,000 in 1923), transformed the army into a militia (territorial-militia) system, the limitations of which in the then international system led to a 1939 law on general military conscription.

9 Next, it is argued that from the 1950-1990s the Soviet army went through a process of gradual decline, stagnation, demoralization, and loss of prestige. Universal military conscription allowed the Soviet party *nomenklatura* to control the USSR’s ethnically and geographically diverse population, the army serving the purposes of the *nomenklatura* to reinforce their position. No real reforms took place during throughout the period.

10 The stage is set for the final Soviet articulation of military reform, the Gorbachev’s 1988 declaration of intent to reform the Soviet army was declared: but no action followed.

11 Despite this, the book lacks a discussion of the politico-military relations which fomented cyclical attitudes towards and capacities for substantive military reform: particularly relevant in terms of the apparently willed inertia of the post-Second World War period. Russia’s wars, political tensions, and non-military individuals as drivers of military-technical and organizational reform are not addressed. The contrast between the massive energies deployed to scientifically/technically innovate in the realm of nuclear weapons (and other unconventional weapons in the 1980s) and the reality of a comparatively badly equipped albeit mass army are similarly omitted.

12 The second half of the book focuses on contemporary Russian military reform. The authors divide the history of the last decade in two : 1992-1997, during which the old Soviet defence system degraded; and post-1997, when more systematic attempts were made to reform military structures.

13 The authors argue that in the 1990s the military potential/capacities of Soviet times were lost, and that Russian military power had to be rebuilt from scratch. The only parameter of power preserved in full from the Soviet era was that of nuclear weaponry. Military policies, determined by difficult economic considerations, had to be carried out in the general framework of reform efforts in the transitional society.

14 From 1997, reform became more substantive with the reduction of armed forces to 1.2m, a five service military structure reduced to three element structure (land forces, military-air forces, navy fleet), and the adoption of a number of documents aimed at systematic military reform. The focus often tends to material aspects of reform.

15 Finally, several key challenges for ongoing reform efforts are identified: bringing military capacities of the country into line with global standards; optimising the military structure to fit the economic capabilities of the state; enacting the new military doctrine; improving the armed forces qualitatively (in fighting capacity etc.); equipping them with modern arms and military technical equipment; introducing at least elementary state and civil control of the armed forces; reorganising the currently weak military management; and raising the morale of the army.

16 The book is to be commended for looking at Russian military reform in a historical perspective. The book’s focus on ideal types of contemporary military organization for Russia reflects the historical debate on optimal military outcomes. This is at the expense discussions of domestic politico-military relations, particularly the issue of political stability and its effect on reform, and the role of the military in the wider (and extensive) Russian ‘security sector’. Unintentionally, the book perhaps reflects the weight of history and mentalities on the contemporary Russian army, for instance the recurring interest in operations in the North Caucasus, military-technical superiorities and the similar interest in the supposed keystones of a mass-army’s military effectiveness – organizational cadres and morale/élan. These tendencies, combined with the clean lines of statistical fields, are indicative of the ghosts of the modern era in attitudes towards personnel training and reform which, when placed (albeit in limited contingents) in the cauldrons of Afghanistan and Chechnia, have ultimately led to fissures being exposed. Yet a consciousness of the capacity to mend such failings drives the book – Peter the Great’s thoroughgoing reforms being thus the point of departure and

destination. In sum, a very useful handbook on the (military) history of military reform in Russia.

References

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