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Dedovshchina : From Military to Society

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Frank Cass, 2003.**

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- 1 In this edited volume, the fourth book in the Cass Series on Soviet (Russian) Military Institutions, the authors analyze the security threats the first two post-Soviet administrations and military apparatus have had to contend with. The period covered by this volume is one of the most tumultuous which has confronted the Russian military. The array of new threats, resource limitations, the ambiguity of civil-military relations, and the interaction between the military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies, vastly complicates the institutional responses of the Russian military to the security environment of the late twentieth and early 21st century.
- 2 The first section of this volume explores the complex nexus of, military reform, the political dynamics of a transitional state, and a dramatically altered security environment. The chapter by Marcel de Haas, “The Development of Russia’s Security Policy, 1992-2002”, is an overview of post-Soviet military organs and key personnel, and key Russia security documents. De Haas examines successive iterations of National Security Concept, Foreign Policy Concepts, and Military Doctrines. An interesting conclusion that de Haas draws from the themes of these key security documents is that, despite 9/11 and the Moscow theatre siege, the Putin administration is not yet willing to systematically revise these documents to reflect a more pro-Western orientation, but has rather only shifted towards the West at a symbolic level.
- 3 The durability of Russian military perceptions also effects political competition as discussed in the second chapter, “Civil Military Relations During Reform”, by Jennifer Mathers. For Mathers, the permeability of the boundary between military and civilian during the era of reform poses a long -term threat to civilian oversight and reform. The changing structure of civil military relations is also examined in the third chapter “A New Day for he Russian Army: Reforming the Armed Forces under Yeltsin and Putin” whose authors, David J. Betz and Valeriy G. Volkov, speak of a “new concordance” between the Russian military and the federal executive under Putin. The Putin presidency and its “pragmatic nationalism” have heightened the prospect for significant reforms that had languished under the Yeltsin administrations. Betz and Volkov conclude that Putin’s bearing, and the military’s respect for such a leadership style, has created a window for reform, a window whose length of existence may be greater than the authors’ assumed at the conclusion of the chapter, based on Putin’s re-election and the performance of the Russian economy as of late.
- 4 In the fourth and final chapter of this section, Joris Van Bladel discusses “Russian Soldiers in the Barracks: A Portrait of a Subculture” and the impact that some of the more dysfunctional features of Russian military culture has had on the Russian public’s perceptions of the need for reform. Van Bladel focuses on the negative impact of *dedovshchina* by using Goffman’s conceptualization of “total institutions” to frame the difficulties of eliminating such an abusive informal institutional culture. Van Bladel maps out a series of possible reforms to eliminate this systematic bullying of soldiers, reforms that are essential if Russia is going to go the route of an all-volunteer force. Key features of these reforms include: dismantling the total-institutional format of the army; building in reporting and oversight functions into the officer corps; and, encouraging the army to take responsibility for the mistakes and inaction. All of the above are worthy goals, however the likelihood of these reforms being implemented is not adequately addressed in this chapter.

- 5 The second section of this volume moves on to a discussion of the force structure of the Russian military. In the fifth and sixth chapters “Nuclear versus Conventional Forces: Implications for Russia’s Future Military Reform” and “The Strategic Rocket Forces, 1991-2002” Frank Umbach and Steven Main respectively, detail the consequences of the failure to provide the resources to support a modern conventional force structure, a an over-reliance on the Russian nuclear arsenal to make up for stalled reforms. While nuclear arms control treaties with the United States would imply a reduction of the Russian nuclear arsenal to free up resources to deal with new security threats that can only be dealt with by conventional forces, the Russians are concerned with preserving a strategic nuclear force enabling them to maintain superiority over regional nuclear rivals, especially China. The power of what Umbach refers to as the “rocket mafia” is a substantial impediment to reforms.
- 6 In the next three chapters “Reform and the Russian Ground Forces” by Michael Orr, “Reform of the Russian Air Force” by Stéphane Lefebver, and “Rudderless in a Storm: The Russian Navy” by Mikhail Tsypkin, the authors trace out the difficulties each of the respective branches of the Russian security apparatus face in executing reform programs. These chapters echo Umbach and Main’s conclusions about the major obstacles in the stalled reform of the RSVN. Orr attributes the failures of reform of the Russian ground forces to the influence of Soviet era mindsets. The conservatism of the Russian ground forces has delayed the adaptation to the Western “revolution in military affairs”. Despite the shocks of the Gulf War, the Chechen conflict, and 9/11, Russian ground forces remain mired in the past. Another major difficulty which Russian ground forces face are the declining quality of conscripts and recruits, morale difficulties, and what continues to be endemic corruption among officers, all of which have impeded professionalization of the ground forces.
- 7 The fall of the Russian navy from a force “second only to that of the United States” in the late 1980s, to a force “just over one-quarter of the Soviet navy in size” (according to Russian Navy Commander in Chief Admiral Kuroyedov) is chronicled by Mikhail Tsypkin in the ninth chapter. The end of the Cold War hit the Russian Navy particularly hard because many of its central missions derived directly from anticipated conflict with NATO and US naval forces. The Russian Navy interpreted the series of cuts in its budgets as not being necessarily a valid readjustment of military spending priorities but rather a self-serving interpretation tat this was a continuation of the tradition of “navy haters” in the military and civilian hierarchy that did not contribute to the historic mission of the Russian Navy to develop and maintain a blue water navy. The sense of drift in the incorporation of the Russian Navy into the overarching post-Soviet grand strategy was compounded by the inability of the Russian Navy to provide direct support for the wars in Chechnia and other low-intensity conflict operations.
- 8 In the third section of the book titled “Experience” the authors use the Chechen wars to illustrate the constellation of problems with confront Russian force structures, and how they are emblematic of the dilemma posed by adjusting the national and internal security apparatus from the Soviet-era mindsets and Cold War security threats, to the rapid diffusion of “small wars” and counterterrorism threats of the early 21st century. In “The Challenge of ‘Small Wars’ For the Russian Military”, Pavel K. Baev opens his discussion by observing that in the 1992-2002 period the Russian armed forces were involved “in more regional or localized violent conflicts that any other army in the world.” Have the Russian armed forces incorporated the lessons learned from this experience ? Baev points out that despite this extensive and intimate experience with “small wars” and other forms of low intensity conflict starting with instabilities in the late 1980s and lasting to the first Chechen War, Russian military conservatism and the uncertain leadership of the Yeltsin administration and Russian public opinion, the problems posed by “small wars”, was not effectively addressed.
- 9 In chapter eleven “Information Warfare in the Second Chechen War: Motivator for Military Reform” Timothy L. Thomas reviews the impact of the Chechen conflict on the development

and implementation of Russian military information warfare (IW) doctrine, strategy, and tactics, by also discussing how the Russian military has also attempted to respond to the prospect of a Western consolidation of “information superiority” as demonstrated by the at least at first glance successful use of information warfare by US and allied states in Gulf I, Kosovo, and the clearly mixed record of Gulf II and the “global war on terror.”

10 In the final chapter of the section on “experience” Jacob W. Kipp in chapter 12 “War Scare in the Caucasus: Redefining the Threat the War on Terrorism”, examines the evolution of Russian “threat perception” using the war scare in the fall of 2002 between Georgian and Russia regarding the infiltration of Chechen guerrillas into the Pankisi Gorge. Russian threat perception in the Fall of 2002 crystallized a change in the succession of Russian threat perception paradigms. Kipp briefly traces in a genealogy of paradigms from the perception of the West (NATO expansion of US superiority) as the primary threat to Russian security, to an emphasis on the war on terror and the mix of national and internal security threats. At the conclusion Kipp uses the Pankisi Gorge war scare to justify his assertion that “the War on Terrorism has brought to an end the post-Cold War decade of transition”, reflecting a focus on threats in the near abroad that will provide a momentum to minor reforms.

11 The aptly titled concluding section of the volume “Where To?” maps out the near-future prospects of the Russian armed forces accomplishing even the slightest reforms, let alone a deep and systematic reforms. In “Putin’s Military Priorities: The Modernisation of the Armed Forces” Roger N. McDermott stresses the urgent need for a comprehensive modernization of Russian armed forces. Russia has, unlike the United States, not yet begun on a comprehensive military reconfiguration to adjust to the new low-intensity conflict environment, despite having more direct experience with this form of conflict. McDermott points to the difficulties of developing comprehensive reform in an era of low morale and resource limitations.

12 In chapter 14 “An Economic Analysis of Russian Military Reform Proposals: Ambition and Reality” authors Peter Sutcliffe and Chris Hill conduct a detailed review of the economic limitations of reform. One of the more interesting points of the chapter is the importance of continued strong demand and prices for oil for the future success of Russian economic growth, and by implication the creation of additional resources which might make the Russian armed forces more amenable to systematic reform,. It appears that in the intervening year and a half since the chapter was written the strength of oil markets may give the Russian economy an extra boost and perhaps give the prospects for reform more breathing space. In the concluding chapter of the book “Reshaping Russia’s Armed Forces: Security Requirements and Institutional Responses”, Christopher Donnelly summarizes the complexity of military reform, which is difficult especially problematic given the Soviet legacy of closed military and intelligence cultures and atavistic mindsets forged by the Great Patriotic and Cold Wars. Donnelly distills the necessary reforms of the Russian armed forces into five points: 1) basing force structures on a realistic understanding of threats; 2) balance of resources devoted to meeting threats with other social and political goals; 3) ensure the armed forces are supported by the population; 4) inter-service rivalries controlled; and, 5) cognizance of the need to develop definitions of national and internal security that do not raise unnecessary fears on the part of neighboring states and major peer competitors.

13 Whether or not the Russian armed forces can follow these general steps to reform is in the end the most important question that Donnelly and the rest of the contributors to the volume have attempted to address. Donnelly points to a critical element of reform in the penultimate section of the chapter, the need for a “very good information system” which subjects threat assessment to openness and oversight, to ensure the most fundamental element of any systematic reform, accurate threat assessment. A critical point for not only the Russian armed forces, but on which the military, intelligence, and law enforcement apparatus of either states, need to learn.

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