

REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT:
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S.-RUSSIAN DEFENSE COOPERATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In light of the growing spirit of partnership between the U.S. and Russian defense establishments--Russian military thought deserves a fresh look. U.S. policymakers seeking to forge a new cooperative relationship with former Cold War adversaries could indeed benefit by sharpening their focus on the rich and sometimes troubled intellectual heritage of the Russian professional military officer, as they attempt to manage the new, bilateral defense relationship now developing.

A survey of the historical development of Russian military thought reveals three major themes of conflict and change that continue to influence military policy in Russia today. The first theme, *The Magician and German*, reflects the internal search for identity. At the highest, political level, this search has been characterized by a constant struggle to define the role of the Russian nation-state in world affairs. At the subordinate, military level, the quest has historically centered on the conflict between theorists attempting to preserve a Russian way of war (*Magicians*) and those seeking concepts and methods (*Germans*) that transcend nationality. The second theme, *The Search for the Perfect Paradigm*, concerns the desire by the Russian officer to develop and sustain a *unified system of thought* that provides him with a "scientific" approach to military affairs. The final theme of conflict and change, *Coping with "Revolutions in Military Affairs,"* focuses on how Russian theorists have

tended to incorporate military-technological revolutions into their paradigm for war.

Today, the U.S. perspective reveals that U.S. decisionmakers have a range of policy options from which to choose: important choices which, while advancing U.S. interests, will help define the U.S.-Russian defense relationship in the coming years. At the present, there appears to be an increase in good will between the U.S. and Russian military services--brought about in part by successfully implemented arms control accords, IMET, and military contact activities. Channels of communication have been established, and relationships are being built upon professional respect and mutual trust. Doubts still linger, though, about Russia's future. Nevertheless, according to nearly two dozen policy specialists interviewed, Clinton Administration officials are intent on taking the U.S.-Russian defense relationship to a new level.

One strategy for increasing U.S.-Russian defense ties might be to examine in more detail the field of Russian military thought, and then attempt to address, by U.S. actions, the major themes or historic issues which continue to affect its development.

The first theme, *The Magician and the German*, could be addressed by U.S. initiatives that facilitate the Russian officer's evolving understanding about the role of military force in the new world order. At the same time, U.S. programs

could attempt to influence indirectly the ongoing doctrinal debates in favor of defense reformers. DoD needs to design specific programs that deal with these important tasks on a frequent and routine basis. The Air Force's Sister Base Program and IMET-sponsored attendance by mid-level officers at the nation's war colleges are excellent starters; but these are long-term investments. DoD should implement, within the next six months, a national security affairs course (two weeks in duration), which focuses on influencing Russian officers of flag rank, similar to the orientation course offered by Harvard. U.S. policymakers could also influence the Russian view toward the use of force by intensifying discussions on peacekeeping operations. The U.S. Army will begin some exploratory talks with the Russian ground forces in the next several months. This effort needs to be fully supported, and the U.S. Government should consider training Russian units in peacekeeping operations in the U.S. in exchange for access to military ranges in the Russian Federation for low-level flight training or weapons testing.

The U.S. Army, perhaps, is in the best position to deal with the second theme, *The Search for the Perfect Paradigm*. Compared to the other Services, the Army has made a major effort over the last several decades to develop a corps of career officers knowledgeable in the Russian language and culture, and this gives them an immediate capability to access and influence both the substance and structure of the

Russian system of military thought. DoD should improve the overall Russian language skills of its personnel by actions such as creating Language Training and Maintenance Centers at the Pentagon, the war colleges, and command headquarters. The investment DoD makes today will reap dividends in the years ahead. Eventually all of the Services should have the capability of sending qualified U.S. officers to attend Russian war colleges in residence.

The third thematic issue, *Coping with "Revolutions in Military Affairs,"* can be addressed by U.S. actions only if Americans are willing to actively engage the Russians as full partners. One important step for building a cooperative technical partnership would be for the U.S. to develop a coherent policy that allows DoD laboratories and acquisition organizations to engage in substantive discussions on joint research & development projects. Potentially fruitful areas include ballistic missile defense, jointly manned warning centers, and airspace management.

Clearly, the U.S. has a long-term interest in seeing the Russian nation succeed in its epic struggle to transform itself into a modern democracy. U.S. defense policy over the next several years--if boldly but delicately formulated--can contribute to that success.

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A NOTE ON USING THE ADJECTIVES
"RUSSIAN" AND "SOVIET"

The author's intent is to use the adjective, *Russian*, quite liberally when it forms with a noun a concept that transcends all three historical periods--Czarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet (e.g., *Russian military thought*). The adjective, *Russian*, will also be used to modify nouns that properly belong--by virtue of the historic context--to either the Czarist or post-Soviet periods (e.g., *Russian Minister of War*, or *Russian President Yeltsin*).

By contrast, the adjective, *Soviet*, will be used only to modify nouns belonging to the period from 1917 to 1991 (e.g., *Soviet tactics in World War II*).

Regrettably, there may be occasional exceptions to this methodology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Colonel Bruce Slawter, a former Assistant Air Attaché, U.S. Embassy, Moscow, has travelled extensively throughout the Russian Federation. From 1987 to 1989, he was the director of Soviet Studies at the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, and served as one of the original team chiefs for the newly formed On-Site Inspection Agency. From 1989 to 1992, he served as Chief, Russia & Central Eurasia Policy Branch, Headquarters, USAF, in Washington, D.C. Lt Colonel Slawter is also a Command Pilot with over 3,000 hours of flying time. The opinions expressed in this study are the author's and do not reflect the official views or policies of the U.S. Air Force or the Department of Defense.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Revolutionary changes are taking place. . . . A new military doctrine and guidelines for defense sufficiency have been worked out. . . . That means that ground forces will be completely different in force structure and manpower, capable of repulsing an aggression, but incapable of conducting large-scale offensive operations. It will be a drastic restructuring of the ground forces in the Soviet Union and its allied countries. The United States and its allies are interested in that development.

- Statement of Marshal Sergey F. Akhromeyev
Before the House Armed Services Committee
July 29, 1990¹

During his historic testimony before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) in July 1990, Marshal of the Soviet Union Sergey F. Akhromeyev attempted to explain how military doctrine in the USSR had taken on a benign, defensive character. Accord to Akhromeyev, the Soviet leadership was convinced that "political means" to protect national security interests in the 1990s would predominate, while "military means" would decrease. To be sure, there would be some tension and turmoil resulting from this change; however, the Soviet armed forces and the Soviet system would survive.²

In the past, Western analysts had observed how Soviet High Commands, in one succession after another, had come to rely on the concept of offensive operations in depth as the fundamental basis for Soviet national security. Since the time of Triandafillov and Tukhachevsky in the 1920s, Soviet

military professionals had struggled to perfect the force structure and military art required to support this concept. Now, in the summer of 1990, the chief military advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev was trying to convince the U.S. Congress that a new "revolution" in military thought had occurred, and to take heed.

Indeed, in the year-and-a-half preceding Akhromeyev's testimony on the Hill, Western analysts had begun to observe a number of significant changes in Soviet forces stationed in Eastern Europe and Mongolia--developments linked to Gorbachev's unilateral force initiative first announced in December 1988. These changes were still in progress when the rapid East European revolutions of 1989 sent further shock waves throughout the Soviet empire--and increased the tempo of the Warsaw Pact's agonizing dance of death. Finally, after the failed hard-line Communist *putsch* in August 1991, barely one year after his historic testimony before the HASC, Sergey Akhromeyev--distraught over all that had been lost in the revolutionary turmoil he had not foreseen--was found dead in his apartment, hanging by the work of his own hands.

Akhromeyev's successors in the new Russian armed forces will, no doubt, retain a significant nuclear and conventional capability well into the twenty-first century. But how successfully will they cope with the changing strategic landscape? Are they any better prepared--in the cognitive sense--to deal with the *new world order* than was Akhromeyev?

Fortunately, Western observers know a great deal about the quantity and quality of the hardware used by the military professional in Russia today--principally due to the tremendous amount of effort expended by Western intelligence services during the Cold War. Most analysts, however, never quite shared a similar zeal for learning about the *theoretical foundation* of military thought in Russia which influences how such hardware might ultimately be employed.

The chief premise of this study, therefore, is that--in light of the growing spirit of partnership between the U.S. and Russian defense establishments--Russian military thought deserves a fresh look. U.S. policymakers seeking to forge a new cooperative relationship with former Cold War adversaries could indeed benefit by sharpening their focus on the rich and sometimes troubled intellectual heritage of the Russian professional military officer, as they attempt to manage the new, bilateral defense relationship now developing.

The purpose of the author's research effort was twofold: first, to survey past and present themes in Russian military thought and, thereby, determine what, if any, insights might be derived to aid U.S. policymakers in the years ahead; second, to evaluate the potential for expanding the U.S.-Russian defense cooperative program beyond its current level.

During the research phase, the author's inquiry remained focused on the following questions:

- What are the elements of continuity and change in the historical evolution of Russian military thought?
- What are the implications of doctrinal debates on how Russians view the use of force?
- How do U.S. policymakers view future U.S.-Russian relations?
- What are the potential areas for defense cooperation, and what has the U.S. Department of Defense already done?
- What should U.S. objectives be, and what are the constraints on policy development and implementation?

The study's conclusions regarding the first two questions are based considerably on secondary sources. The author has also relied on his own notes and recollections of discussions over the past several years with military counterparts from the former Soviet Union.³ Data for the last three questions, by contrast, were derived principally from nearly two-dozen interviews with U.S. government officials, academics, and contractors currently working U.S. policy issues.

This paper, itself, is organized into six chapters (see Figure 1). After this introduction, Chapter Two provides an interpretive analysis--from the Russian perspective--of continuity and change in military thought, and highlights three broad issues or themes which policymakers

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>TITLE</u>
1	<i>Introduction</i>
2	<i>Revolutions in Russian Military Thought</i>
3	<i>Friend or Foe: Shaping the Defense Relationship</i>
4	<i>What DoD Has Already Done</i>
5	<i>The Clinton Administration Looks Ahead</i>
6	<i>Conclusion</i>

Figure 1

should consider when evaluating future U.S.-Russian defense initiatives. Next, Chapter Three examines several of the concerns about the future of Russia from the U.S. perspective and offers up four broad "policy tracks" or options to follow. Chapter Four then looks at cooperative efforts already initiated by the Department of Defense. Following this, the themes first developed in Chapter Two are revisited in Chapter Five as the study considers programs that may be implemented by the Clinton Administration. Concluding remarks are contained in Chapter Six.

The scope of this study is limited in several important respects: First, it is confined to the U.S.-Russian defense relationship--which has matured considerably--and provides minimum commentary on the much smaller programs with the non-Russian states of the former Soviet Union. Second, the study contains no substantive discussion of force structure issues. This may disappoint some readers. Lastly, the study has little to add to the already extensive literature on U.S. arms control policy. To be sure, negotiations will continue in a number of important areas, such as nuclear non-proliferation. It is the author's general belief, however, that treaty-mandated arms reductions--as conceived of in the past--have reached a temporary plateau, and that the importance of arms control to the changing U.S.-Russian relationship will diminish in proportion as the tenor of the relationship itself becomes less adversarial.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing on Soviet Views on National Security: Statement of Marshal Sergey F. Akhromeyev, Advisor to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev*. Hearings (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1989), pp. 2-29.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

3. Examples of such discussions include those which took place at INF Treaty elimination facilities in the former Soviet Union (1988), the Vienna Military Doctrine Seminar (1990), the Sochi Emerging Leaders Summit (1990), and during a number of military exchange visits (1989-1992).

CHAPTER TWO

REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT

A critic should never use the results of theory as laws and standards, but only--as the soldier does--as *aids to judgment*. . . . In our reflections on the theory of the conduct of war, we said that it ought to train a commander's mind, or rather, to guide his education; theory is not meant to provide him with positive doctrines. . . .

- Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*¹

Despite its recent ties to the Marxist-Leninist dialectic, Russian military thought continues to play an influential role in defense policymaking. At times visionary, this highly structured conceptual framework continues to serve the Russian high command as a basis from which to attack problems of national security importance.

Two questions must follow: First, if the traditional system of military thought is still influential in the current Russian defense establishment, can policymakers in the United States derive significant benefit from studying it? Second, are there any *specific* principles in Russian military thought that can be readily applied to current policy problems?

If one accepts the advice Clausewitz offers about studying military theory, then the answers to these questions are "Yes" and "No," respectively.

After surveying the historical development of Russian military thought from 1867 to the present, this author concludes that there is indeed little in the way of *specific*

prescription that the Russian theoretical approach offers the U.S. policymaker at this current juncture. Clearly, no defense official in the United States should ever be advised to make policy decisions based solely upon the doctrinal conclusions of Russian strategic thinkers--be they *Suvorov* or *Grachev*. It would be equally negligent, however, to ignore the study of Russian military thought altogether.

Clearly, the U.S. policymaker can only enhance his own intuition by endeavoring to understand methods used by the military professional in Russia to solve problems of *Russian* national security. The insights gained through such a process--if evaluated in the daylight of U.S. risks and interests--can indeed serve as valuable "aids to judgment" as current and future programs are evaluated. Ultimately, it is *guidance*--not "positive doctrine"--that the modern day problem-solver needs the most.

Themes of Conflict and Change

In analyzing the development of Russian military thought since the nineteenth century, there are perhaps three major themes--really issues of conflict and change--that continue to influence the Russian military officer today (see Figure 2).

Lists of major themes in the historic development of Russian military thought vary from one commentator to the next; examining the three themes selected here is perhaps only one method of approaching the subject. The issues of conflict

and change considered in this study, however, have clearly played an important role in Russian military affairs over the past 125 years and are yet to be resolved. Clearly, the themes themselves--and the manner in which the military officer has approached conflict and change

within his profession--have important implications for current U.S.-Russian military relations.

THEMES OF CONFLICT AND CHANGE

- *The Magician and the German*
- *The Search for the Perfect Paradigm*
- *Coping with "Revolutions in Military Affairs"*

Figure 2

The Magician and German

Perhaps the most longstanding internal conflict in the development of Russian military thought has been the search for identity. At the highest, political level, this search has been characterized by a constant struggle to define the role of the Russian nation-state in world affairs. At the subordinate, military level, the quest has historically centered on the conflict between theorists attempting to preserve a Russian way of war (*Magicians*) and those seeking concepts and methods (*Germans*) that transcend nationality.²

Although the dilemma over whether or how to Westernize Russia's military institutions preceded the reign of Peter the Great, the intellectual discourse on the issue--in terms of serious military literature, lectures, and programs--really

began in the years following Russia's dramatic defeat during the Crimean War by a British-led Western coalition. Russia's military system was essentially the same as that developed by Suvorov and Kutuzov. It seemed to serve the nation well in the years following the Napoleonic Wars. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, it was in drastic need of modernization, and the man tasked with making the reforms was Dmitry Miliutin, Alexander II's Minister of War.

Miliutin was a practical reformer. By the 1870s, with the support of the Czar, he had managed to transform Russia's archaic Napoleonic army into a contemporary one which, for a period of time, approached Western standards. Serfdom had been abolished, based in part of the belief that emancipated subjects make better soldiers. Improvements to the officer education system were initiated. Finally, Miliutin built two programs which are, by and large, still in place today:

1) an administrative system of military districts; and 2) a manpower system based upon short-term conscription and a large ready reserve. It was during this period that Clausewitz' *On War* was first translated into Russian (1869) and introduced into the curriculum of the General Staff Academy.³

Alexander II's Minister of War, however, was no radical Westernizer.⁴ Miliutin shared the prevalent Russian belief that the spiritual side of war played an important role in determining an army's effectiveness on the battlefield. Still, a number of military theorists in the latter half of

the nineteenth century (*the Magicians*) thought that Miliutin had gone too far, and that the reforms he had pushed though were destroying the moral basis for Russian military prowess.

The stage was set for the great rift during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century between theorists such as M.I. Dragomirov, the Chief of the General Staff Academy, who represented the *Nationalists*, and his successor as head of the Academy, G.A. Leer, who advocated the views of the *Academics*.

Like their West European counterparts, Leer and the Academics accepted the premise that the laws of modern warfare were universal, and they sought insights into modern military concepts from all sources, foreign and domestic. Dragomirov and the Nationalists, by contrast, believed principally in the mystical Russian combination of *cold steel* and *moral force*.

The debate was a serious one, and the Nationalists were legitimately concerned about the fate of Russian strategic culture.⁵ Unfortunately, the principal consequence of the schism was the gradual erosion of the Miliutin reforms and the continued disagreement among Russian military leaders on methods of modernization, prewar planning, and military art.⁶

Russia's disastrous defeat by Japan in 1905 did result in some cooperation and theoretical advances prior to the First World War--the invention and development of the operational level of warfare, for instance. The core issue--*whether or not there is a uniquely Russian way of war based upon the*

special spiritual qualities of the Russian people--however, remained unresolved.

For a brief period following the turbulent years of the Russian Civil War, Soviet military thought was characterized by a considerable amount of pragmatism and spirited debate.⁷ Leon Trotsky initially played the role of the *Magician* as he vigorously argued for the preservation of the people's militia system created by him during the Civil War. According to Trotsky, the system was empowered by the moral forces unleashed by the ideological struggle of the Russian masses against capitalist oppression. His opponent in the dispute was Mikhail Frunze who eventually replaced Trotsky as Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs in 1925. Frunze believed that, for reasons of national survival, the new Red Army had to transform itself into a professional cadre with Western techniques and technology--and could do so in a manner that would optimize the use of the moral forces liberated by the Revolution.

In the end, Trotsky lost the debate; but even before then, he had gradually come around to the view that the Red Army might indeed benefit from limited Westernization. As a consequence, in 1922, under the cover of secrecy, Trotsky initiated one of the most interesting epochs in the development of Russian military affairs, the period of Soviet-German collaboration from 1922 to 1933.⁸ Arguably, the cooperative programs that were implemented in the 1920s bear

resemblance to some of the programs (outlined later in Chapter Five) being considered by U.S. policymakers today.

During this fascinating interval, the Soviets encouraged their German counterparts to conduct combat maneuvers on Soviet soil--in violation of the Treaty of Versailles--in exchange for German technical assistance and approximately \$100 million marks to develop aircraft and armament industries.⁹ The Germans built factories, experimental centers, and training establishments inside the Soviet Union. In addition, a minimum of 120 Soviet officers in senior positions passed through professional military education courses inside Germany or were attached to German military units for training.¹⁰

German programs inside the Soviet Union were initiated following a senior military contact visit by General Werner Von Blomberg in 1923. The Germans rapidly established training establishments throughout the Soviet Union, such as an armored vehicle school at Kazan, a flight training center at Lipetsk, and a chemical warfare research institute at Saratov.¹¹ The Germans also built the Junkers works at Fili.¹²

In 1924, the Germans began transforming Soviet aviation into a modern air force by helping the Soviets establish a large aviation complex in the Lipetsk-Voronezh-Borisoglebsk triangle. Lipetsk, itself, was transformed into a modern, state-of-the-art air training center with a cadre of 60 German instructors and 100 technicians.¹³ The Fokker DX-III was

initially used as the basic aircraft trainer. Officers and technicians officially took leaves of absence from the German armed forces.¹⁴ The Air Force Main Staff was established at Borisoglebsk with the assistance of a Captain Schondorf, and experimental joint training was conducted for a brief period between German pilots and Soviet ground forces.

In 1927, the Germans began assisting the Soviet navy. Both the U.S.S.R. and Germany viewed Poland as a common threat; consequently, for a period of time, the Germans offered to supply the Soviet Navy with experienced U-Boat captains should war break out with the Poles.¹⁵

Stalin began terminating Russo-German cooperative programs as his paranoia increased about the effect Western influences might have on the loyalty of his subordinates. Clearly, ideological contamination through contact with the Wehrmacht became one of the chief excuses he used to devastate the officer corps during the subsequent purges. For a brief period in the development of Russian military affairs--until Stalin stepped in--the classic conflict between *the Magician and the German* seemed to be tilting in favor of the *German*.

No doubt, a good deal of cross-fertilization took place between Wehrmacht and Red Army officers as they trained and consulted with one another from 1922-1933. Certainly, the Red Army had more to gain than the Wehrmacht with respect to technological development and advancement in air operations. It is more difficult, however, to assess who benefitted the

most in terms of general military theory and strategy.

The Search for the Perfect Paradigm

For the past 125 years, the professional military officer in Russia has valued the *process* of thinking about war. Studying past campaigns to derive guiding principles and creating new theoretical concepts has at times been pursued with religious zeal. Although there's no quantifiable data, one might even venture to postulate that the Russian military officer, by comparison with his counterpart in the West, has spent *too much* time living in a world of military theory and ideas, and *not enough* time perfecting his own operational proficiency. Clearly, the quest by the Russian officer to develop a *unified system of military thought** has offered both promise and disappointment to his profession.

Lenin's paradigm on war and social change provided a major impetus for theoretical development during the 1920s and 1930s. Although it takes into account the various forms of modern armed combat, Lenin's theory maintains that wars are really only violent political acts between opposing social systems. As social phenomena, their outcomes are based upon

* The *unified system of Russian military thought* is defined here as the comprehensive theoretical framework used by the military professional in Russia for studying the problems of modern warfare. The chief components of the system--which were developed to their fullest extent during the Soviet period--are *doctrine, science, military art, the principles of war, and the laws of armed conflict.*

the correlation between the moral parameters [objectives] and physical parameters [means] of the opposing sides.

Lenin also introduced the dialectical method of analysis into Russian military theory. The reader may recall that the concept of dialectics is the old Hegelian analytical approach favored by Marxists to describe the process of change (see

Figure 3). According to Hegel, a *thesis* (such as an initial concept, policy, or social class) comes into confrontation with a conflicting *antithesis* to produce a new end state, called *synthesis*. As the reader will see, dialectics (according to Russian theorists) has been an

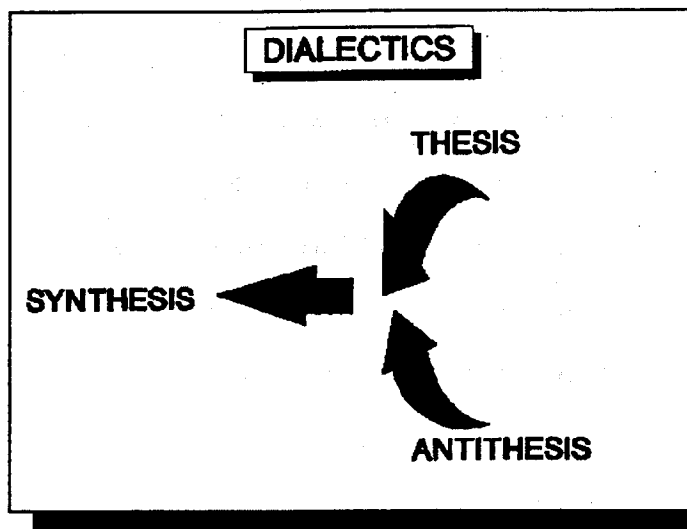


Figure 3

effective tool for analyzing changes in military affairs.

By comparison with the Stalinist era, the early 1920s were a relatively permissive period of theoretical discourse, and there were, no doubt, other strains of West European political theory that were absorbed by military theorists. Although it is difficult to make the case by direct reference to Soviet military writings, one such body of thought may have been the geopolitical paradigm first outlined by British geographer Sir Halford J. Mackinder in 1907 and later injected